

TECA

Trauma Expression &
Connection Assessment



Background

Children form their sense of self in the context of their relationships. When these relationships are unsafe or threatening, children's nervous systems become reactive and in turn become unable to self-regulate. If trauma can be assessed and intervened initially from a biological perspective, rather than a behavioural one, we can settle the very states of arousal which inhibit children from being able to engage in the relationships which can be a resource for their healing.

Infancy and early childhood are key periods for developing self-regulation of emotions. When regulated, a child can accept outside input and learn from their environment; while dysregulated, a child will experience a flood of hormones that changes their heart rate, breathing, digestion and other functions of their sympathetic nervous system.

The process of becoming regulated is scaffolded by attachment figures, as caregivers soothe distress and help children understand their mental state (called mentalisation) and gradually support them to self-calm. This co-regulation is the way that caregivers use their own state of calm (modelling) coupled with coaching them to use strategies (the activities provided in this guide) to bring a child back into a state of regulation.

Introduction to tool

The TECA is an assessment process which shapes the understanding of trauma expressions which a child or young person may be displaying. It helps to make sense of how their trauma history is impacting them in their behavioral and relational presentations. The TECA understands that central to trauma responsive practice is the presence of safety and promotion of strong, safe and healthy relationships which can be used as a resource to support healing.

The TECA is a tool to support co-regulation, decreasing a child/young person's trauma behaviours/symptomology by recommending prescribed therapeutic responses which are matched to their needs.

Understanding the TECA and Fight, Flight, Freeze and Fawn

Fight, Flight, Freeze and Fawn are used to categorise the behavioural responses a child/young person's body has gone into. In response to a trauma, our bodies stress response system will activate and send us into a fight, flight, freeze or fawn response.

All trauma experiences trigger stressors which activate responses.

By knowing which response, the child/young person goes into, we can provide appropriate therapeutic recommendations for co-regulation.

Description of the four expressions

- Fight resembles the body preparing to go into battle/fight.
- Flight appears as if the body is preparing to run away or flee from the danger.
- Freeze evokes the body to stop, pause and disconnect from the real or perceived threat freezing separates the body from the trauma it is experiencing.
- Fawn appears as submission and appeasing behaviour, as the child or young person attempts to please the person in charge/the person with power and control to avoid the danger/conflict.

Categories of trauma behaviours

Tick the box that is most appropriate for the behaviour listed. If the behaviour is not present for that child/young person leave it blank or tick never seen.

To add up an intensity score, use the sum of the numbers provided in the key below
e.g. I tick the appropriate Fawn boxes giving scores of 3+3+0+2+1+1+0 leads to Fawn intensity rating: 10

For app development/scoring

- Often Seen = +3
- Sometimes Seen = +2
- Rarely Seen = +1
- Never Seen = 0

| Behaviours | Often seen | Sometimes Seen | Rarely seen | Never seen |
|---|------------|----------------|-------------|------------|
| Section 1: Fight | | | | |
| Hitting/punching | | | | |
| Screaming | | | | |
| Moving in a threatening way | | | | |
| Verbal threats | | | | |
| Aggression | | | | |
| Tightening their muscles Clenching hands/fists | | | | |
| Destroying possessions/ furniture/environment | | | | |
| Intimidating looks/glares | | | | |
| Stand offs | | | | |
| Swearing | | | | |
| Outbursts | | | | |
| Argumentative | | | | |
| Fight intensity rating = | | | | |

| Behaviours | Often seen | Sometimes Seen | Rarely seen | Never seen |
|---|---------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Section 2: Flight | | | | |
| Fidgeting and Restless | | | | |
| Jumpy legs | | | | |
| Eyes darting around | | | | |
| Constantly scanning for danger | | | | |
| Running away/absconding | | | | |
| Rapid heartbeat/pounding heart | | | | |
| Climbing | | | | |
| Hiding | | | | |
| “Feeling trapped” | | | | |
| Oversensitive to loud noises or sudden movements | | | | |
| Difficulty with transitions and change | | | | |
| Scanning for opportunities to run | | | | |
| Flight intensity rating = | | | | |

| Behaviours | Often seen | Sometimes Seen | Rarely seen | Never seen |
|---|---------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Section 3: Freeze | | | | |
| Lack of control and unaware of bodily functions | | | | |
| Disconnected from themselves | | | | |
| Frozen | | | | |
| Numb | | | | |
| Feel like they cannot move | | | | |
| Unable to sense if they are full/hungry – overeating/ never hungry | | | | |
| Low or high tolerance to pain / do not feel pain | | | | |
| Does not feel temperature, wears jumper in summer, shorts in winter | | | | |
| “Spacey”/ appears to be daydreaming | | | | |
| Withdrawn from peers/ relationships/a “loner” | | | | |
| Difficulty trying new things | | | | |
| Finds it hard to make decisions | | | | |
| Freeze intensity rating = | | | | |

| Behaviours | Often seen | Sometimes Seen | Rarely seen | Never seen |
|---|---------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Section 4: Fawn | | | | |
| “People pleasing”/appeasing | | | | |
| Difficulty identifying feelings | | | | |
| Cannot ask for help | | | | |
| Cannot get their own needs met/ignore own needs | | | | |
| Telling adults what they want to hear | | | | |
| Loss of identity | | | | |
| “Submitting” to what adults/people around the child want | | | | |
| Takes responsibility for others actions | | | | |
| Withdraws in social settings | | | | |
| Relies on others to make their decisions for them | | | | |
| Often the “unseen” child in the group or family | | | | |
| Often seen as the resilient or robust child in spite of trauma | | | | |
| Fawn intensity rating = | | | | |

| Fight – making the body safe to inhabit | Flight – grounding in the present | Freeze – moving out of shut down | Fawn – building confidence and removing the need to appease |
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| Bubble blowing Blowing bubbles in any size, way, or configuration. Taking turns, blowing towards ea. other, see who gets theirs highest. | Hand and foot massage with/out oil or cream Alternate between child/adult. | Roll up/unroll body On the floor Roll up using a blanket and unroll to a stretch. | Yoga Strong and rigid yoga poses i.e. Warrior pose – strong spine. |
| Feather tennis Blowing a feather across a table or marker to determine who gets the most points. | Weighted activities I.e., blanket, wrist weights. | Yoga poses i.e. child's pose, cat pose. Child directs adults pose and vice versa. | Karaoke/singalong |
| Ping Pong Breath Using a ping pong ball and big breaths to see how far with each breath either one can reach. | Balance on a string Place a string on the ground. Using imagination pretend to "walk the tight-rope". | Animal stomping/jumping Choose a large animal ea. and stomp and embody that animal i.e. elephant, giraffe. | Dress ups |
| Ribbon circles Making large, small, slow, quick circles with a ribbon (can be attached to a stick). | Guided meditation Use meditation to provide an opportunity for a pleasurable experience which is safe and grounding. You can develop a narrative with the child going to a place they choose, seeing the things they want to see i.e. beach, forest, Outer Space. | Frog jumps Have a frog jump race leaping to the finish line. | Mirroring dance moves |

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| Resistance bands Using resistance bands individually or wrapped around both child and adult to see how far/close they can stretch. Wrap around toes and see how high you can stretch to the sky. | Seated twisting Whilst seated opposite each other twist as far to the right and then left as you can go. | Skipping and counting Whilst skipping (with or without a rope) keep counting until you forget where you are up to. | Line dancing, Hokey Pokey |
| Rhythmic movement or dance Choose a song to rock, sway or move rhythmically to. Child and adult move and sway in time with each other. | Walking backwards Decide on a target and walk backwards to the designated spot. You can count steps or adapt steps to be small or big. | Clapping to a beat Either child or adult begin by creating a beat for the other to follow in clapping. | My medal a day game Award a medal a day to each other for something that you notice has gone well, achieved, or meaningful reflection. This can be done by telling each other what their medal each day is. |
| Body sock Use the Body sock to stretch and move whilst contained in the space. Open body posture, small body posture. | Party blowers Blow the party blowers or Kazoos make a song taking turns to complete the song verse by verse. | Food smells and textures Discuss ea. others favourite food smells and textures. | Forced choice game Similar but different choices Coke/Fanta McDonald's/KFC Bath/Shower etc. |
| Lava lamp mirroring Be a lava lamp, what does it feel like to be that blob? Move fluidly, sway, rock, what colour are you? | Drinking thick drink through a straw Make a smoothie or thick drink together and drink through a straw. | What is in the bag? Sensory and tactile lucky dip Create a sensory bag with smells and textures and choose whilst blindfolded. | Puppets |

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| Medicine ball toss Throw the weighted ball to ea. other and use variations in timing. i.e. quick throw, slow throw, high throw, low throw. | Blowing out candles Light candles and blow them out. One by one or all at once. repeat. | Align to environment Talk about the things that you are experiencing what can I see? what can I hear? What can I feel? What can I taste? What can I touch? | Climbing competency games Using ladders, play equipment, park equipment to find ways of achieving competency through climbing and balance-oriented activities. |
| 5 quick breaths In unison do 5 quick inhale and exhale breaths then pause. | Bubble gum Chewing gum or food that has texture which requires rigorous jaw motion i.e. Minties. | Lions breath- deep exhale then roar Taking a big breath in then letting out with a big roar. | Emotional and affect mirroring Whilst looking at each other mirror the others facial expressions. |
| Bean bag falling Take turns falling into a safe bean bag. Adult can catch child prior to landing on bean bag. | Blowing up balloons Blow up balloons to different sizes then let go and repeat. | Hot/Cold Temperature game Using a heat/cool pack hold and talk about environments/ things which are cold and hot whilst holding the corresponding temperature. | Menu Planning Sitting together and menu planning for the week. Considering the others likes and dislikes. |
| Plastic bubble wrap popping | Cuddling a Pet Cuddling toy pet and emulating the touch if no pet is available. | Pillow fight Playful pillow fighting . | Parents jobs, kids' jobs list Making lists of which jobs are for kids and which ones are for adults. |
| Gardening Any type of planting, digging, sewing seeds, weeding. | Toilet paper mummy game Wrap each other like a mummy in toilet paper and bust out. | Jumping Trampoline Jumping on a trampoline to different heights and pressure. | Mirror me, mirror you Taking turns to hold up a mirror in front ea. others face and pull faces which show emotions. |

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| Row your boat Sitting opposite each other holding hands. Singing and rocking back and forward to old rhyme. | Wheelbarrow walking Inviting the child to walk around on their hands whilst the adult uses their legs to “push the wheelbarrow”. | Hammock swinging Swaying gently in a hammock – can be created by two adults on either side also. | My box of goodness Using a tissue box, creating a box of all things good and joyful – magazine cuttings, shells, symbols, and icons. |
| Watching a sand timer whilst rocking How many times can you rock from side to side until the egg timer has emptied. | Torch spotto Using a torch to spotlight things so the other person can guess | Being pulled around in a blanket Wrap the child in a blanket and pull them around gently so they feel the pressure underneath their body. | My hero and Me Making a list or collage of the same traits as your favourite hero. |
| Shaving cream statues Make statues from shaving cream. | Baking- bread, kneading dough | Laying on lambswool/snow angels | The I am poem Writing a poem that highlights all the strengths and positive attributes of the child and the safe adult. Each line begins with “I am”. |
| Simon says Can be played in car or on the way to or from visit. | Headphones with nature sounds | Electric toothbrush | Role Play Role playing/drama creating scenarios which allow positive role modelling. |
| Hair brushing Brushing with a range of strokes. Slow, fast, zig zag etc. alternative between child and adult. | Gym ball rolling Rolling around on a large gym ball frontwards, backwards, touching the ground. | Spinning on a chair Using an office type chair, safety spin | Pet therapy |

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| Pet grooming Washing or brushing suitable pet. | Slime/playdough/ waterplay | Kinetic sandcastles | Making homemade and other therapeutic tools i.e. stress balls, playdough, pasta. |
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All activities are intended to be done with a relationally safe and regulated adult. They are activities which use mirroring, serve, and return and kindness to create connection and attunement which can bring children back into a regulated state of arousal so that language can be used to discuss needs and fears.