



Framework for supporting traumatised children at school

## SMART PRACTICE

### Predictable

#### Principle:

Traumatised children experience any change as a potential threat.

Even if the familiar is difficult and destructive, the familiar is safer for traumatised children than the unfamiliar.

#### Strategies:

- Have the student identify another adult with whom they feel comfortable in case the significant reference point/adult is unavailable.
- Visual/pictorial class timetable displayed in classroom or hallway as appropriate.
- Where possible, let student know 1:1 of significant changes occurring within the class/timetable/day. Provide explanations.
- Have a familiar or safe area or person the student can access if a situation is unfamiliar and threatening.
- Use short, explicit instructions- keeping in mind possible short term memory impairments.
- Make individual contact with the student at the start of each day.
- Consider classroom management strategies- such as moving desks- with an eye for the traumatised student.
- Consider student being placed in another class on days where TRT is teaching. This would obviously be a teacher with whom there is a connection.
- Prepare peers to support student through transition points in the day.
- Classroom rules or expectations displayed. Some meaningful negotiation of these with the students can be considered.
- Think about induction of new staff around the issues of predictability.
- Develop plans for the lead up to excursions and camps that enable the student to adjust to the new experience.

- Ensure predictability is provided across the whole school environment
- Communicate with caregivers regarding any significant changes, which will enable them to support and prepare the student as well
- Buddy programs may enable child to manage change with some support.
- Support personnel are welcoming, consistent, have predictable responses and provide explicit instructions
- Look at planning around TRT's where possible, who might be in the classroom first thing when the TRT and student arrive to mediate the experience?
- Set up a shadow board outlining what children will need for each class/lesson/subject.
- Keep all children informed if the room or other element of their environment is being changed or moved around.
- Have only one "messy day" per week, wherever possible.
- Have a shared behaviour code for all classes within the school. Everyone is provided with these codes.
- Whole school Professional Development around responding to traumatised students.
- Work on specific responses to individual behaviour e.g.: when the student goes under the desk, what do we do now?, what could we do instead?, what has worked in the past? Etc
- Mentoring with regard to classroom practices. Having a colleague revisit strategies you use may identify that the child is responding to a trigger that you manifest rather than the strategies you are using.
- Whole school ownership of working with all traumatised children ensuring everyone is "in the loop".

## Outcomes:

Traumatised children will come to trust and rely on their reference point(s) as an interpreter of their environment. They will respond in a less volatile way to changes in the classroom and build a platform for responding to change overall. The child will learn to use others as a resource to support them at school.



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### SMART PRACTICE

#### Responsive

##### Principle:

Traumatised children will often display behaviour which is experienced as difficult or challenging by others but often makes sense in the context of their trauma. They find it hard to internalise external rules and consequences.

Secondary reactions are experienced as threats and responded to as such by these children.

##### Strategies:

- Provide praise that is concrete, specific and delivered without effusiveness.
- Whole school approach which responds to challenging behaviour calmly. Recognise triggering behaviours and develop plan for diffusion but also an “after plan” if diffusion isn’t possible.
- Provide “cool down” time and space for child- that is clearly not delineated as punishment. Allow child to verbalise their feelings when able.
- Stay calm and think about tone of voice.
- Make a commitment to see the incident through to resolution. Not passing the child on because it gets difficult. Restorative practice rather than punitive.
- Have ongoing reviews with other professionals involved with the child to ensure consistency of response to behaviours.
- Utilise predictable, consistent language and provide scripts for this to all those involved with the child.
- Provide transparent, clear and known guidelines/behaviour codes or rules and ensure these are displayed.
- Observation and feedback regarding behaviour needs to be provided- but in a factual and neutral way.
- Provide a range of methods to reinforce behavioural expectations i.e.: visual, auditory, words and pictures.

- Recognise that trust underpins this whole process.
- Ensure the response plan is known, taught and revised by all key people involved with the child. Don't forget the office staff in this process.
- Utilise naturally occurring "breaks" during the day to try to de-escalate behaviour. These might include toilet, messages or monitor tasks.
- Access challenging behaviour funding to improve school resources and response options.
- Adults should convey a message of "never giving up" on child.
- School behaviour should be dealt with at school- try to avoid "double dipping" in terms of consequences.
- Work on behavioural choices in calm times.
- Point out escalating body language in a non-blaming way to assist child in making links.
- Remember to think about the meaning your gestures might hold for the traumatised child. Try to be non-confronting but firm.
- Provide the student with a clear plan or pathway that enables them to remove themselves if required. Individual action plans- which promote a sense of co-ownership.
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- Remember to include positive and realistic comments in the communication book with home.
- Access community based programs which can reinforce school-based expectations.
- At the start of day, set the child up for success with positive statements e.g.: rather than "I hope you have a good day."

**Outcomes:** Traumatized children will be less likely to over-react to limit setting. They will experience the present s different from the past and will feel personal exchanges are reaffirming to themselves.



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## SMART PRACTICE

### Attuned

#### Principle:

Traumatised children do not easily know how they feel and have had limited experience of having their feelings recognised by others.

Feelings are experienced as separate to traumatised children's knowledge of themselves.

#### Strategies:

- Model dealing with feelings in appropriate ways- and talk through the process.
- Reflect on the teaching strategies that have caused conflict. This can be done as a whole staff team- where are the “explosions” and, more importantly, where are the periods of calm.
- Specific skills development with the child that also extends into whole class programs- recognising, naming, managing own feelings and responding to others' expression of feelings.
- Seek support and strategies from parents/family regarding patterns, cues and what works (or doesn't work).
- Utilise visual cues to assist in identifying feelings based social skills.
- Initiate pathways for students' positive memories, linking in with supporting meaning making.
- Recognise and acknowledge the student's involvement in school activities and experiences.
- Have a clearly defined and developed student at risk model (this may include guidelines around who to see, what to record, what to do, key personnel inside and outside the school etc.) Make this known to all staff.

- Explicit teaching of language related to feelings. One example is to ‘bubble thought’ another person’s thoughts and the feelings that stem from that.
- Think about using the welfare team involved with a child to identify possible cues or triggers- putting the pieces of this child’s response jigsaw into place.
- Enable activities that promote the giving and receiving of compliments.
- Do not underestimate the value of modelling both your own feelings awareness but also responses to those feelings.
- Value the emotional insight and thoughts the child is able to identify. They provide a path for understanding further- for ourselves and the child.
- Show an interest in the child’s interests and share your own. This enables modelling of feelings such as joy, commitment and enjoyment.
- Recognise early warning signs and flag these to the child in a range of ways- verbal and non-verbal.
- Utilise a tracking sheet or tick sheet to enable all those who work with the student for the day/week to provide feedback about how they’re feeling. This information can be examined to see if any patterns emerge and provide an opportunity to put strategies in place.
- Build a relationship vocabulary as well as a feelings vocabulary.
- Consider the language of a restorative approach- “tell me what happened?” “What were you thinking when that happened?” “What do you think of that now?” “Have you ever thought about how you feel when you think like that?”
- Help colleagues to make sense of strategies the students are trying to use to manage triggering events. This means they can also acknowledge attempts and not just successes.
- Admin/leadership take the class to facilitate the class teacher having some 1:1 time listening, talking and/or drawing with the student.
- Tactile experiences to explore a situation e.g.: blow up a balloon to the size of this issue or fold a piece of paper to the size of the issue. Validate the child’s assessment.
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## Outcomes:

Traumatised children will be better at tracking their own feelings/concerns/worries.

They will practice enjoying and marking experiences of positive feelings.

The child will develop experiences of having his/her feelings validated.



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## SMART PRACTICE

### Connecting

#### Principle:

Traumatised children will often feel disconnected from their feelings, memories of experiences and their sense of identity.

They need support to get in touch with how they're feeling, what they are feeling and linking their perceptions and experiences to their feelings.

#### Strategies:

- Memory box- include a story about child, personal item or anything else they would like included.
- Use feelings faces in a range of ways. This might include the students drawing them as a group, colouring them in, making 3D faces or playing feelings bingo.
- Programs: "Friends for Youth", "Mind Matters", "Kids Matter", "I Can". "Rock and Water", "Bounce back", "Program Achieve", "Think Boldly, Act Boldly, Feel Amazing".
- Provide a safe place to go when not feeling OK.
- Talk about happy/positive events- including questioning, recounting stories and reflecting on the experience.
- Utilise strategies to recall information- remembering when....
- Relaxation activities. Providing a Milo opportunity.
- Utilise symbols for feelings e.g.: colours, pictures, bear cards, Stones cards.
- Sensory "toys" to enable calming down or experiencing different feelings and trying to name them. An example might be squeeze balls or linking textures to feelings.
- Continually work on different strategies/actions to deal with a feeling. Give alternatives and don't expect children to just "get on with it."

- Child protection curriculum embedded.
- Working with the student to understand the link between the behaviour, the impact on their own feelings and the impact on the feelings of others (could incorporate restorative justice principles.)
- Pacing- when student is angry walk with them and start pace where they're at and then gradually slow them down.
- Develop your own "feelings faces"- using the creative talents of students in the group.
- Incorporate "circle time"- especially after breaks where students can talk about their feelings during that time. No blame. Community building.
- Think about videos (films, music clips) than can help with discussion of feelings- as well as magazine pictures and stories.
- Books: "Taming Anger", "Taking the Grrr out of anger."
- Journaling- with or without teacher input or feedback.
- Repetition of the one story to examine the emotional content in a range of ways e.g.: acting out, puppets, role plays, songs, sharing story with a range of adults.
- Using full body outlines to link physical and emotional responses.
- Use "Mood heads"- available through COPE.
- Draw the day's journey- think about the media you might use for this e.g.: chalk, textas, wool, clay etc – Line of my day activity.
- Utilise an identity web to explore children's connections to extended family.
- Facilitate opportunities for self-monitoring. You might think about scoring, feelings magnets or visual cues.
- Link sensory activities with understanding early warning signs e.g.: tactile feelings linked to emotional responses, smells as linked with build-up etc.
- Explicit teaching around feelings- link the limbic response to a cortical label and control.

**Outcomes:** Traumatized children will build capacity to express themselves in language. They will come to know how their feelings are affected by past experiences and can be better supported to be in control of their feelings and reactions.





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## SMART PRACTICE

### Translating

#### Principle:

Traumatised children will find it difficult to make stories about their day to day experiences because their memory and interpretive functions have been impaired. They struggle to make sense of their past, feel separate from their present and have no starting point for making their path into the future.

#### Strategies:

- Focus on setting short term, clear goals with a specific reward- including a chance to reflect on the achievement. Reference point weekly reflection.
- Challenge the “absolute” statements e.g.: “I’m always hopeless”. Give concrete examples in a neutral tone to challenge these.
- Make copies of good work and photograph school involvement. Scrapbook.
- Teacher(s) to monitor references/stories/events in artwork and writing for possible current trauma requiring further action.
- As there is often a verbal block to meaning making, use creative methods to assist in the process e.g.: leadlighting, craft activity, art, drawing.
- Use physical activity to link the child to their school/community.
- Doing specific work on putting the day’s events into chronological order and also categorising.
- Make physical recordings of children’s stories- audio and video tape (for example). CD of the year- could be a PowerPoint presentation.
- Involve the student in decision making processes about them. Consider different ways to do this that are non-threatening and of value.

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- Utilise a no-blame approach where appropriate in story development. It may be worth discussing blame issues and why blame is sometimes apportioned and why sometimes it has no value. This would be a whole class discussion.
- Work through a “chase your dreams” process.
- Identify the student’s strengths, skills or interests in terms of projecting those into the near future as well as the medium to long term future. “How do you think you could use that when you’re ....?”
- Set achievable goals and somehow record these for later weeks, months, years
- Provide impromptu fun experiences which are not a “reward” for something- simply because they are themselves and everyone deserves something positive (unconditional rewards/celebrations).
- Create DVD’s or videos which provide a history of the year/class/week/camp etc and enable a review of this work.
- Utilise circle time from a story based perspective- incorporating restorative questions and practices.
- Utilise mentoring, peer skills and cross age tutoring to build storying exercises and experiences amongst the students. Build positive experiences.
- Continually allude to future activities- next session, tomorrow, next week, next term, next year, next school. Provide opportunities to experience future careers as a way to provide a sense of future.
- Provide sentence starters or structured ways for journaling processes.
- Use objects from the present to link to a picture of the future for each child.
- Develop a “sack of my life”- which holds items that evoke a memory.
- Look for cues i.e. foot tapping, fist clenching, body tensing. Note these.
- Do a check-in at the start of each week and each term: “What do you remember from last week/term? What stands out? Why? What would you like to be the same this week/term? What would you like to be different?” etc

**Outcomes:** Traumatized children will build better memory for events and experiences, including their capacity to learn and retain information. They will build a base for being able to explore their history and begin to make conscious sense of their experiences of abuse and/or violence.



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## SMART PRACTICE

### Involving

#### Principle:

Traumatised children will find it difficult to make friends, having poorly developed maps to guide them.

They often fail to constructively interpret social cues and will often feel isolated and different from their peers. They may use socially inappropriate behaviour to try to engage with peers and this often leads to ostracization.

#### Strategies:

- Role model and practice a range of social skills. These could include interpreting body language, listening skills, how to enter a group, how to say hello, how to respond to rejection and how to be part of a conversation.
- Carefully introduce the student to small group projects, with the emphasis on small groups and consider the process rather than the group outcomes.
- Consider developing a cross-age tutoring program which can draw on the student's strengths. Develop peer-support networks.
- Look at building groups around areas of interest, rather than social ability.
- Building relationships with teachers, other staff and other significant adults.
- Expect and consider responses to emotional outbursts as these are challenging processes for traumatised children.
- Using a digital camera in class to "catch" students doing the right thing and helping them to process their own behaviour and strengths.
- Provide immediate, neutral, feedback to students re: use of social skills.
- Do class puzzles and improvisational games
- Could do belly dancing or drumming (using phone books) with the whole class or a whole small group.
- Consider looking after an animal as a group.

- Making a friendship quilt or rainbow serpent.
- Other specific programs identified as valuable include Lions' Quest, Skills for Growing, Program Achieve and, of course, Mind Matters.
- Work with the whole class, rather than small (separate) groups.
- Take whole class to community outings/places e.g.: elderly people's home to develop alternative friendship models.
- Teach realistic friendship philosophies e.g.: friendships are not forever.
- Develop a pen pal or email communication system which can be within the school or with students at other schools. This can assist in friendship skill development without the pressure of meeting and having to utilise all the non-verbal skills as well.
- Give clear parameters of what is acceptable behaviour within groups.
- Provide structured play opportunities during breaks. These could focus on social skills, team work or sharing (as examples).
- Values program, specifically CORKA (Cooperation, Organisation, Respect, Kindness, Attitude).
- Find an activity the child is good at and facilitate them being able to invite others into it.
- Specific teaching about the qualities that underpin friendship skills, particularly trust and honesty.
- Limit the length of time spent on one activity to give all a chance at "leadership".

### Outcomes:

Traumatised children will feel they belong and will be able to engage in appropriate behaviours as attempts to become part of a friendship group. They will be better able to understand social cues and will be less likely to feel peer interactions are threatening.



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## SMART PRACTICE

### Calming

#### Principle:

Traumatised children find it difficult to shape or change their own feelings of stress/distress.

Trauma has impaired children's cortical capacity to regulate sub cortical functioning.

#### Strategies:

- Utilise John Joseph's rooms of the brain- a visual cue (red room, orange room, blue room, green room).
- Provide cool down space/chair/tree/room.
- Think about a variety of calming strategies: draw, run, walk, play doh, puzzles, music, fish-watching, soft toys.....
- Whole school approach to understanding trauma and recognising the importance of calm and space. What does the school look/feel like?
- Raising awareness of staff's own behaviour on students: cool, calm and firm.
- Utilise music in the classroom- particularly rhythmic music -drumming.
- Remember that you will be acting as the student's cortex in some regards in terms of keeping calm and thinking about the calming process.
- Utilise time out/in cards- initiated by staff member or student. Have a set plan of calming place and strategies when this is invoked. Some other strategies might include journaling, yoga, guided fantasies, doodling or drawing, humming and whistling or drumming.
- Use anecdotal observations to identify possible triggers/situations that create stress/distress.
- Incorporate regular relaxation activities into class time.
- Provide explicit commentary, modelling or coaching of strategies to manage stressful situations. Model and discuss your own calming strategies.

- Provide a visual support system to promote self-calming, could be seen as a “manual” for the child
- Relay some of the calming strategies to the parents/carers. There may be some opportunities for skill building within this environment.
- Be realistic about your role with this child- it is a shared responsibility.
- Ensure SELF-CARE in terms of maintaining your own sense of calm. This can be achieved through formal and informal means.
- Provide all staff with opportunities to de-brief.
- Consider all strategies for building and maintaining calm at both a broader environmental level and at an individual level. How calming is the school?
- Have stretching and relaxing activities at predictable times each day.
- Create a calm box with a reference point with things that help that child feel calm. This might include sensory toys, photos of favourite things, a toy to hug or other visual reminder which is age appropriate.
- Do not discount the value of just “being with” the student- silence can be very calming.
- Provide both structured and free choice relaxation times.
- Could focus on “peacefulness” in your virtues/values program.
- Know your own “buttons” and take responsibility for your response to them being pushed. Don’t enter into arguments with students. Calmly state what needs to happen and repeat it if necessary. Consider your own mantra.
- Encouraging individual identification of what works as a relaxation/calming technique.

**Outcomes:** Traumatized children will feel more supported and connected to school community by feeling less blamed. They will not feel singled out because everyone is learning how to stay calm and will be able to come up with and use plans to stay calm or become calm that make sense to them. You will be able to respond rather than react.



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## SMART PRACTICE

### Engaging

#### Principle:

Traumatised children have insecure blueprints for forming, maintaining, understanding and being in relationships.

Changing relational representations comes with repetitive opportunities to practice and experience difference in exchanges with others.

#### Strategies:

- Modelling relationship skills- such as language and friendship behaviour.
- Mentoring programs- formal and informal- between teacher/student and older student/younger student.
- Enable different levels of relationship with a range of adults within the school community. Collaboration with outside agencies. Significant adult/reference point can negotiate exchanges. All staff to be made aware of reference points.
- Provide small challenges with achievable goals.
- Reflect back and acknowledge positive experiences and feelings.
- Encourage positive reflections from family/parents.
- Repetition e.g.: positive greeting each day to be similar.
- Connecting activities such as footy tipping competition or class lunches.
- Ring two families per week with positive comments about their child's week.
- Think about class placement- based on the capacity of the teacher and class.
- Ensure that reference points are the children's choice- don't assume who will be an effective reference point.
- Consider a broad range of adults within the school community who could fulfil the role e.g.: groundsman, SSO's, Principal etc
- Ensure reference points give a clear message that they will be there for the student, no matter what.

- Build relationship building skills into the curriculum. Explore the differences between relationships with adults and relationships with peers.
- Develop special interest groups within the whole school. Craft. Dance. Sport.
- Include a process of de-briefing for the reference point.
- Explore opportunities to interact with the student and provide feedback in non-threatening ways.
- Utilise a “commentary for action” approach.
- Set up a reflection book- the student can record their own experiences but also have feedback provided by the reference point or other key adults.
- Explicit training for staff around being a mentor or reference point. This should include avenues of support for those in the role.
- Curriculum based activities to reinforce concepts around support networks. This might include circles of friendship, child protection curriculum, Mindmatters, Student Matters and accessing the Kids Helpline.
- Ensure important information is transferred on transition (between year levels as well as between schools).
- Regular case conferences enable reference points to hear about what is working well, where areas of difficulty are and planning for future goals.
- Look for groups or individuals outside the school who could be reference points. How do you manage keeping them informed?
- The reference point should provide emotional validation as well as validation of the child’s contribution to a range of exchanges.
- Be aware of how much non-verbal signals can influence other people’s perceptions of a child.

**Outcomes:** Traumatized children will learn to tolerate adults at school with different levels of intimacy. They will experience opportunities to review their relationship representations. They will practice maintaining connection with important adults. The child will be more likely to feel safe.