

HELPING PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS EXPOSED TO STRESS OR
TRAUMA TO LEARN IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.

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August 2021

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The question addressed in this project is *how can English as foreign language teachers mitigate the impact of stress and trauma on primary school learners to facilitate learning in the language classroom?*

The goal of my project is to raise awareness of teachers to the severity of the consequences of stress and traumas and help them create safer classrooms for children where they will be able to perform at a high level academically and socially.

The project is represented by a comprehensive guide for mainstream primary school teachers of English as a second language.

The guide contains the following information:

- explanation on the mechanism of stress and trauma and their influence on academic performance;
- list of common symptoms of stress (for instance, a temporary forgetfulness, short-term loss of interest to the learning process or communication with peers) and trauma (for example, repetitive aggressive responses, sudden bursts into tears) in children and how they are reflected on behavior;
- practical recommendations for teachers on how to identify those symptoms and how to respond constructively to specific learner's reactions;
- classroom activities dedicated to help children build resilience to stress and trauma.

The practical guide on stress and trauma mitigation strategies is provided in a form of a textbook in a PDF format. This format is easy to access from any device and it is easy to use because teachers can access it either in a digital version by simply downloading it on their laptops, tablets or phones, or they can print it and have a paper copy in hand.

CALM CHILDREN = HIGH PERFORMANCES

(The guide to working with stressed and traumatized children)



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Introductory note for teachers

The strategies in this guide are research-based and modelled on current best practices. The guide includes methods that have been used successfully in schools. However, before applying the suggestions that follow, please you remember that:

1. Instruction must vary from student to student and class to class. Use your knowledge about teaching your individual students and working with their families to make thoughtful refinements and adjustments.

2. This guide is NOT intended to be a step-by-step prescription. Strategies should be chosen because they are a match for the content being taught, the teacher's instructional style, and most important, the students' current needs.

3. Trust your professional judgment; but DO NOT try these ideas alone. As you implement new approaches and strategies take time to reflect upon the results with others, for example, with teaching colleagues, counsellors, and social workers (Wolpov et al., 2011).

What do educators have in common with police officers, firefighters, emergency room physicians, and psychologists? We are often first responders; that is, we are among the first “outsiders” to learn that trauma is affecting students and their families. However, in comparison to other first responders, most educators get very little training in recognizing the symptoms of trauma.

Trying to focus on academics while struggling with trauma is like trying to meditate on a roller-coaster. Here are four examples from the shakes in the lives of our students:

- a 10-year-old who habitually falls asleep in class. This child is frequently awakened in the night by the sounds of his mother groaning and pleading as his father strikes her repeatedly.

- a 9-year-old who doesn't complete required homework. At home are two parents, one who drinks too much, the other undergoing chemotherapy for terminal cancer.

- an 8-year-old who finds it difficult to concentrate on math. Last night, while her mother was out, her step-father forced himself upon her, again. Echoing in her mind is his threat, “Tell anyone and I swear, I will kill you and your mother.”

- an 11-year-old whose frustrations explode into angry displays of emotion. The fear: he and his older sibling may be “taken away” from home because of violent behavior. Where will they sleep tonight? Will they be safe?

Is it reasonable to expect students in these circumstances to concentrate on their schoolwork, to behave “normally” while transfixed in the glare of emotions so horrific that they are beyond words? These students need and deserve compassionate support.

We who teach often know very little about what is going on in the lives of our students. Many have lost, or are about to lose, dear ones due to alcoholism, drug

abuse, incarceration, physical or mental illness, suicide and more. Each day we work with students who are struggling with high levels of stress, abuse and/or who have been separated from their families to be placed in foster care homes. The problem's pervasiveness and its effect on school performance are dire.

Felitti and Anda (2002), specialists in Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), highlighted the following experiences affecting the lives of children in a destructive way:

- child physical abuse;
- child sexual abuse;
- child emotional abuse;
- emotional neglect;
- physical neglect;
- mentally ill, depressed or suicidal person at home;
- drug addicted or alcoholic family member;
- witnessing domestic violence against the mother;
- loss of a parent to death or abandonment, including abandonment by parental divorce;
- incarceration of any family member for a crime.

Several studies (Delaney-Black et al, 2002; Sanger et al., 2000; Shonk & Cicchetti, 2001) reveal that students dealing with trauma:

- are two-and-one-half times more likely to fail a grade;
- score lower on standardized achievement test scores;
- have more receptive or expressive language difficulties;
- are suspended or expelled more often;
- are designated to special education more frequently.

Let us see how trauma affects learning (Cole et al., 2013, pp. 14-41).

1. Acquisition of academics (e.g., reading, writing, and math) requires attention, organization, comprehension, memory engagement in learning, and trust. Traumatic stress from adverse childhood experiences can undermine the ability of children to form relationships, regulate their emotions, and learn the cognitive skills necessary to succeed academically.

2. When students enter the classroom with symptoms of trauma (hyperarousal, intrusion, or constriction)*, they may be unable to process verbal/nonverbal and written academic information. They tend to have limited ability to understand or respond to classroom instructions or explanations, or to retrieve information on demand.

3. Traumatized students struggle to use language to relate to people, often because they are unable to use language to articulate emotional needs and feelings. Consequently, they have trouble identifying and differentiating emotions. While they may be somewhat effective in using language to get something from somebody, they struggle with the language of mutual relationship. Many students struggle to relate well with others, or in conveying abstractions, both of which are essential skills required for higher-level learning.

4. Successful completion of many academic tasks depends on the ability to bring linear order to the chaos of daily experience. When one comes from a home where sequencing is not logical, where things are “out of order” one’s ability to organize material sequentially may be inhibited. This is often shown in poor ability to organize, remember, and store new information. It may also result in struggles to understand cause and effect relationships.

5. When a child does not feel safe expressing a preference without first assessing the mood of a potentially volatile parent, he or she cannot fully develop a sense of self. This may result in an inability to define boundaries that often leads to

difficulties in making independent choices, articulating preferences, and gaining perspective.

6. Deficits in this area can make it hard to solve a problem from a different point of view, infer ideas from a text, or participate in group work or exhibit empathy of another.

7. The executive functions, such as setting goals, developing a plan, anticipating consequences, carrying out goals, reflecting on the process, are very important for achieving academic success and, for reasons listed above, are often lacking for children who have experienced trauma. (Sometimes children are very focused on what they need to survive instead of those things needed for academic success.) These children tend to “act instead of plan”.

8. Children affected by trauma have trouble with classroom transitions (endings and beginnings). After all, if one finally feels safe in one situation, transition from one situation to another could be fraught with danger.

9. Classroom behavioral adaptations to trauma include aggression, defiance, withdrawal, perfectionism, hyperactivity, reactivity, impulsiveness, and/or rapid and unexpected emotional swings. Trauma-related behaviors are often confused with symptoms from other mental health issues such as ADHD and mood disorders such as bipolar disease and depression. When educators review the reasons that children are not behaving and/or learning, trauma should be considered a possible contributing factor. Trauma is one potential cause of these problems, one that is often overlooked. However, it is often only one of several contributing factors.

A student’s academic or social behaviors change dramatically. A short discussion in the hallway or telephone call home reveals that these behaviors may be linked to traumatic events. How do we respond? Are we supportive? Do we foster resiliency by acting with compassion? Or do we turn away? Schools can be

supportive elements of a child's community. Regrettably, this is not always the case (Cole et al., 2013, pp. 14-41).

The Impact of Untreated Trauma

Children are resilient. Some stress in their lives (e.g., leaving caregivers for a day at school, riding a bike for the first time, feeling nervous before a game or performance) helps their brains to grow and new skills to develop. However, by definition, trauma occurs when a stressful experience (such as being abused, neglected, or bullied) overwhelms the child's natural ability to cope. These events cause a "fight, flight, or freeze" response, resulting in changes in the body—such as faster heart rate and higher blood pressure—as well as changes in how the brain perceives and responds to the world. In many cases, a child's body and brain recover quickly from a potentially traumatic experience with no lasting harm. However, for other children, trauma interferes with normal development and can have long-lasting effects (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2014).

Factors that determine the impact of traumatic events include the following

(Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2014):

1. Age. Younger children are more vulnerable. Even infants and toddlers who are too young to talk about what happened retain lasting "sense memories" of traumatic events that can affect their well-being into adulthood.
2. Frequency. Experiencing the same type of traumatic event multiple times, or multiple types of traumatic events, is more harmful than a single event.
3. Relationships. Children with positive relationships with healthy caregivers are more likely to recover.
4. Coping skills. Intelligence, physical health, and self-value help children cope.
5. Perception. How much danger the child thinks he or she is in, or the amount

of fear the child feels at the time, is a significant factor.

6. Sensitivity. Every child is different - some are naturally more sensitive than others.

The effects of trauma vary depending on the child and type of traumatic events experienced. Table 1 shows some of the ways that trauma can affect children (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2014).

Table 1. Effects on trauma on children

Trauma may affect children's...	In the following ways
Bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability to control physical responses to stress • Chronic illness, even into adulthood (heart disease, obesity)
Brain (thinking)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty thinking, learning, and concentrating • Impaired memory • Difficulty switching from one thought or activity to another
Emotions (feelings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low self-value • Feeling unsafe • Inability to regulate emotions • Trouble with friendships • Trust issues • Depression, anxiety
Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of impulse control • Fighting, aggression, running away • Substance abuse • Suicide

This list of potential consequences shows why it is so important to understand trauma. The right kind of help can reduce or even eliminate many of these negative consequences.

Some children may be experiencing PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). This term is used to describe psychological symptoms of a distressing event that were outside the range of usual human experience and lasted for longer than one month

(Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 2013).

There are three overlapping categories of PTSD symptoms:

1. Hyperarousal may be characterized by a persistent expectation of danger, which may or may not be actually present. Victims with this symptom will react to stimuli with an all-or-nothing response. They may demonstrate an impaired capacity to modulate the intensity of their responses, whether anxiety, anger or intimacy. For example, a teacher who innocently raises his voice and bangs on his desk to dramatically make a point may trigger an intense (and seemingly inappropriate) response by a student regularly exposed to violent outbreaks by an angry, intoxicated parent.

2. Intrusion may manifest in trauma survivors as a re-enactment of the trauma scene, either unconsciously or in a disguised form. Victims with this symptom will have recurring nightmares or may experience flashbacks while awake (“day-mares”). One theory is that some students who cut themselves do so in order to distract themselves from their day-mares. In the words of one student who burned herself with cigarettes, “The repeated images in my mind haunt me. I feel so much pain on the inside that it helps to feel the pain on the outside.” (Wolpov et al., 2011, p. 8). Whether the person doing harm to him or herself consciously intends it or not, the wounds provide a visible sign of the pain within.

3. Constriction may result in an emotional state similar to that of an animal transfixed in the glare of oncoming headlights. The victim escapes from the real world by disconnecting or “disassociating” from the ordinary meanings of what is happening. Victims disconnect from their feelings about them in order to get through the terrible events that surround them. Students who appear “out of it” may very well be manifesting “constriction” (Wolpov et al., 2011, p. 8).

Understanding Children’s Behavior

When children have experienced trauma, particularly multiple traumatic events over an extended period of time, their bodies, brains, and nervous systems adapt in an effort to protect them. This might result in behaviors such as increased aggression, distrusting or disobeying adults, or even dissociation (feeling disconnected from reality). When children are in danger, these behaviors may be important for their survival. However, once children are moved to a safer environment, their brains and bodies may not recognize that the danger has passed.

These protective behaviors, or habits, have grown strong from frequent use (just as a muscle that is used regularly grows bigger and stronger). It takes time and retraining to help those “survival muscles” learn that they are not needed in their new situation, and that they can relax (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2014, p. 3).

Trauma Triggers

When a child is behaving in a way that is unexpected and seems irrational or extreme, he or she may be experiencing a trauma trigger. A trigger is some aspect of a traumatic event that occurs in a completely different situation but reminds the child of the original event. Examples may be sounds, smells, feelings, places, postures, tones of voice, or even emotions. Youth who have experienced traumatic events may re-enact past patterns when they feel unsafe or encounter a trigger. Depending on whether the child has a “fight,” “flight,” or “freeze” response, the child may appear to be throwing a tantrum, wilfully not listening, or defying you (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2014, p. 3). However, responses to triggers are best thought of as reflexes—they are not deliberate or planned. When children’s bodies and brains are overwhelmed by a traumatic memory, they are not able to consider the consequences of their behavior or its effect on others (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2014, p. 3).

Symptoms by Age

Table 2 shows symptoms and behaviors that children who have experienced trauma might exhibit at different stages of development. The age ranges are merely guidelines. For many children who have experienced trauma, their development lags behind their age in calendar years. It may be normal for a child to exhibit behaviors that are more common in younger children.

Table 2. Signs of trauma in children of different ages (adapted from Finkelhor et al., 2009).

Young children (ages 0 – 5)	School-age children (ages 6 – 12)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irritability • Startling easily or being difficult to calm • Frequent tantrums • Clinginess, reluctance to explore the world • Activity levels that are much higher or lower than peers • Repeating traumatic events over and over in dramatic play or conversation • Delays in reaching physical, language, or other milestones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty paying attention • Being quiet or withdrawn • Frequent tears or sadness • Talking often about scary feelings and ideas • Difficulty transitioning from one activity to the next • Fighting with peers or adults • Changes in school performance • Wanting to be left alone • Eating much more or less than peers • Getting into trouble at home or school • Frequent headaches or stomach aches with no apparent cause • Behaviors common to younger children (thumb sucking, fear of the dark)

These signs alone do not necessarily indicate that a child has experienced trauma. However, if symptoms are more severe or longer lasting than is typical for children the same age, or if they interfere with the child's ability to succeed in school, it is important to seek help.

To get a visual representation on what trauma is and how it affects children, teachers are encouraged to watch these *Modules on creating trauma informed care in*

schools developed by Madison Metropolitan School District (2012)

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCy4KXcM4ISTQILVmf21MTHQ/videos?app=desktop>

At this stage watch the following episodes:

Module 1. Introduction to trauma-informed practices in education.

Module 2. A sense of safety.

Module 5. Trauma and the brain. You are encouraged to watch the other 7 modules after you get acquainted with the strategies on helping students affected by stress and trauma learn.

What can we, teachers, do to help children?

Although childhood trauma can have serious, lasting effects, there is hope. With the help of supportive, caring adults, children can and do recover. The leading principle of the guide is as follows “You cannot teach the mind until you reach the heart.”

We can reach the hearts of our learners with the help of the following four actions:

1. caring of our learners;
2. feeling empathy;
3. acting compassionately;
4. building resilience.

Let us define each action in detail (Wolpov et al, 2011).

1. Caring is important. It is the foundation for success in the work we do every day in the field of education. Every one of us who works in a school knows what it is like to sit, with the intent of being helpful, next to a student who is struggling to master an academic, physical, or artistic challenge.

2. It is extremely important to listen and observe with empathy. Empathy is

intellectual identification with, or the vicarious experiencing of, the feelings, thoughts or attitudes of others. It involves deeply engaging our minds and hearts. Focusing on the cognitive and physical tasks requires us to look for strengths and weaknesses and, together with the learner, address challenges. We observe with our minds and we listen with our hearts. If the student is visibly upset or distracted, we endeavor to provide encouragement and behavioral direction. We also focus on the affective dimension. Sometimes, however, in the process of listening and providing guidance, we learn of unspeakable sorrow and pain. When this happens, we do our best to be helpful. Sometimes just listening helps, while at other times, we refer students to a school counselor or agency to get help.

3. Compassion is a prerequisite for fostering resiliency. Compassion is at the heart of learning and teaching. Compassion may be defined as a feeling of deep empathy and respect for another who is stricken by misfortune and the strong desire to actively do something about it. In other words, compassion is the human quality of understanding the suffering of others paired with a desire to help alleviate it. It may be worthy to note that the virtues of compassion may be found in nearly every spiritual and religious tradition. In order to have compassion, one must have empathy. Empathy requires that we be in tune with the feelings and needs of others. However, compassion goes beyond feeling for others. We are compassionate when we act on those feelings in soothing, helpful, caring, accepting, and/or protective ways. When we feel that our actions helped others and alleviated their pain, we experience compassion satisfaction, which is the positive feeling we get when we realize that the compassion we put into working with others is resulting in some relief, growth, or healing. In learning and teaching, compassion satisfaction is most often felt by both student and teacher.

4. Resiliency, the ability of an individual to withstand and rebound from stress.

Caring, empathy, and compassion are traits of human character which are prerequisites in teaching profession, which just cannot be taught as skills. The last component, resiliency, can be trained.

Now let us focus on how teachers can foster resilience and respond to any unpredictable and unclear reactions of their students (Wolpov et al., 2011).

The strategies are based on the following six teaching principles which are borrowed from the book *The Heart of Learning and Teaching* (Wolpov et al., 2011).

Principle One: Always Empower, Never Disempower (Wolpov et al., 2011)

The first principle of fostering resiliency is the empowerment of the student (Herman, 1997). Students affected by trauma often compete with their teachers for power. This is because they believe that controlling their environment is the way to achieve safety (Craig, 1992). Rape victims could tell us what it feels like to be disempowered and the extent that they would go to avoid being in that position again. The more helpless, dependent, and incompetent a student feels generally, the worse the behavior will become.

Clearly, no teacher wants to trigger feelings of powerlessness. Nonetheless, teachers are in positions of unequal power and authority over students. A well-intentioned teacher may try to wield control over students struggling with the effects of trauma. This is counterproductive. Whenever possible, compassionate teachers avoid battles for control. Yes, they must hold students accountable. However, teachers' responses should reflect an understanding of the origin of traumatized behavior. They recognize that student behavior may be outside the students' awareness and beyond their self-control. Accordingly, discipline must never resemble the behaviors of those who perpetrated violence against students in the first place. Yelling, threats, and sarcasm must be avoided. Instead, discipline should be

consistent, respectful, and non-violent. It should include offers to share control of the classroom environment. Most important, discipline must have, at its heart, unconditional positive regard for the student (Wolpov et al., 2011)

Principle Two: Provide Unconditional Positive Regard (Wolpov et al., 2011)

Traumatic events make it difficult for children to trust. They make it difficult to feel worthy, take initiative, and form relationships. Unconditional positive regard is an important ingredient in recovering from the unspeakable. It is defined here as the various ways an adult shows genuine respect for students as persons. Students struggling with trauma don't need another adult to tell them what is wrong with them. What they do need, what helps them thrive, is an adult who treats them with simple sustained kindness, an adult who can empathize with the challenges they face moving between home and school.

Studies of children who thrive despite adversity consistently reveal the healing power of an adult who cares. For those who have been hurt or betrayed, turn-around teachers demonstrate that adults can consistently act and respond with positive regard. In their very words and actions, they demonstrate for these children the healing conviction that life, despite adversity, can make sense.

For example, in anger a student tells the teacher, "I hate you. You are mean." The teacher responds, "I am sorry you feel that way. I am here to support you regardless of how you feel about me. I would like to work together to help you finish your assignment." A student tells the teacher, "I feel dumb and don't think I'll ever learn this." The teacher responds, "I am sorry you feel that way. I realize that this is hard for you right now, but you are bright and capable. I am willing to help you when you are ready to try again." A student discloses a tragic event that occurred over the weekend. The student says, "I don't know if I can handle this anymore." The teacher is respectful of what the student is feeling. The teacher doesn't argue that the student

is wrong. Instead, the teacher responds, “Yes, I can hear the pain and frustration in your voice. What happened is very sad. It will take a great while, but I believe you can get through this. I would like to help you get some help from the counseling office. Would that be okay with you?” To the student who shows that he or she is embarrassed and ashamed, the teacher responds, “I respect you and value you exactly the way you are.”

Note that the term “unconditional positive regard” is used instead of “unconditional love.” Unfortunately, abusers sometimes also tell their children they “love” them. Older students can sometimes become confused by the use of that word. Therefore, it is recommended that the word “love” not be used in the context of public school education (Wolpov et al., 2011)

Principle Three: Maintain High Expectations (Wolpov et al., 2011)

Teachers may be so concerned that they avoid disempowering their students that they may be hesitant to set limits. Therefore, expectations for achievement are lowered. Doing so inadvertently sends negative messages such as “you are too damaged to behave” or “you are different from others, so I am giving up on you.” Note that these messages can increase the perception of the student that they are powerless. Increased feelings of powerlessness lead to increased symptoms of traumatic affect. Consistent expectations, limits and routines send the message that the student is worthy of continued unconditional positive regard and attention. Consistency in your classroom will allow students to begin to differentiate between the arbitrary rules which led to their abuse and purposeful ones that assure their safety and well-being. Limits are most appropriate when they are immediate, related, age appropriate, proportional, and delivered in a calm and respectful voice. When we set limits, we name inappropriate behaviors and follow through with consequences.

For example: “I see you are struggling and feeling angry, but you can’t

continue to behave in this manner. You must stop interrupting the work of others. For now, I'm going to have you change your seat. Would you rather sit in the back of the room, or next to my desk? Wherever you sit, please remember that I will continue to support you" (Wolpov et al., 2011)

Principle Four: Check Assumptions, Observe and Question (Wolpov et al., 2011)

Traumatic events can affect any person, family, or group of people. It is important to observe and question in responsive and relevant ways, which involves three skills. First, we learn to identify our own assumptions. Every time we catch ourselves making an assumption, we choose to make an observation instead. Based on our observations, we then ask questions. However, asking questions is only worthwhile when we are willing to listen carefully to the response. Listening to the responses of students is one of the ways we seek relevancy and display respect. Listening is also how we show unconditional positive regard. Each child independent of any factors we may know about his or her personal life. The quiet, withdrawn child who is emotionally absent during lectures and reading can and should concern us as much as the child who misbehaves. After observing, it may be helpful to use paper and pencil to record observations, often because writing and reflecting allows us to remove emotionally charged reactions of our own. When we do this, we can better focus on the context of the behaviors of the student. This will be especially helpful when trying to assure a child's perception of safety. It is not necessary to take notes on all of our observations. However, if we suspect trauma, notetaking may be worth the effort. When we recognize patterns of behavior, we are ready to ask a question. For example, we might say, "Sally, I notice that every time I raise my voice to get everyone's attention, you throw your book down. Are you worried about what I might do?" At this point you have observed and questioned. The next step is to stop, wait, and listen. Your listening is part of being a relationship coach (Wolpov et al., 2011).

Principle Five: Be a Relationship Coach (Wolpov et al., 2011)

Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. Compassionate teachers think of themselves as relationship coaches. After all, the relationships we establish with and among students influence the tone and demeanor in our classrooms. By helping students feel safe and supported in our classrooms, students can put more energy into learning. Putting less energy into dealing with emotions and behavior that detract from learning will result in better physics or history scores. By attending to their roles as relationship coaches, teachers can help students take small but significant steps towards mending torn perceptions of community and friends. The key principle in this approach is to provide choices for a child, discuss together the outcomes of making each choice, and let the child choose by themselves. This way they will learn to see several steps ahead and take responsibility over their actions. For example, in response to a child's unwillingness to come out of the cabinet and shouting "*I hate you!*" and "*I hate school!*" the teacher responded in the following manner "*Paulette, you have a big decision to make here. You can choose to come out of the cabinet and talk with me or choose to deal with the principal who I will call to talk with you. If you come talk with me in the hallway you can tell me 'no' you don't want to go. Then again, you can come out to the hallway to tell me that you'll go. Or you can stay in the cabinet and our principal will come to talk with you. Whatever you decide, I will care about you and do my very best to make sure you are safe*" (adapted from a real-life example by Leigh D. 5th/6th grade teacher, Acme Elementary School, Washington, as cited in Wolpov et al., 2011, pp. 75-76).

Principle Six: Provide Guided Opportunities for Helpful Participation (Wolpov et al., 2011)

We all need to belong. Belonging gives us opportunities to be heard, to make

choices, to have responsibilities, to engage in problem solving. When we participate we get to feel like we belong. When we make meaningful contributions to the welfare of others, we improve our own feelings of self-worth. Helping others strengthens resiliency. Why is that? Perhaps the sense of belonging that comes with “giving back” ends the isolation that worsens the symptoms of trauma (Wolpov et al., 2011, p. 76). Perhaps helping others provides insight to one’s own struggles. Perhaps each authentic demonstration of resilience provides meaning to an otherwise tragic remembrance. Whatever the reason, providing guided opportunities for helpful participation is an important principle of compassionate teaching. Such supervised opportunities can provide solace, create mutual trust, and affirm the self-worth of those involved (Wolpov et al., 2011).

These six teaching principles should be infused into the three following domains, which are grounded on works of Cole et al., 2005, Craig, 2008, Kinniburgh et al., 2005, Wolpov et al., 2011:

1. Domain one: safety, connection, and assurance
2. Domain two: improving emotional and behavioral self-regulation
3. Domain three: competencies of personal agency, social skills, and academic skills.

Domain One: Safety, Connection, and Assurance

Threats of danger, whether real or not, can trigger the freeze-fight-flight-fright response. They can also trigger traumatic memories (flashbacks). Once triggered, children will behave in ways that neither they nor their teachers may understand. Obviously, these behaviors will interfere with academic success. They will interfere with a student’s ability to encode, process, organize, and store new information. They will interfere with students’ abilities to recall information needed to complete assignments or to use language to relate to people. As if that weren’t serious enough,

a pattern of perceived threats and uncontrolled behaviors can lead students to feel demoralized, exhausted, and depressed. This pattern can lead students to appear oversensitive, numb, hostile, or aggressive. Obviously, students who behave in these ways will have problems connecting with others in healthy ways.

Children with no history of connection with trustworthy adults will challenge their teachers. After all, they have reason not to trust adults. However, they can learn to trust others and make healthy connections. This will require three things: consistency and integrity on the part of the teacher; attunement on the part of the student so they can read teacher cues accurately; and opportunities to respond appropriately. Attunement is the term used to describe the capacity to accurately read the cues of others and respond appropriately. Children affected by trauma may be oversensitive (misattuned). Misattuned children may mistakenly read signs of anger, rejection or abandonment where there are none. They may be numb or unattuned to others, acting in ways that alienate them. Conversely, they may be overly attuned (over-adaptive) to their caregivers. In these cases, they will take responsibility for the actions of the adults who are supposed to care for them. (Kinniburgh & Blaustein, 2005). Teachers, especially those who are troubled by problems of their own, may also be misattuned, overly attuned, or unattuned. One of the goals of this domain is to improve teacher/student attunement.

Teachers can do a great deal to create a climate of safety for their students. Teachers who are attuned to the needs of their students can help students identify and deal with their triggers. They can help their students with attunement, teaching them more about the cues of others. They can respond to the emotions that underlie unpredictable behavior rather than simply react to the most disturbing symptoms.

Students who will benefit from instruction in this domain may appear distracted, defensive, guarded, wary, or hypervigilant. Consequently, they have

trouble staying on task. They require frequent redirection. Behaviors may take the form of aggression or withdrawal. For example, seemingly without provocation, a student may aggressively challenge the teacher's authority. On the other hand, the student may choose not to participate in an activity, accepting the consequences without seeming to care.

Changes in routine may trigger unexpected behaviors. These may include emotional outbursts, self-destructive behavior, or efforts to retreat to a safer area in the room. (Younger students may choose to hide in a cabinet or under a desk. Older students may demand the use of the hall pass, see the school nurse, or cut class.) Students who feel safe with the administrator who provides discipline may purposefully act out so that they are sent to the disciplinarian.

The need for predictability may make transitions from one activity to another especially difficult. After all, once a student feels safe in one activity, why take the risk of a change? Once again, the result could be aggressive or passive. The student may challenge the need for a transition from one activity to another, or the student may simply refuse to make the change. Then again, the student may find a way to disrupt the class, making the transition impossible.

Anticipation of an unsafe situation may lead a student to preemptively strike out at the person who instigates change. Sometimes that is the teacher. Other times that may be other students. This will often cause peers to avoid playing or working with this student. In response, students in need of compassion may tease, bully, or harass a member of the group so as to be placed in isolation by the teacher.

Normal occurrences in the classroom environment may startle some students. A teacher raising his voice in anger at another student may trigger spacey (passive) behavior on the part of a student who sits motionless despite a directive that the class move into groups for the next activity. A signal of real danger, such as a fire alarm

ringing or the sounds of a fight in the hallway, may trigger a gamut of emotions and behaviors beyond the child's ability to identify or regulate. (Whispering can do the same if there is a history of whispering by adults before abuse starts.) A class discussion may lead to a student flare-up. A student "going off" like this may cause others in the class to feel unsafe. Consequently, other students will want to avoid potential flare-ups with him or her (Wolpov et al., 2011).

Content and Strategies

Safety First!

Assuring that students feel safe, emotionally, and physically, must come first. Basic assurance of safety of students is required to focus on learning. Without these assurances, students are likely to behave in ways that are hard to understand. Let us not forget that assurances of safety benefit us all. All students, and their teachers, should feel safe in the classroom. Once students feel safe, they need opportunities to connect with adults and other students in healthy ways. These connections can lead to further assurance of well-being.

Here's a checklist of actions to consider:

- Monday mornings and daily schedules can be made routine and predictable.
- Routines can be posted in writing and articulated frequently.
- Teachers can regularly attune themselves to students' needs. In so doing, they can make themselves available for students to express their emotions appropriately.
- Potential triggers can be identified.
- Setting limits can act as a trigger.
- Opportunities can be created for students to make choices and be in control.
- Transitions can be planned, previewed, and made routine.
- Seating arrangements can improve feelings of safety.

- Calm Zones or Safe Places can also improve feelings of safety.
- Whenever possible, safety plans can be in place. Students with IEPs should have that plan in writing.
- Artifacts and activities can be used to develop and enhance connections (e.g. Photo Albums, Scrapbooks, Fancy Fridays).

Let us examine each action in detail.

Monday Mornings, Daily Schedules and Class Meetings

For many teachers, weekends are restful. Yes, we have papers to grade and planning to do. We may have family and community needs that demand our attention. But for the most part, the stresses that come with attending to the needs of dozens, if not hundreds, of students at a time, in one space, are removed. We have additional time for self-care. This may include much-needed sleep, exercise, nutrition, and recreation with family and friends.

For students affected by trauma, the opposite may be true. During most weekends, these students become fully immersed in traumatic events and unhealthy relationships. Schedules tend to be chaotic, sleep unpredictable, food choices limited, and relationships insecure, and the potential for emotional or physical harm are ever-present.

Providing structure and predictability on Monday mornings is important. Take time to outline the day. Post a schedule on the board. Use symbols and pictures of clocks for younger students.

It is recommended to hold a brief class meeting. Class meetings work best when students are seated in a circle. There is a safety factor here as well. When seated in a circle no one has their back to anyone else. During class meetings rules and agreements that provide safety may be reviewed. For example, if teasing has surfaced recently the teacher may say, “Respect and care in this classroom mean that we don’t

tease each other. What is teasing? Is it always disrespectful? How can it sometimes be scary to someone?" Students can also be asked to share a bit about their weekends.

You may also ask for "celebrations or challenges." Participation should be by choice. No student should be called upon or required to speak. Sharing about the weekend gives students and teachers opportunities to attune to each other's needs. Students may celebrate the purchase of a new toy or special time spent with a visiting cousin. On the other hand, a student may share the challenge that they are worried about a family member. They can share that they are saddened by the illness of a beloved aunt. Teachers can model appropriate ways to connect with students who are celebrating or grieving. They can encourage their students to do the same for each other. Together you can build the connections that create community. There will be time for the lesson, but let the needs for safety, connection, and assurance of well-being come first.

Not all students will speak of their challenges. They may feel, with good reason, that it is not safe to do so. If you note a change in a student's affect, take time to connect with that student later in the day. Others may demand your time and attention right away. Seek privacy in addressing their needs. Offer choices.

Identifying and Dealing with Triggers

Kinniburgh et al., (2005) define a trigger as any stimulus that acts as a reminder of past overwhelming experiences and leads to the same set of behaviors or emotions that originally developed as an attempt to cope with that experience (Kinniburgh, et al., 2005).

Triggers may be external. These involve stimuli from any of the five senses. For example, a teacher shouting may remind a child of the yelling that occurred prior to being beaten. Then again, kind words said in comfort can unconsciously remind a child of betrayal. The smell of a new car interior, if it was present at the time of a

tragic accident, has unconscious power to trigger traumatic memories. The smell or nuzzle of a large dog, no matter how friendly, can create problems for children who have survived animal attacks.

Triggers may also be internal. Feeling hungry may remind children of times when they were abandoned. Feeling anxiety, like when preparing to speak before a group, can trigger unrelated memories, such as when she was fearful when Mom and Dad were in a fight.

A trigger may sometimes be a combination of external and internal stimuli. For example, a substitute teacher who wears a certain brand of cologne takes away a student's cell phone. The student is worried about the safety of a family member who wore the same cologne, and without the cell phone, they are disconnected.

How are we to know that a student has been triggered? This is where teacher attunement is most helpful. Were there significant changes in the student's mood, tone of voice, facial expressions, or behavior in general? Did the student suddenly become more manipulative, withdrawn, or engage in conflicting aggressive and passive behavior? What should we do when we suspect that a student has been triggered?

Kinniburgh, et al., (2005) suggest that we can create opportunities for students to make choices and be in control by:

1. Acknowledging that the student behavior we are seeing may be a traumatic response to something bigger and more complex than what we are seeing in our classrooms. Doing so requires that we not take the behavior personally. We can help ourselves do this by asking: What was the function of the student's behavior? Was it to defy us personally? Or was its intent to somehow cope with a perceived danger?

2. Acknowledging and respecting boundaries. We don't have to know the details of the student's history to respond with compassion. We are NOT going to be able to fix the problem. Therefore, knowing all the details is not the most useful way

to use our energy. However, we can respond with care and concern. We can model appropriate adult behavior.

3. Assuming that there is a plausible link between some stimulus (or stimulus configuration) in the classroom and the complex behavior of the student.

4. Looking for that stimulus configuration and figuring out how it might be a representation of a current day form of a threatening thought or memory. This will require a bit of detective work on our part. Triggers are complex. They can be external, internal, or a combination of both. At this level, the student can't help us much. Their response is reflexive, not reflective.

5. Playing a role in removing the trigger. Whenever possible, we do this by providing the student with choices. There are three ways to do this. In this domain we address the first two: either remove the stimulus or help the student remove the stimulus. (The third part will be addressed in the next domain: help the student learn to respond to the stimulus differently.)

6. Remembering that compassionate strategies for traumatized students tends to be useful for most students. In the wake of the storm, foster the resiliency of all who are present in the room. Take explicit steps to reduce any residual stress (embarrassment, shame, humiliation, harassment, threats of violence) in the classroom. As the adult who has significant control over the environment, model compassion (affirm unconditional acceptance, respect, reason, increase opportunities to connect and help others etc.).

7. Monitoring student progress and providing alternatives as needed. Debrief with a colleague.

Transitions and Safety Plans

Many students have trouble with transitions. Once safe in one activity, a transition to something new involves risk. Therefore, the change becomes the trigger.

To assure younger children of safety and to avoid triggering reactions, teachers can preview changes. For example, you may routinely play a recording of classical music or sounds of nature between activities. As the music came on in the background you may say, “OK, children. We are getting ready to move from activity A to activity B. Please finish what you are doing. Sometime between now and when the music stops, please do”

A written safety plan enables teachers to help students remove stimuli that lead to unpredictable behavior. A safety plan is a certain action agreed upon by a student and a teacher, which will be executed by both in case when a learner feels triggered by stimuli. For example, a student may raise hand as a sign of permission to go out to the hall or a school counsellor when he or she feels too nervous. After the class, the teacher and the student may talk privately, and try to identify what triggered the sense of nervousness (Cole et al., 2013).

Minimizing Triggers When Setting Limits

Kinniburgh et al., (2005) remind us that setting limits is necessary to maintain classroom safety. And yet, all types of limit setting can act as triggers. A time-out can trigger feelings of abandonment. Ignoring or removing a student from a group can trigger fears of rejection. Discipline can trigger fears of inappropriate punishments. These authors encourage us to minimize the impact of limit setting by:

- Naming the rationale for the limit. (Throwing pens at people can hurt them.)
- Link the consequence to the behavior, not the person. (I care about you. I don't think you wanted to hurt anyone. But throwing is not OK).
- Naming the boundaries of the limit. (You have a 5-minute time out or I'm going to hold your pen until after lunch.)
- Move on. The limit has been set. Consequence given. (After your time out you may look at your book, or clean your desk.)

- Make adaptations. (If, in the past, a child has been punished by being isolated for long periods of time, have the student sit in a nearby chair. Don't send them to another room.

Calm Zones

A calm zone is a place where students can voluntarily move when they feel themselves getting out of control. This safe space is an area separate from where students may be sent for time outs. Children can choose to go there, without penalty. Use of this space is available to any student having a difficult time. Neither the child suffering from the effects of trauma nor the child simply having a bad day is singled out as being different (Cole et al., 2013).

Fancy Fridays and Photo Scrapbooks

Fancy Fridays is an activity geared for early elementary aged students. On these days, the teacher and a select group of children have lunch together. Rather than go to the school cafeteria an area of the room is set up like a restaurant. Teachers and other adults help model appropriate behavior and conversation. Children attend Fancy Fridays on a rotating basis. No one is excluded.

Teachers at all levels can have classroom photos taken of themselves with individual students while working together. These can be dated and stored in a scrapbook (digital or paper). Later on, teachers can use this book to help students review the history of their relationship with the teacher and others. When so doing, teachers can help students notice how they were able to reconnect despite disagreements or misunderstandings (Craig, 2008).

Domain Two: Improving Emotional and Behavioral Self-Regulation

More often than not, lack of self-regulation is the major cause of concern raised by teachers about students who have been affected by trauma. Time and again, our attention go to the students who are acting out aggressively. However, children

who are withdrawn may be reliving traumatic events in their minds. While their behavior may not be disruptive to the classroom, they are no less deserving of our unconditional positive regard, empowerment, and skills to process their trauma.

Operating at high levels of arousal or fear, triggers can overwhelm their emotional management skills. In order to cope, children will disconnect from their feelings and behave in ways not appropriate to the classroom. They may act out or withdraw. Teachers can help students feel safe, connected and assured of their safety. They can also help students learn to recognize triggers. However, students cannot learn to self-regulate emotions that they don't know they have.

This domain of the curriculum addresses ways that students can recognize and name their feelings and bodily states. It addresses the vocabulary of feelings. Once students recognize and name their feelings, the objective is to help them create links between external experiences, internal feelings, and triggered behaviors. However, within this domain there is one more set of behaviors to be learned. Students still need to learn how to respond differently to their feelings. Doing so requires affect modulation, which may be defined as calming down or reviving back up after an arousal of an intense emotion. Once students recognize and name the emotions and the triggers that set them off, the objective in this domain is to help students modulate their emotions, so as to be able to express them appropriately. Doing so will enable them to behave in a manner that will help them succeed in the classroom (Kinniburgh et al., 2005).

With an understanding of the challenges of discerning levels of affective understanding, let us describe the behaviors of students who will benefit from learning in this domain. We know that overwhelming stress combined with triggers that remind them of past experiences may cause children to shut down (constriction). They may appear to be daydreaming, writing on their desks, or some other means of

distraction. External triggers such as a teacher's facial expression may be misinterpreted as a threat, triggering overwhelming negative feelings such as shame or self-blame. A teacher's innocent use of sarcasm or humor to lighten a stressful situation may be misinterpreted as a cue of potential danger triggering aggressive behavior. In these cases, students may impulsively get out of their seats, challenge or distract another student, or show some other form of physical aggression (hyperarousal). Some students will go back and forth between constrictive and hyperaroused behavior (Herman, 1992).

By connecting with compassion, teachers can remove or help their students remove triggers; however, the ability to identify and express emotions may still be lacking. Asked what they are feeling, students' response may be "I don't know." Others will be able to identify that they are angry, but unable to identify the feeling underlying that anger (e.g. fear, confusion, rejection). These students lack a vocabulary of feelings, and the ability to use that vocabulary to learn how to modulate their responses.

Content and Strategies

The Vocabulary of Feelings

With training, most people become highly competent in using language to describe what they are thinking. Surprisingly, however, when asked to express how we feel, many of us are at a loss for words. That includes most teachers. We are trained to use words to describe levels of thinking, but rarely do we receive training in the levels of feeling. However, we can't address our feelings unless we can identify and name them. Neither can our students. The following table displays categories of affect. Each category has a list of words that may be used to describe: (a) how we feel, (b) what we may be thinking when we feel that way, and (c) how we may act when we are having those feelings. Regularly during our teaching days, we can stop

to reflect on the affective dimensions of our learning and teaching. Practice doing this yourself. Then observe your students' behaviors. How are they acting? From what they say, what are they thinking? What are the underlying feelings? (Craig, 2008)

Categories of Affect

Category	Feeling	Thinking	Acting
Apathy	Overwhelmed, tired, cut off, defeated, despairing, discouraged, disillusioned, futile, and/or resigned.	It doesn't matter. I give up. What's the use? Why bother? It will never work, I can't. It's too hard. No matter what I do, it won't make a difference.	Indecisive, lazy, listless, negative, passive, stuck, careless, disassociated, forgetful, inattentive, and/or unresponsive.
Fear	Unsettled, nervous, startled, frightened, threatened, anxious, caged, skeptical, frantic, confused, distrusting, tense, doubtful, vulnerable, apprehensive, exposed, and/or terrified.	It's not safe. It's so confusing that I just can't move. I don't want anything to change. Disaster is looming and I've got to protect myself. What if I fail? What will they think?	Defensive, disturbed, mistrustful, nervous, timid, agitated, shady, traumatized, scared, irrational, distraught, secretive, and/or self-sabotaging.
Pride	Smug, judgmental, aloof, uncompromising, above it all, righteous, holier-than-thou, cool, condescending, and/or vain.	I knew that. I'm in a better place than you. I'm smarter than everyone else. It's your fault, not mine. I would never associate with those kinds of people. I'm not like them. I know this already. I'm better.	Dogmatic, aloof, boastful, sanctimonious, hypocritical, closed, stoic, false humility, patronizing, putting others down, and/or distant.
Anger	Frustrated, huffy, ticked-off, vengeful, perturbed, irritated, agitated, disturbed, sizzling, violent, upset, exasperated, livid, resentful, jealous, hateful, seething, infuriated, beside oneself, full of rage, hateful, and/or mad.	I'll get them. I'm not going to do what they want. Not a chance! Now you'll pay for that. I'll get even. Drop dead! Who do you think you are? I won't be pushed around like that!	abusive, sarcastic, resistant, belligerent, blinded, pushy, destructive, aggressive, ferocious, fierce, inflexible, malevolent, merciless, nasty, offensive, stubborn, and/or passive aggressive.
Tranquility	Serene, free, fulfilled, full of awe, complete, centered, aware, quiet, and/or peaceful.	This is just perfect. I am just fine with what is happening now. Everything is unfolding as it should. I'm enjoying this!	Balanced, centered, serene, connected, composed, quiet, and/or whole.

* Adapted from Wolpov & Tonjes, 2006, p. 121, as cited in Wolpov et al., 2011, p. 97

Practice Using the Vocabulary of Feelings

Once you are attuned to your feelings and those of your students, model what

you are learning. For example, when reading a story out loud to elementary students, pause and ask: How do you think this character feels? What do you think she is thinking? How are her feelings affecting how she acts (Craig, 2008)?

Using Analogies to Describe Emotions and Triggers

Metaphor, simile, and analogy are strong tools to teach any language. This can be especially true with the language of emotions. Are you as happy as a kid in a candy store with a pocket full of money? Are you as angry as an exploding volcano? Does arguing with your aunt feel as if you are wrestling with a pig in the mud? Does trying to get your father to stop drinking feel like you are spinning your wheels and burning the clutch?

When talking with a student about triggers, teachers can draw analogies to alarm systems (Kinniburgh et al., 2005). For example, you may say the following *“where there is smoke, there can be fire. A smoke alarm rings because there are leaping flames. You will recognize the danger and your body will call for lots of energy. You have good reason to get out fast! The ringing alarm triggers your brain to tell your body to release a bunch of chemicals. They are like super fuel for a car. Have you ever lived somewhere where the smoke alarm goes off too easily? You are making toast and a tiny bit of smoke sets off the alarm. There was hardly any smoke at all and the toast has already popped up. Nonetheless, the alarm rings so loud, you would think there is a big fire. It rings loud enough to wake up your entire neighborhood! Sometimes, our brain gets triggered to set off emergency signals to our body too fast. There can also be false alarms. This is when there is no smoke at all. We see, hear, or feel something that reminds us of bad things that used to happen. Our brain sends signals to us to get ready to run or fight. We get fuel we don't need. This would be helpful if there was a real danger, but what if there isn't one? What if this is a false alarm? Acting like there is a fire when there isn't one can get us in*

trouble. If we know what set the alarm off, we can do something about it. We can help ourselves learn not to get all geared up to run or fight.”

Teaching Affect Modulation

The ultimate goal is to help children learn to maintain optimal levels of arousal. We can think of feelings triggered by stimuli as if they could be controlled by a volume switch. When triggered, sound comes on. If the music is too loud, we will want to turn it down. If it is too soft, we want to turn it up. We can control the volume by moving the switch.

In the first domain, we helped students learn to recognize they have been triggered. The sound was on. Now we can help them learn to control the switch. First, we need to help them understand that the switch can be clicked up and down. Feelings come in all sizes. Learning subtle shifts in emotion is difficult for us all.

There are several activities that can help students build an understanding of degrees of feeling (Kinniburgh et al., 2005). We can draw control knobs with numbers from 1-10 and ask “How upset are you?”. We can also draw a thermometer with temperatures (e.g., “You say you were red hot! How hot would that be on this thermometer?” Then, two weeks later, that person has apologized to you. You might ask again, “How angry are you now?”). The same process can be applied to pie graphs or poker chips.

Calming the Body and Mind

Applying the techniques of progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) we learn to relax our body. This physical relaxation can also result in emotional calm. The following exercise can be performed at the beginning of a class (Kinniburgh et al., 2005).

First, encourage all to turn off distracting electronic devices. Sit with your spine as straight as possible. Place feet flat on the floor. Arms and legs should not be

crossed. For a deeper relaxation, children may close their eyes.

The two steps are:

1. Have students isolate one muscle group, creating tension for 8 to 10 seconds.

2. Have students let the muscle relax and let tension go. Students then are encouraged to notice how the tension flows away as the muscles relax.

To lead PMR a teacher leads students through steps 1 and 2, as progressing through the following muscle groups and encourage them to breathe slowly: Relax your feet, relax your feet and legs, relax your hands, relax your hands and arms, relax your abdomen, relax your chest, relax your neck and shoulders, relax your face.

When you are finished, have students breathe in and out slowly for a few seconds. Encourage those with eyes shut to open them after a count of ten.

You may want to use a feeling thermometer or pie graph (see above) to ask students if there are any changes in how they feel.

Calming the Mind and Body: Games for Young Children

PMR can be modified for younger children. The following games, suggested by Kinniburgh et al. (2005), may be applied in the middle of a class or in between the classroom activities:

Stuffed Animal Breathing: Children lie on the floor with a small stuffed animal on their stomachs. Teach the student to get the animal to rise and fall with each breath. *Robot/Rag Doll:* Children walk stiffly like a robot, then melt like a rag doll.

Spaghetti: Children move arms or legs like uncooked spaghetti, then like cooked spaghetti.

Bridges: Children raise and lower arms as in the game London Bridges breathing in as arms go up, and out as arms go down.

Giraffe/Turtle: Children pretend to be giraffes reaching for leaves on the

highest branch of a tree, then pretend they are turtles pulling their arms, legs and heads into their shells.

Caterpillar/Butterfly: Children move like a caterpillar still in the cocoon, then spread their wings to fly.

Doorway stretch: Then push with both arms against a doorframe. Hold for a count of ten. Then release. Notice the difference between how muscles feel during pushing and releasing.

Empathy/Listening Skills

Recognizing feelings and degrees of feeling can be hard. Sometimes it is easier to see emotions in others than in ourselves. The following exercise, developed by Kinniburgh et al. (2005), helps learners recognize emotions. The object is to listen carefully enough to what someone is saying that you can discern degrees of feeling.

Provide all students with a copy of the following page. Then divide them into groups of three or four. One student in each group is asked to be the teller. The other students will be listeners. Read the directions to the teller on the top of that page. Read the directions to the listeners in the middle of that same page. Next, read and discuss the five characteristics of a good listener at the bottom of the page. Finally, hand out copies of the following pages showing the emotions of happy, sad, angry, afraid, and confused.

Discuss or model an example of what the teller might tell. The teller describes a time when he or she felt happy, angry, sad or confused. The teller tells the story making sure to describe his or her feelings at the time. Then the teller tells how she or he feels about that event now. Once again, the teller describes his or her feelings, but this time, it should be about now.

While the tellers tell, listeners practice the five characteristics of a good listener. When done, listeners identify emotions they heard expressed. They also talk

about the degree of the emotions they think they heard in the two versions of the story. For example, did the teller sound angry? Sad? Happy? If so, did the amount of anger change during the story? Did the teller sound angrier at the beginning or end of the story?

Listening with Empathy (an exercise)

Teller:

1. Tell of an event from the past that invited you to feel happy, angry, sad, scared or confused. What happened? How did you feel at the time? Most importantly, give the listener details about your feelings.

2. Tell how you feel about this event now. Describe how the intensity of your feelings changed. How so? By how much? (Please don't use the words strong, medium or mild. Let the listener figure that out.)

Listener:

1. Practice the five characteristics of being a good listener.
2. Listen to hear which emotion (or emotions) are being described.
3. When the teller is done, use words from the chart to describe the intensity of emotions you heard. How intense were the teller's emotions when the event first happened? What are they like now?

Five Characteristics of a Good Listener

1. Acknowledge that you are listening (e.g., I hear you, [name]).
2. Show empathy (e.g., nod head, smile).
3. Face the person speaking and maintain good eye contact.
4. Maintain open, available posture.
5. Acknowledge what you heard and/or ask clarifying questions (e.g. I heard you say that ... By that do you mean ...?)

It is worth noting that this exercise can be used as a part of curriculum in any

classroom as a means of fostering empathy in learners and teaching them vocabulary to help them express their feelings and emotions.

Happy



pleased
pleasant
satisfied
content
charmed
calm
light
chill
peaceful



appreciative
gratified
cheerful
jovial
jolly
playful
upbeat
buoyant
glad



thrilled
delighted
joyful
fulfilled
fantastic
excited
gleeful
beaming
wonderful



ecstatic
elated
euphoric
exhilarated
overjoyed
blissful

Sad



down
glum
blue
low
discontented
disgruntled
dissatisfied



sorrowful
bummed out
discouraged
down in the dumps
somber
disappointed
gloomy



heavy-hearted
depressed
dejected
forlorn
mournful
lonely
melancholy
defeated
morose



grief-stricken
heartbroken
crushed
miserable
wretched
despairing
inconsolable

Angry



ticked off
annoyed
upset
displeased
grouchy
crabby
uptight
huffy



irritated
disturbed
aggravated
irritable
cross
a little frustrated
sullen



mad
bitter
resentful
frustrated
incensed
irate
storming



seething
infuriated
livid
beside myself
raging
exasperated
furious
fuming
very frustrated
hateful

Afraid



uneasy
nervous
cautious
unsettled
ill at ease
a little shy



startled
concerned
worried
fretful
apprehensive
bothered
shy



alarmed
anxious
frightened
fearful
scared
spooked
intimidated



terrified
aghast
petrified
quaking
dreading
horror-stricken

Confused



unclear
undecided
ambivalent
hesitant



unsure
puzzled
uncertain
in doubt
suspicious



mixed up
stumped
mystified
vexed
perplexed
frustrated
flustered
muddled
befuddled



overwhelmed
baffled
bewildered
snowed under
dazed
confounded

*Illustrations are adapted from Wolpov et al., (2011)

Domain Three: Competencies of Personal Agency, Social Skills, and Academic Skills

Living through traumatic events disrupts the normal development of children. The overall objective of this domain is to build (or rebuild) the normal competencies that trauma has derailed. These include personal agency, social skills, and academics. The development of executive functions is essential to these competencies.

Personal agency is the term used to describe the belief that one can make things happen. A child with personal agency believes that she or he can originate and direct actions. They believe they can influence others in order to accomplish goals. Children affected by traumatic events rarely develop a sense of personal agency. By definition, traumatic events overpower their victims. In order to survive, children learn to be either overly passive or overly aggressive. Therefore, the key to thriving in the classroom will be to help the student learn to be assertive (Wolpov et al., 2011).

Social skills are needed for students to interact with others in acceptable ways. The

social skills that enabled a student to survive in an abusive home are most often not the same social skills needed to thrive in a classroom. When children have mastered the content and skills of this domain they know how to join in small group work, get the attention of an adult in an appropriate way, or argue constructively with a peer (Wolpov et al., 2011).

Academic skills are cognitive skills needed for school success. We know that childhood trauma can interfere with the normal development of the skills needed to succeed in school. These include skills necessary to read, write, listen, speak, compute, and solve problems. In homes and communities where complex traumatic events are present, behavior is often extremely illogical and disorganized. This is distracting, of course, and over time there are consequences to children's brain development. But there is more. When cause and effect are not demonstrated in children's homes, they will not be able to learn them by themselves. Where are they to get the schemata of sequential logic required to make sense of text? Consequently, children affected by traumatic events can have trouble analyzing ideas, organizing narrative material, or seeing cause-and-effect relationships (van der Kolk, 2005 as cited in Wolpov et al., 2011).

Executive functions are those skills that enable a person to behave in goal-directed ways. These include the ability to set goals, anticipate consequences, make decisions, evaluate outcomes, and generate alternatives. They are the "captain of the cognitive ship" (Kinniburgh et al., 2005) Children who experience chronic trauma lag behind their peers in development of age-appropriate executive function skills.

Students who will benefit from instruction in the domain often appear "spacey" or withdrawn. They rarely raise their hands. When they want the teacher's attention, they tend to get it in a disruptive fashion. Rarely can they stay in their assigned seats or focused on their assignments. When asked why they haven't been

doing their work they may have multiple excuses, or say that they “don’t give a damn.” When pushed too hard, these students burst into volatile language and/or behave erratically. In class, they often engage in the teasing of others.

When walking down the hall, these students often make inappropriate comments to others or touch others in ways that make them uncomfortable. When challenged about their behavior, they often claim it was not their fault. Often, they truly don’t understand why others are angry or frustrated with them. They appear to lack problem solving skills, choosing instead to assert that they “had no choice.”

One-on-one overtures of tutoring or support are often greeted with an “I can’t do it” attitude. Indeed, their low academic skills are matched with low self-esteem. They seem to have difficulty extracting key ideas in lengthy narratives. Their work is disorganized, or rigidly organized.

Content and Strategies

Assertiveness Skills

Assertiveness is standing up for your rights, needs and desires in ways that are respectful of yourself and others. Basically, it is asking for and advocating for oneself in a civil manner. Assertiveness can lead to feelings of confidence, higher self-esteem, and personal agency. However, the lives of students with traumatic experiences include stories of how their basic rights, needs and desires have been neglected, or worse yet, violently abused.

Teachers can be role models for their students by demonstrating assertiveness skills in their work with students in the classroom. Two techniques for teaching assertive talk are Giraffe Talk and DEAR MAN.

Giraffe Talk: Non-Violent Communication

“Giraffe Talk” was developed by Marshall Rosenberg in 1990 (as cited in Wolpov et al., 2011). This strategy earned its name because asserting ourselves non-

violently requires us to stick our necks out. Others like to point out that the giraffe has the largest heart of land-animals.

There are four parts to a Giraffe Talk request:

1. *When I observe. . .*

Describe events without using evaluative judgments, blaming, labeling, or name calling. Note that only “I” statements are used. For example, never say “You accused me of stealing that pencil.” Instead say “When I observed you saying that I had stolen something . . .”

2. *I feel . . .*

Name the feelings that were stirred up within you. (The language of feeling chart may be helpful here.) Was it fear, sadness, anger, hurt, excitement... Once again, no blaming. You may say “I felt angry and hurt.” Don’t say “You made me feel angry and disrespected.” (When we say that someone “makes” us feel angry we are blaming them. Disrespected is not a feeling. It is a judgment.)

3. *Because I imagine. . .*

A statement of what I think the other person may be thinking (or believe) about me. For example, “Because I imagine that you don’t trust me, and you think I am a thief.”

4. *I want . . . (or) Would you please . . .*

A request for a concrete, specific action that the other person can do to help you meet your needs. This request needs to be positively framed and should not be a demand, threat, or guilt-shaming manipulation. The listener to your giraffe talk has the right to say “no.” If you don’t get your needs met, move on. For example, “Would you be willing to get my side of the story by talking to me privately?”

The following are examples of violent (aggressive) talk, in the left column,

paired with contrasting examples of giraffe talk in the right column.

When I observe. . .

Violent talk	Giraffe talk
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -You “dissed” me. - You flunked me. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When I observed you saying that I was the one who broke the science lab rule. . . - When I saw that I received an “O” on my test for using pen instead of pencil.

I feel...

Violent talk	Giraffe talk
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You must hate my guts! - You made me feel “pissed-off.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I feel hurt and ashamed. - I felt sad and angry

Because I imagine...

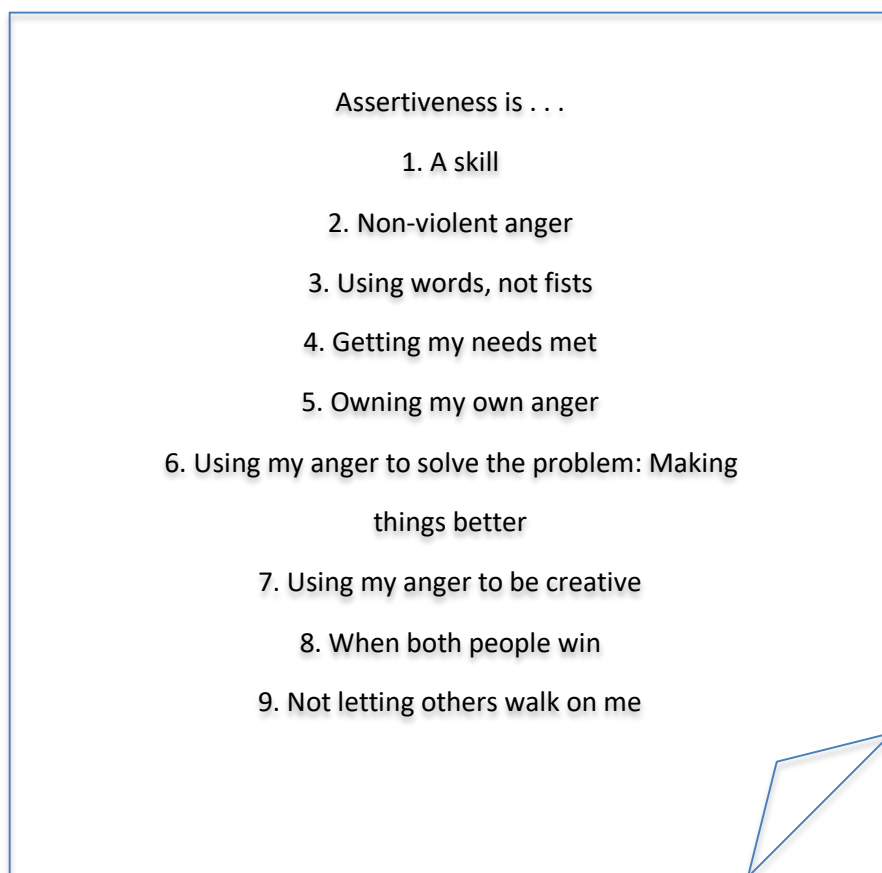
Violent talk	Giraffe talk
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You are so mean to me! - You keep doing things like that over and over again 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Because I imagine that you haven’t noticed how hard I have been trying to improve. - Because I imagine that you must think that I am not very bright and I don’t study.

Would you...

Violent talk	Giraffe talk

<p>-Stop yelling at me or I'll do something we will both regret!</p> <p>-I guess I'm just going to have to flunk this class. It won't be the first time I failed English</p>	<p>-When you see me doing something you think I shouldn't, would you talk to me about it privately and in a softer tone of voice?</p> <p>-Would you grade my paper so that I at least know that you know that I am learning something in your class.</p>
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Teachers may also hang the following poster on the wall in the classroom reminding children of what assertiveness is.



*This poster was developed by Dr. Ken Fox at Mount Vernon High School (Wolpov et al., 2011)

The strategy **DEAR MAN** is an acronym for Describe, Express, Assert, Reinforce, stay Mindful, Appear confident, Negotiate. This technique does not require that each of the steps be followed. Sometimes a step is not necessary (Linehan, 1993,

pp. 79-81).

DEAR MAN may be used when:

A) Asking for things, making requests, initiating discussions.

B) Saying “no,” resisting pressure, maintaining a position or point of view.

Describe the situation. Tell the person exactly what you are reacting to. No judgmental statements. Stick to the facts. (e.g., I keep hearing you ask me for stuff. Last week I heard you ask for my pen and after you finished with it I didn’t get it back. This week you asked to copy my homework.)

Express your feelings or opinions. Describe how you feel or what you believe about the situation. Don’t expect the other person to read your mind to know how you feel. (e.g., I like being helpful because I like you. However, I can’t keep giving away my stuff. Besides, I could get in trouble for letting you copy my homework.)

Assert wishes. Ask for what you want. Don’t expect people to know what you want without telling them. If the answer is “no” say so. Be direct. Don’t “beat around the bush.” (e.g., I will lend you a pen, but I want you to return it at the end of the class. And no, you cannot copy my homework.)

Reinforce or reward the person ahead of time by telling them the positive consequences. (e.g., I sure will feel better about lending you things when you return my pen. And thank you for understanding why I won’t let you copy my homework.)

(stay) Mindful: Maintain your position. Don’t be distracted. Play a broken record - keep asking for what you need, or saying no, over and over again. (If the other person keeps asking to copy your homework, repeat what you have said: “I will lend you a pen but I want you to return it at the end of the class. And no, you cannot copy my homework.”) If the other person tries to change the subject, keep repeating. If they threaten or attack, ask a teacher for help.

Appear confident: If you want the other to believe that you are serious you

must maintain a tone of voice that is convincing. Make eye contact when you say “no.”

Negotiate: Turn the table and ask the other what they would suggest you do. Your answer can still be no, but you can offer an alternative solution. (e.g., “I like you but I want my pen back and I don’t want to let you copy my homework. How about I help you do tomorrow’s homework during study hall this afternoon. That way you will get the work done and you will have more reason to remember to return my pen.”)

Worry Lock-Box is a good way of releasing tension, worrying thoughts on paper, training in thinking critically and analyzing situations, and also possibly coming up with solutions. This strategy is easy to use because it is private and takes the form of a game, since they lock their journal into the box, and by doing so, keeping their thoughts and ideas private (Kinniburgh et al., 2005).

Here is the instruction on how to use it:

1. In the left column describe the event(s) about which you are worried. Go into as much detail as you can. Don’t be afraid to fill the box.

2. In the middle column write down the feelings you experience when you reflect on that event. Do you feel threatened, insecure, confused, etc. The language of feelings activity from earlier in this chapter might be helpful here.

3. In the right column write down anything you might be able to do about this tomorrow.

4. Place your journal in a box. Lock it. Don’t unlock it until the next morning. (The imaginary box provided next may be used in lieu of a real box.

Event(s)	Feeling(s)	What can be done tomorrow



Dear teacher,

It is my hope that the strategies provided in this guide will be successful in your classroom.

Please, always remember that you cannot teach the mind until you reach the heart.



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