
Playing to Reduce Trauma-Related Stress and Support Problem Solving

INSTRUCTIONS

This handout was designed for use with the video “Play in Early Childhood: The Role of Play in Any Setting.” The questions and activities in this handout could be used in a work session (e.g., professional learning community, professional development session), for individual coaching, or for self-reflection.

Goals

- ◆ Learn about play as a means to reduce trauma-related stress and support problem-solving skills.
- ◆ Recognize educators’ role in scaffolding play for young children exposed to trauma.

Activity

- ◆ Watch the video.
- ◆ After watching the video, use the questions below to guide your reflection on why play can serve to reduce trauma-related stress and support problem solving.
- ◆ Implement your plan and adjust as needed to support children’s problem-solving skills.

Play can be a doorway to bringing the children who are traumatized into having that sense of security.

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ What caught your attention from the video? What made that fact, idea, or example meaningful to you?

- ◆ In the video, Laura Huerta Migus says, “Play won’t fix everything, but we definitely embrace play [...] as a therapeutic intervention to support not just surviving but thriving through incredibly stressful experiences and environments.”
 - In what ways do you think play helps children exposed to trauma? In what ways do you think play helps them thrive?
 - In what ways do you think can play be challenging for young children exposed to trauma?

- ◆ Appreciating and reflecting on what you do well is an effective way to improve the quality of your teaching. The video highlights that adults can support children’s use and development of core life skills, including problem solving, through play.
 - Recall a specific time when you guided a child or group of children through problem solving in the context of play. What was the problem?
 - What did you do that guided the child or group of children to find and accept a solution (e.g., label the problem, identify emotions, provide visuals, offer solutions, etc.)? Identify and write down specific practices or steps.
 - What did you learn about supporting problem-solving skills through play by doing this exercise?

- ◆ List all children in your classroom that you know (or suspect) may be experiencing some type of trauma or adversity.
 - Intentionally plan opportunities to engage in play with them or to observe them while playing alone or near others or with others, according to their needs.
 - Consider reaching out to families to learn more about what their child likes playing with at home. Pay attention to specific items or scenarios that are personally and/or culturally relevant to the child.
 - For each child, use the practices or steps that you identified in the prior question to brainstorm how you would support their problem-solving skills during play.
 - Follow through this plan for a week and reflect on your experience. What did you learn from these children by playing with them or observing them play? What went well in terms of supporting their problem-solving skills? What could you improve next time?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about supporting children exposed to trauma:

- ◆ **Source:** National Public Radio (NPR)
- ◆ **Article:** “5 Proven Benefits of Play”
- ◆ **Link:** <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2018/08/31/642567651/5-proven-benefits-of-play>
- ◆ **Description:** This article talks about five benefits of play, including reducing stress.

- ◆ **Source:** National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)
- ◆ **Resource:** “Supporting Students Experiencing Childhood Trauma: Tips for Parents and Educators”
- ◆ **Link:** <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/mental-health-resources/trauma/supporting-students-experiencing-childhood-trauma-tips-for-parents-and-educators>
- ◆ **Description:** This resource lays out recommendations for teachers to support children exposed to trauma in the classroom by helping reestablish their security and stability. The resource also identifies problem-solving skills as one resiliency factor that help children cope with traumatic events.