

## Maximising Trauma Informed Approaches using the SMART Practice Framework.

These considerations and approaches may be particularly useful when teaching and working with adolescents and young adults. Often in secondary school settings there are less opportunities to build consistent trauma informed strategies in the classroom. There is also often less contact/ more sporadic time with students, which means we need to think about how we can still build connection with students and how we can understand and respond to their needs, even if we have the student “for just one lesson.”

While this resource is largely framed in the context of classroom lessons it can also be applied to staff/ student interactions outside of the classroom in the broader school environment.

This resource uses the 8 domains from SMART Practice and poses a range of questions for you to consider in your approach when teaching and working with young people. You may find it useful to use the Gauges to self assess where you currently sit with each domain and where you want to target your efforts. As you consider each of the questions on the following pages, draw on the gauge to indicate where you currently sit (eg green if you feel this is an area of strength).



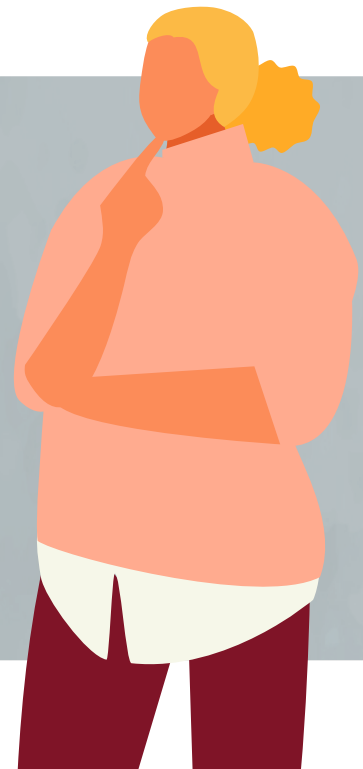
Green = An area of strength or expertise.



Orange = An area of some knowledge and experience.



Red = An area that still needs attention.





## Predictable

Changes to routines and uncertainty can be a source of stress for students. Predictability in students' relationships and activities can modulate their stress systems. This then promotes flexibility and adaptability.

### Considerations and Approaches:

How I greet them each lesson (or outside the classroom)?

Do they know what's coming up in the lesson (or school day/ task if outside the classroom)?

Do they know the general routine of the lesson (or broader school routine if outside the classroom)?

Is the environment I am gathering in familiar to them?

Do I provide a consistent experience of who I am as a mentor?

Do they know how I will give them their instructions, tasks, work, feedback....?

Do they know where to find everything they need to undertake a task?

Do they know what to do if they are struggling with a task? Do they know how I will react?



1. Is the flow and resourcing of lesson/ broader task (such as assembly, meetings) consistent and predictable?



2. Am I predictable in my interactions with students?

**Based on my self assessment, what aspects do I want to expand / further develop in my trauma informed approach:**



## Responsive

Young people who have experienced trauma may display behaviour that is experienced as difficult or challenging by others but often makes sense in the context of their trauma. They may find it hard to accept external rules and consequences.

We need to recognise and reflect the possible meaning of the behaviour and repair after rupture - young people need lots of reparative experiences.

When we do this, young people will be less likely to experience trigger responses such as overacting to people around them and to limits being set within the school environment.



### Considerations and Approaches:



1. Do the students impacted by trauma know I get them, what they've been through and what they need to support them?



2. Can I be open and curious about what their behaviour is telling me? Can I see the person behind the behaviour and translate it as a form of communication?



3. Can I respond to their behaviour and their cognitive and emotional levels where they are at rather than where, chronologically, they 'should' be?

**Based on my self assessment, what aspects do I want to expand / further develop in my trauma informed approach:**



## Attuned

Young people who have experienced trauma, may not easily know how they feel and may have had limited experience of having their feelings recognised by others.

Being able to understand how one feels and be able to articulate that requires developing accurate Interoception (the perception and understanding of body sensations) and safe responsive relationships around us.

We need to acknowledge and reflect feelings, emotions and body states with students to build this.



### Considerations and Approaches:



1. Can I pick up on the students non verbal and body language cues to help me gauge where they are at, what their state of being is?



2. Can I be flexible in my approach so that if they're getting agitated or start withdrawing in the lesson I can meet them where they're at and guide them back?



3. Can I see when they need my understanding and connection? Can I pick the moments when they can be responsive to playfulness, or having their capacity for learning pushed, or when they need more sensitivity from me?

**Based on my self assessment, what aspects do I want to expand / further develop in my trauma informed approach:**



## Connecting

Young people who have experienced trauma may often feel disconnected from their feelings, memories, sense of self/ identify and from others.

Trauma can be very disconnecting. This sense of disconnection can further reduce a felt sense of safety for a student. We need to create environments that are relationally safe and connecting. We do this by attuning to the student and helping them to tune into / connect with, what is going on around them and within them. This supports them to feel safe in understanding how they feel and why, which can lead to greater self efficacy.



## Considerations and Approaches:



1. Can I help raise their awareness of their feelings, naming them, linking to signals from their movement, facial expression, behaviour or drawing attention to their internal signals? How does this sound in my own voice?
  - “You seem agitated, you’re fidgeting heaps and your eyes are darting everywhere. Is your body making it hard to settle?”
  - “I’m thinking, judging from your expression and your slumped shoulders, you’re feeling a bit low right now; have I got that right?”
  - “I’m guessing the task I just handed out has made your brain and body go NO WAY, I’m not ready for that! It looks like they are freaking out a bit but I’ve got you, we can work this out”

**Based on my self assessment, what aspects do I want to expand / further develop in my trauma informed approach:**



## Translating

Young people who have experienced trauma may find it difficult to make cohesive stories about their day to day experiences because their memory and interpretive functions have been impaired. This may add to their struggle to make sense of their past and the world.

It can be tricky helping to bring students awareness to their responses and ways of interacting with their environment in a safe respectful way in the classroom environment so that they may begin to make meaning of these responses and ways of being. Doing this though, can help students to heal, to challenge unhelpful internal working models and create space for personal growth and encourage experiences of success.



### Considerations and Approaches:



1. What does this sound/ look like in my interactions with them? How do I bring their awareness to their ways of being such as their reactions, how they interpret events/ conversations, what they struggle with, what they seem most comfortable with....?

**Based on my self assessment, what aspects do I want to expand / further develop in my trauma informed approach:**



## Involving

Young people who have experienced trauma, may find it difficult to make friends, having poorly developed relational 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.

They may also carry a sense of shame, lack of belonging, being wanted, or understood. They may also lack the complex skills sets that 'involvement' may demand. This can deepen the sense of isolation and drive avoidance of joining in.

We need to invite young people to participate in a variety of relationship - connecting activities such as student forums, student feedback opportunities, sports / games, camps, group work, interest groups, special in school programs etc. However, we need to meet them where they are at and build skill sets and confidence from there to avoid overwhelming them.



## Considerations and Approaches:



1. Do I know how safe and positive each of my students feel in peer relationships? How connected they feel? How competent and respected they feel in those relationships?



2. Can I consider the kinds of engagement and relational tasks that are common in my lessons/ interactions with students? Are my students working in pairs, groups, with equipment, moving around, in close proximity? How well do they know each other? How are their social and academic skills matched to enhance the experience? How do I take these factors into consideration to promote safety and positive experiences? How can I scaffold students to be able to engage safely with their peers in my classroom?

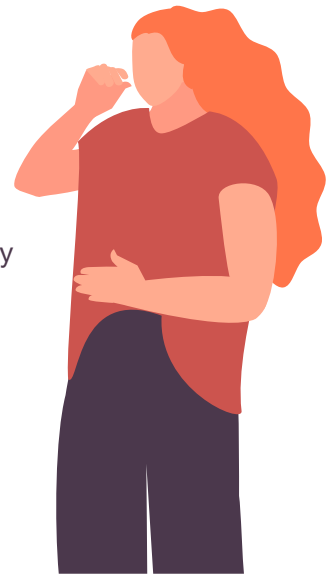
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## Calming

Young people who have experienced trauma may find it difficult to regulate their feelings and emotions particularly feelings of stress/distress. Trauma can impair their cortical capacity to regulate sub cortical functioning; in other words their capacity to use logic, reasoning, judgement, impulse control etc can go off line leaving them driven more by emotion and survival instincts.

We need to provide co-regulation - use our regulation to support them to regulate. We need to provide calming environments, calming interactions and calming strategies. We need to create a felt sense of safety for them.



### Considerations and Approaches:



1. Building trust and a felt sense of safety is sometimes done by testing limits for understanding and reassurance. How do I stay calm and grounded in order to hold a student who is learning to adapt to and trust calm peaceful environments? How do I check in on my inner state of calm? How do I check that I am well grounded myself; particularly when students might be testing the limits?



2. How do I help them to adapt and learn to trust and thrive in these environments of calm and peace, including the engaged hum of a focused classroom? How can I promote their sense of being an integral part of that, so they don't feel like an outsider, alien to that kind of environment?

**Based on my self assessment, what aspects do I want to expand / further develop in my trauma informed approach:**





## Engaging

Young people who have experienced trauma, may have insecure blueprints for forming, maintaining, understanding and being in healthy relationships.

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

Remember we largely come to understand ourselves through how others experience us and reflect that back to us. This is why, how we engage with students, has the potential to influence their life journey.



## Considerations and Approaches:



1. How does my compassion, respect, enjoyment, playfulness, and investment in a student shine through in the way I engage with them?



2. How do I reflect these genuine experiences of their strengths, their uniqueness, their potential back to them so that they might come to see and truly believe themselves to be, or capable of being, the amazing human beings I am experiencing them as?

**Based on my self assessment, what aspects do I want to expand / further develop in my trauma informed approach:**