
Recognize and Validate Trauma-Related Emotions

INSTRUCTIONS

This handout was designed for use with The National Child Traumatic Stress Network's tip sheet "Helping Children with Traumatic Separation or Traumatic Grief Related To COVID-19." 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

- ◆ Identify a set of trauma-related emotions (e.g., sad, angry, hurt, lonely) that young children in your classroom may be experiencing during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ◆ Explore how to support children in your classroom by validating trauma-related emotions and helping children to recognize them.

Activity

- ◆ Read the tip sheet. This tip sheet was developed by experts from The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) and is geared towards adults working with children who may be experiencing traumatic separation or grief.
- ◆ After reading the tip sheet, use the questions below to guide your reflection. Consider ways that you can help your children to recognize and describe their trauma-related emotions.

"Especially in stressful times, [...] all children benefit from caregivers listening to and validating their different feelings."

National Child Traumatic Stress Network

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ What caught your attention from the tip sheet? What made the described situation, tip, or example meaningful to you?

- ◆ The first scenario says that children going through these traumatic situations may be experiencing a lot of emotions but may not recognize them. This is especially true for very young children, who do not yet have the skills to understand and communicate what they are feeling and why.
 - What strategies do you already use to learn more about children’s experiences outside of the classroom?
 - How do you connect with families of young children who are experiencing or have experienced trauma in their home or community?

- ◆ The tip sheet describes 12 experiences of separation and/or grief that children may be going through.
 1. Think about your prior experience working with children who were going through these types of situations. In the past, what have been some effective supports for children?
 2. Identify all children in your classroom who may have had one of these situations. Look at the tip sheet for specific suggestions on how you can support such children who are going through these situations. Consider how you might need to modify the suggestions to support very young children or children with disabilities.
 3. Make a concrete plan for how/when to try these strategies in your classroom.

- ◆ Implement this plan and reflect on your experience. How did the children that you identified react to these strategies? What did you do or say that helped children to recognize and describe their emotions?

- ◆ In the tip sheet, the “You Can Help When You” section identifies concrete things you can modify to support very young children. For example, you can validate children’s experiences and help their emotional expression. Some other examples include:
 - Making a card for a sick loved one
 - Find an object or picture that connects children to their loved ones
 - Participate in relaxing activities to calm worries
 1. Identify one scenario relevant to the children you work with and note its related strategies.
 2. How can these strategies be beneficial for the emotional expression of children going through traumatic grief or separation?
 3. In what ways do you think these strategies could benefit the emotional expression of *all* children in your classroom?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about working with children experiencing trauma and help them learn how to recognize and describe their emotions:

- ◆ **Source:** National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI)
 - ◆ **Self-Assessment:** Checklist of Early Childhood Practices that Support Social Emotional Development and Trauma-Informed Care
 - ◆ **Link:** <https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Informed-Care-Checklist.pdf>
 - ◆ **Description:** In page 4 of this self-assessment (i.e., “Help children regulate their emotions and express their feelings appropriately”), you can evaluate yourself in a series of evidence-based practices to support children to recognize and describe their emotions. Reflect on whether you consistently implement each practice in this checklist. This will help guide your teaching practice to support the social-emotional development of young children who have experienced trauma.
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- ◆ **Source:** Center for Disease and Control and Prevention (CDC)
 - ◆ **Blog:** Helping Children with Disabilities Cope with Disaster and Traumatic Events
 - ◆ **Link:** <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandsafety/trauma.html>
 - ◆ **Description:** In this blog by CDC, you will learn what to do to support children with disabilities before, during, and after a traumatic event. Being attuned to children’s emotional cues, providing space to talk about children’s experiences, and maintaining routines as much as possible are some of the recommendations provided.