
Creating A Trauma-Informed Learning Environment to Promote Active Exploration

INSTRUCTIONS

This handout was designed for use with the article, “Creating a Trauma-Informed Learning Environment,” from WestEd. 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

- ◆ Understand why a trauma-informed learning environment is important to support young children’s active exploration.
- ◆ Identify the components of a trauma-informed learning environment that promotes active exploration.
- ◆ Create an action plan to develop a safe environment for children to actively explore.

Activity

- ◆ Read the article.
- ◆ After reading, use the questions below to guide your development of an action plan.
- ◆ Implement your plan and adjust as needed to support active exploration.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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

- ◆ Active exploration involves children using their curiosity about the world around them to investigate their environment. The article stated that, “many students who have experienced trauma view the world as a perilous place and are prone to fear.”
 - Why might children who have experienced trauma need additional support to engage in active exploration?
 - What challenges may arise for children as they approach experiences in the learning environment? What behaviors might you observe (e.g., fight, flight, or freeze responses)?
 - How might a trauma-informed learning environment be a supportive context for children who have experienced trauma to engage in active exploration?

- ◆ A trauma-informed learning environment can consist of many supports. However, “research consistently shows that the most important intervention for children affected by trauma is a safe, caring, and consistent adult who can buffer their experience of stress... to support healing and resilience.”
 - Consider the roles that educators take in creating a safe and caring environment for active exploration.
 - What are the qualities of a trauma-informed educator?
 - What strategies may a trauma-informed educator use to develop a safe learning environment for children? How might they create a secure attachment to children?

- ◆ Reflect upon your current practices and your learning environment.
 - What strategies do you have in place to provide a safe and caring environment for children who have experienced trauma?
 - How do you support children to feel safe to actively explore their environment? What strategies do you use to meet children’s individual needs as they explore?
 - What challenges have you come across in creating a supportive environment? What supports might you need to overcome these challenges?

- ◆ Create an action plan to develop a safe and supportive environment for active exploration for the children in your care who have experienced trauma. Consider using the additional resources below to support your development of an action plan.
 - Consider how you will:
 - Build a secure attachment to promote resilience and safety during exploration.
 - Create a safe and predictable environment for children to explore.
 - Identify fight, flight, or freeze responses and intervene as appropriate.
 - Use positive behavior supports and make referrals when appropriate.
 - Carefully monitor children’s progress and modify your plan as needed.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about supporting young children's active exploration:

- ◆ **Source:** Co-Creating Well-Being: Healthy Foundation for Western & Central NY
 - ◆ **Article and Videos:** Creating Safe Spaces for Young Children
 - ◆ **Link:** <https://www.cocreatingwellbeing.com/module/safespaces>
 - ◆ **Description:** This website offers suggestions for creating a safe and trauma-informed learning environment for young children. It provides video examples and suggestions for providing individualized support for children who have experienced trauma.
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- ◆ **Source:** NAEYC
 - ◆ **Article:** Creating a Trauma-Sensitive Classroom
 - ◆ **Link:** <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/may2015/trauma-sensitive-classrooms>
 - ◆ **Description:** This resource from NAEYC provides strategies for developing a trauma-sensitive learning environment. The strategies provided offer support for children's developing active exploration skills.