

# ‘I’ve got one lesson!’

## Maximising Trauma Informed Approaches using the Making Space for Learning 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 five domains from the Making Space for Learning Framework 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.

 **Yellow** = An area of some knowledge and experience.

 **Orange** = An area that still needs attention.



# STAGED

Brain development is sequential; building upon experiences as we grow.

Some neurodevelopmental delays such as those affected by trauma can cause developmental disruption and brain changes. With the right support the brain can become better integrated through neuroplasticity. This is achievable with consistent ongoing opportunities to practice new ways of doing, thinking and being.

## CONSIDERATIONS AND APPROACHES



1. How aware am I about whether a student might be impacted by trauma? Do I know how I can find out more within privacy and confidentiality policies? Is the student working with any Professional Support Staff in the school? Have any assessments been done? Can they be done?



2. How do I understand and address these impacts in terms of the demands my learning session plans (or tasks allocated to the student outside of the classroom) have on individual students and what their capacity is to meet all those demands? Consider using the Demands and Capacities Tool to check this.



3. How do I address those areas needing scaffolding so the student can experience a sense of achievement and self-efficacy? Am I building up their skill sets and abilities in order for them to be able to engage fully with the content?

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



# PREDICATABLE

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 you 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 you are gathering in familiar to them?
- Do you provide a consistent experience of who you are as a mentor?
- Do they know how you 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 you 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:**



# ADAPTIVE

Most of us have a set of behavioural routines that we draw from to respond to challenges when they emerge. These routines are likely based in what has helped us get by in the past and the experiences of relationships through which these routines were interpreted and responded to.

To broaden children's behavioural repertoires and promote increased adaptability we need to maintain multiple meanings for the behaviour and remain open to multiple options for interventions.

We also need to support students to respond to their environments and situations adaptively; to move beyond the previous adaptations that may no longer be useful. We can help raise our students awareness of how they interact with the world around them. We can provide reflective opportunities in order to challenge limiting internal working models and adapt responses accordingly, creating space for personal growth and healing.

## CONSIDERATIONS AND APPROACHES FOR EACH LESSON

### 9 POINTS OF CURIOSITY – How do we make sense of the way they navigate their world?

1. What is the function behind the behaviour = meeting an unmet need?
2. Developmental stages of the child?
3. Current state of the child's nervous system? (hypersensitised, under responsive? )
4. Survival/protective response – fight, flight, freeze, dissociate
5. Coping strategy (that no longer works)
6. Structural changes in the brain
7. The demands of the environment outstripping the capacity of the person
8. How is this problem the child's solution?
9. Trauma induced thinking and conditioning/ internal working models (the world is an unsafe place, adults cannot be trusted, there is no hope of change, I am stupid, it is not safe to show vulnerability...)

## REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY

Think of a student who struggles; based on what you know and observe which of these points might be at play?

It can be challenging to understand trauma influenced behaviour routines and adapt our responses with fluidity and confidence. We need be open and bring genuine curiosity to how we translate this with them. Having experienced adults letting them down, breaking their trust, violating their safety, it is up to us to translate and respond adaptively to why students may interact, respond, feel, don't feel the way they do. How do we work with them to help them continue to grow? What does this sound/ look like in our interactions with them?



1. How do I bring the student's 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....?



# ADAPTIVE



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



3. 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? Or know when I can be light-hearted and playful?



4. Can I see the person behind the behaviour and translate it into what they are trying to communicate? Can I see when they need my understanding and connection despite behaviour that might provoke feelings of anger and rejection?



5. Can I respond to their behaviour and their cognitive and emotional levels where they are at developmentally rather than where, chronologically, they 'should' be?  
**Consider using the Words Matter resource to help translate the behaviour and reframe your language.**

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



# CONNECTED

Children's relational templates for forming and being in relationships take shape as they grow. They learn what to expect and how to navigate relationships through their experiences of connection with those around them.

We tend to expect things from relationships based on what we have known from past connections.

Strategies to support children as their relational templates continue to develop emphasise relationships with safe and consistent adults and peers as the foundation for healthy, strong social and emotional functioning.

They also need to feel connected to their own body and emotions and be able to read them accurately in order to interact with others in ways that support social connection.

## CONSIDERATIONS AND APPROACHES FOR EACH LESSON



1. How do my students experience me as a learning mentor?



2. How do I engender a sense of safety and respect between me and each individual student?



3. How well do I know my students as people; their life experiences, beliefs, strengths, interests, hopes, fears, joys?



4. 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?

Consider the kinds of engagement and relational tasks that are common in your lessons/ interactions with students. Are your 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?



5. How do I take these factors into consideration to promote safety and positive experiences of connection? How do I scaffold students to be able to engage safely with their peers in my classroom/ school environment?



# CONNECTED



6. How 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?

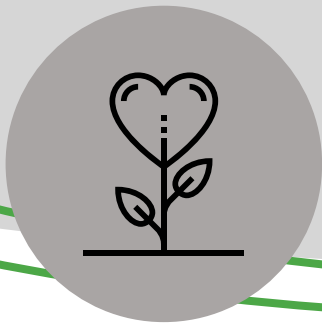
How does all this sound in my own voice.....

“You seem agitated, you’re fidgeting heaps and your eyes are darting everywhere. Is your body making it hard to settle?”

“I’m thinking, 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:**



# ENABLED

Engaging students in the process of understanding themselves can build social and emotional learning.

When students know about their qualities, their attributes and their talents they can feel good about themselves.

Knowing about their own special story helps students to build a coherent self-narrative

Enabling brain systems required for learning is also an important element to making space for learning. An enabled brain is one that can sense sufficient safety to relax and focus its attention on the learning with curiosity, optimism, and confidence.

## CONSIDERATIONS AND APPROACHES FOR EACH LESSON

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



1. How does my compassion, respect, enjoyment, playfulness, and investment in a student shine through in the way I engage with them? How do I reflect these genuine experiences of their strengths, their uniqueness, their potential back to them enabling them to see and truly believe themselves to be, or capable of being, the amazing human beings I am experiencing them as?

Building trust and a felt sense of safety is sometimes done by testing limits for understanding and reassurance.



2. How do I stay calm and grounded myself in order to hold a student who is learning to adapt and trust busy but calm peaceful environments? How do I help them to adapt and learn to trust and thrive in these environments of quiet focused calm, including the engaged hum of a busy classroom? How can I enable their sense of being an integral part of that, so they don't feel like an outsider, alien to that kind of environment?



3. How well do I know my internal signs that indicate whether I am feeling well grounded, particularly when students might be testing the limits, in order to enable a safe learning environment?



4. How do I ensure the demands of the lessons and the environment do not outstrip the capacities of individual students, enabling a space to feel good about themselves and enjoy the learning process? **Consider using the Demands and Capacities Tool to check this.**

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