

# Providing Trauma-Informed Care with a Disability Lens: Considering Trauma in IEPs

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# Agenda



- Quick Review of Trauma
- Reciprocal Relationship: Disability and Trauma
- Trauma-Informed Practices
- Trauma-Informed IEPs

# Trauma Definition



The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) definition:

*an **event**, series of events, or set of circumstances that is **experienced** by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening\* and that has lasting adverse **effects** on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being*

\*Real or perceived



# The Impacts/Manifestations of Trauma

Emotional/ Relational	Cognitive	Behavioral
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Relationship problems</li><li>-Inability to trust adults</li><li>-Anxiety/depression</li><li>-Shame/guilt</li><li>-Feeling a lack of control</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Lower IQs</li><li>-Deficits in verbal skills and math abilities</li><li>-Language deficits</li><li>-Decreased executive functioning</li><li>-Inability to take another's perspective</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Acting out</li><li>-Defiance/ignoring</li><li>-Dysregulation</li><li>-Hyperactivity</li><li>-Aggression</li><li>-Lack of impulse control</li><li>-Shutting down</li><li>-Over-sensitivity</li></ul>

# Trauma Manifestations and Characteristics of Disabilities



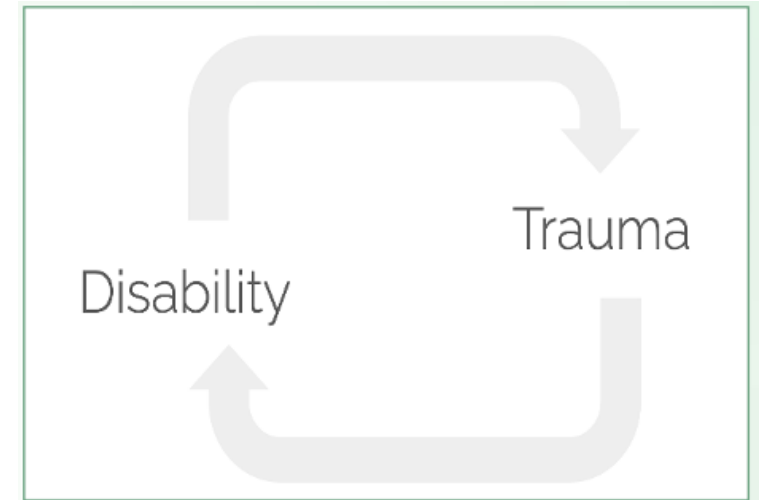
## Shared Characteristics: Trauma Manifestations and Characteristics of Disabilities

Specific Learning Disability (SLD)	Challenges with math, language, verbal ability (comprehension, vocabulary), deficits in executive functioning
Autism Spectrum Disorder	Deficits in executive functioning, difficulty with communication and relationships, oversensitivity to sound or light, behavior challenges
Emotional and Behavioral Disorder	Acting out, defiance, aggression, withdrawing, oversensitivity, anxiety, depression, difficulty with relationships/trust
Other Health Impairment (e.g., ADHD)	Difficulty self-regulating, difficulty focusing, hyper-focusing
Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities	Difficulty attending to tasks; challenges with reading, math, and memory tasks; vocabulary and language delays

# The Reciprocal Relationship



- Children with disabilities are 3.4 times more likely to experience trauma than their non-disabled peers (Sullivan & Knutson, 2000)
- Developmental delays and disabilities may be a risk factor for maltreatment, and a consequence of maltreatment (Erbrederis Meyer et al., 2018)
- The emotional, behavioral, and cognitive challenges caused by trauma sometimes lead to over-identification for special education services.



# Paradigm Shift



## NOT Trauma-Informed

What's wrong with this child?

This child is seeking attention.

This child won't do this.

This child needs a time-out after misbehaving.

I need to control and fix this child's behavior.



## Trauma-Informed

What happened to this child?

This child needs attention to connect.

This child can't do this because they are stressed.

This child needs connection and logical consequences after misbehaving.

I need to understand this child's behavior.

# Trauma-Informed Practices



Three categories across the literature:

- Establish safe, predictable learning environments.
- Build strong teacher-student relationships.
- Teach and practice self-regulation.



# Categories of Trauma-Informed Practices



Safe, Predictable  
Learning  
Environments



- Identity, physical, and emotional safety
- Consistent expectations equitably applied
- Avoid surprises!

Positive Teacher-  
Student  
Relationships



- Know the students
- Listen to students
- Respond with empathy
- Lots of small interactions

Teaching and  
Practicing Self  
Regulation Skills



- Recognize and verbally express emotions
- Teach them about bodies and brains
- Teach and **model** self-regulation skills

## Safe, Predictable Learning Environments

- Organized classroom
- Routines and procedures
- Involve students in developing class expectations
- Schedules displayed
- Transitions supported
- Warnings before changes
- Students reflected in curriculum and classrooms
- Recognize and avoid triggers

## Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

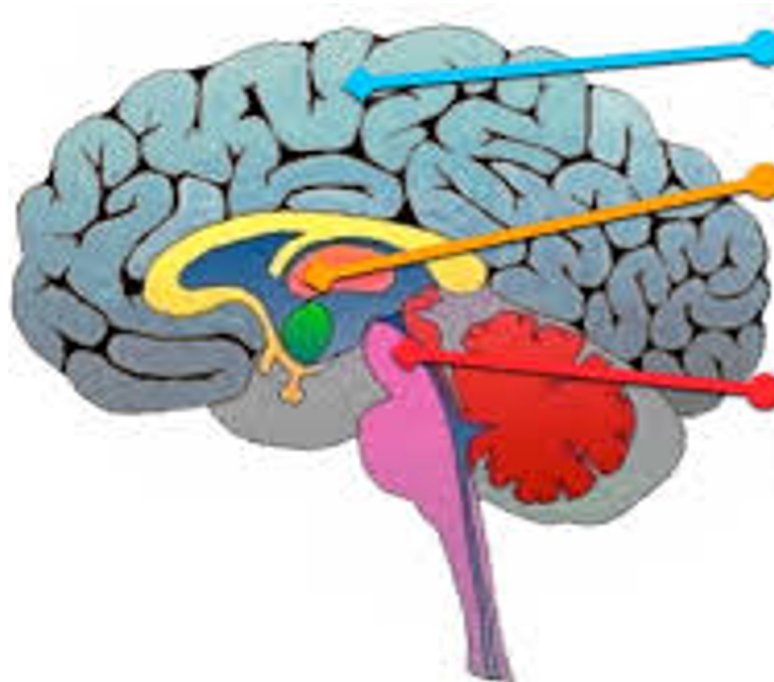
- Call children by name
- Greet them at the door
- 2x10 strategy
- Convey unconditional positive regard
- Insist on a bully-free environment
- Develop a positive-supportive classroom culture
- Validate and respond with empathy

## Self-Regulation Skills



- Brain-breaks (games, call-response, chants)
- Incorporate movement, mindfulness and meditation, muscle relaxation, deep breathing, listening to classroom sounds, visualization.
- Provide time for movement-oxygenate the brain
- Rhythm
- Peace corners, calming corners, designated adult
- Stress balls, fidget spinners, Flexible seating (wobble seats, standing desks, individual spaces)
- KNOW what your student needs (doodlers, pencil-tappers)

# Safety, Relationships, and Self-Regulation



## Neocortex:

Rational or Thinking Brain

## Limbic Brain:

Emotional or Feeling Brain

## Brain Stem

Instinctual or Dinosaur Brain



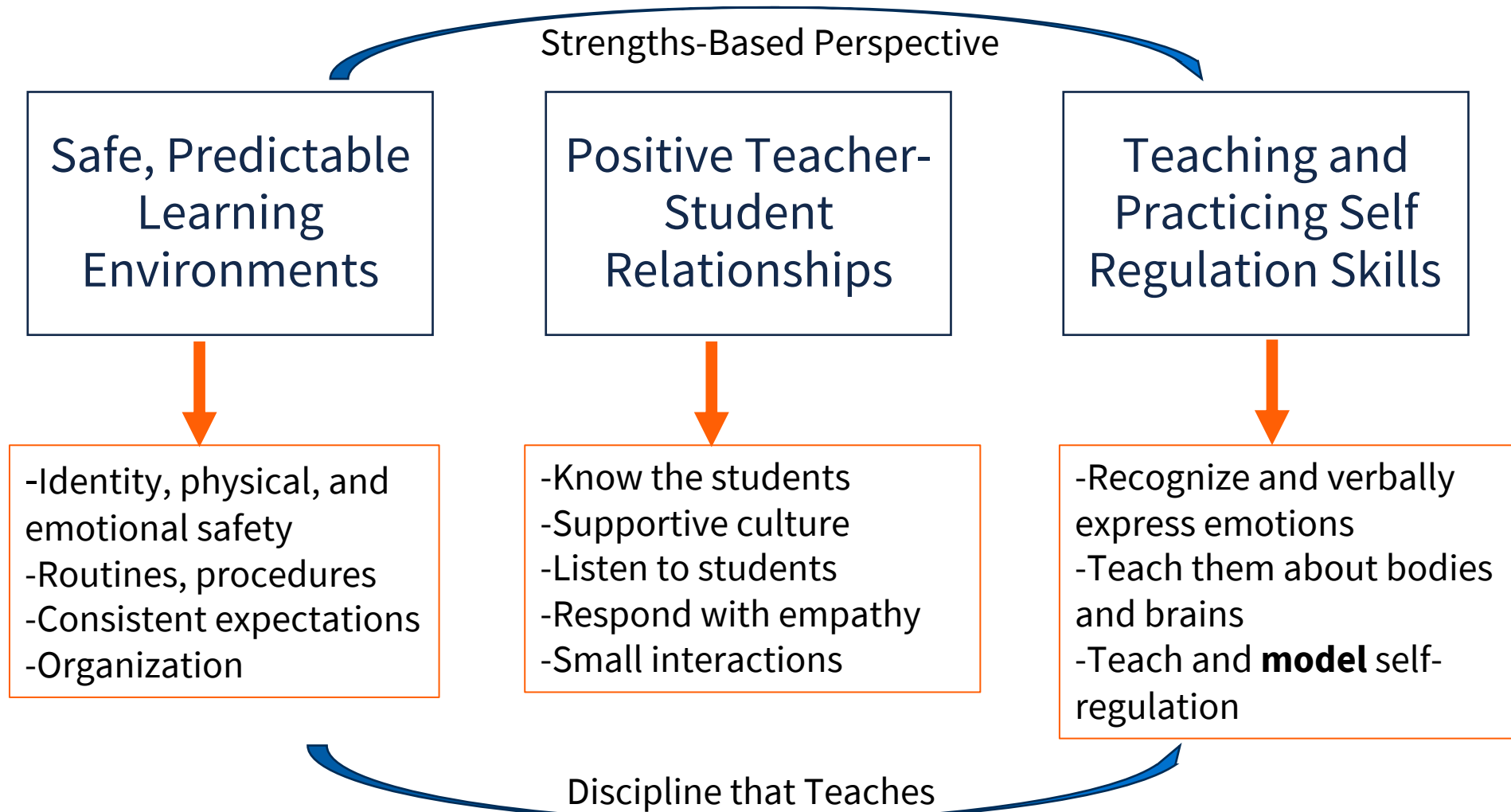


## Think About...

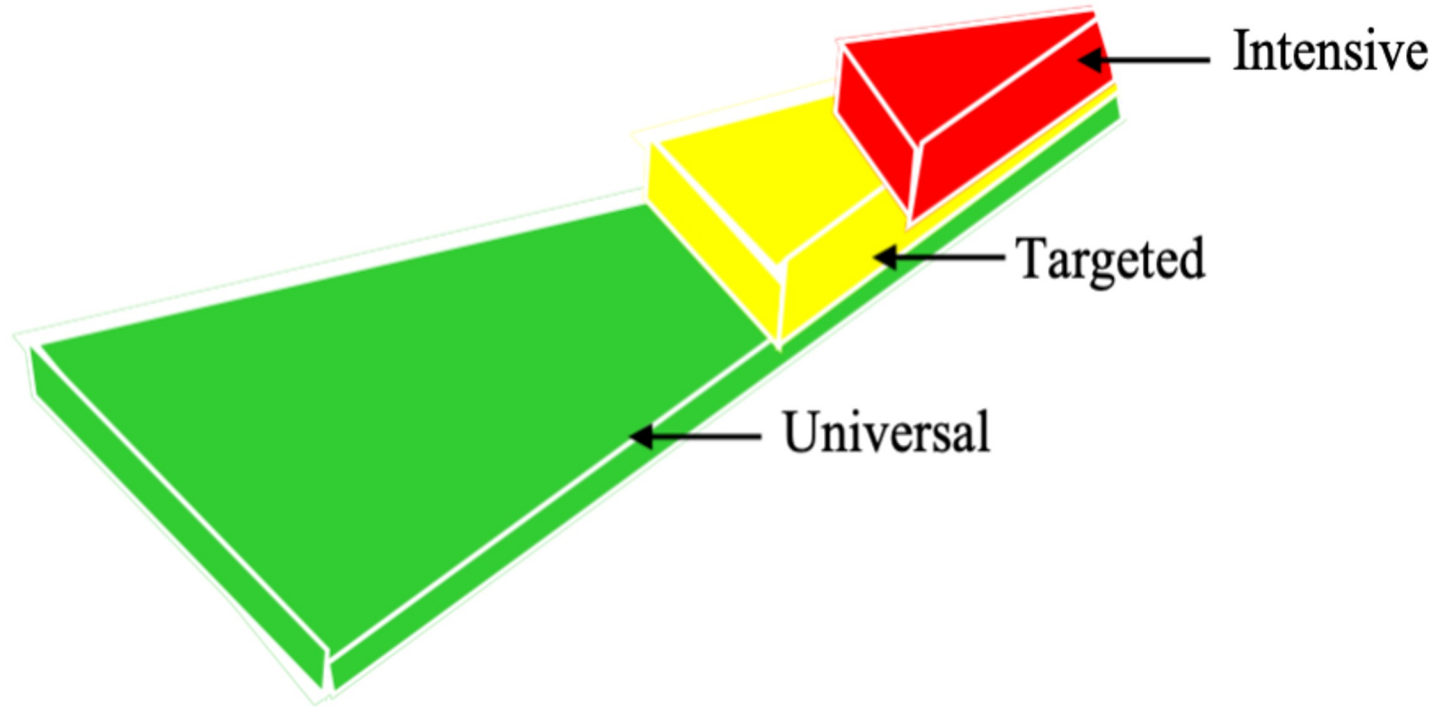


Consider a child with a disability in a general education classroom. What are some possible threats to their feelings of safety?

# Categories of Trauma-Informed Practices



# Universal, Targeted and Intensive Supports





## In Traditional IEPs

- Some stressors that cause behaviors (trauma-responses) are not typically identified and addressed.
- We don't always consider that behaviors may be the result of trauma experience.
- The role of a teacher in behaviors is not commonly considered.
- Goals, objectives, accommodations, and modifications may not reflect a “trauma lens.”



# Traditional vs New Approach to IEPs



Traditional View	New View
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consequence-based</li><li>• Rewards and incentives create motivation</li><li>• External controls (point and star charts, detention, removal of privileges)</li><li>• Time-outs</li><li>• Expectations based on chronological age</li><li>• Behavior management</li><li>• Individual focus</li><li>• Performance/outcome based</li><li>• Intervention</li><li>• Child fit into the environment</li><li>• Behavior is a matter of choice</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Regulatory based</li><li>• Relational influence creates motivation</li><li>• Internal controls (sense of self, sense of accomplishment, self-acceptance, love)</li><li>• Time-ins</li><li>• Expectations build on emotional/social age</li><li>• Stress management</li><li>• Community/family focus</li><li>• Process-based</li><li>• Prevention</li><li>• Environment to fit the child</li><li>• Stress drives behavior</li></ul>

Excerpted from *Help for Billy* by Heather Forbes

# Traditional IEPs: Observations of Student Performance



Description of Behavior	With a Trauma Lens
Jesse's attention-seeking behavior results in frequent disruptions to class activities.	<p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Has Jesse been taught self-regulation skills?</li><li>• When Jesse becomes dysregulated, how does the teacher respond?</li><li>• Is there an environment or demand during which Jesse becomes disruptive?</li><li>• What is Jesse's behavior communicating?</li></ul>

# Traditional IEPs: Observations of Student Performance



Description of Behavior	With a Trauma Lens	Possible Strategies/Solutions
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# Traditional IEPs: Observations of Student Performance



Description of Behavior	With a Trauma Lens	Possible Strategies/Solutions
<p>Nino does not maintain eye contact when speaking with adults or peers.</p>	<p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does Nino feel safe with his teacher and peers?</li><li>• Is the classroom environment safe and accepting for all students?</li><li>• Does Nino have a good relationship with the teacher.</li><li>• Does the teacher respond with empathy when talking with Nino?</li><li>• Are there individuals with whom Nino DOES maintain eye contact?</li><li>• What does Nino's behavior communicate?</li></ul>	

# Traditional IEPs: Observations of Student Performance



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<p>Nino does not maintain eye contact when speaking with adults or peers.</p>	<p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does Nino feel safe with his teacher and peers?</li><li>• Is the classroom environment safe and accepting for all students?</li><li>• Does Nino have a good relationship with the teacher.</li><li>• Does the teacher respond with empathy when talking with Nino?</li><li>• Are there individuals with whom Nino DOES maintain eye contact?</li><li>• What does Nino's behavior communicate?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Work on building the relationship between Nino and his teacher</li><li>• Talk with Nino's classmates to explain that he needs the support of his peers to feel safe in the classroom.</li><li>• Seat Nino with peers with whom he feels safe.</li><li>• Make sure group configurations put Nino with a safe peer.</li><li>• Provide teacher support for Nino while navigating group work.</li></ul>

# Traditional IEPs: Observations of Student Performance



Description of Behavior	With a Trauma Lens	Possible Strategies/Solutions
Regina struggles to regulate when she comes into the special education room for reading instruction.	Consider:	

# Traditional IEPs: Observations of Student Performance



Description of Behavior	With a Trauma Lens	Possible Strategies/Solutions
<p>Regina struggles to regulate when she comes into the special education room for reading instruction.</p>	<p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is Regina coming from a trauma-informed environment (e.g., is she supported during this transition? Was she regulated when she left?)</li><li>• What is her experience with reading? Is she overwhelmed by the demands of reading instruction?</li><li>• What is the teacher-student relationship with the special education teacher?</li><li>• Is the classroom environment organized and predictable for Regina?</li></ul>	

# Traditional IEPs: Observations of Student Performance



Description of Behavior	With a Trauma Lens	Possible Strategies/Solutions
<p>Regina struggles to regulate when she comes into the special education room for reading instruction.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider:</li> <li>• Is Regina coming from a trauma-informed environment (e.g., is she supported during this transition? Was she regulated when she left?)</li> <li>• What is her experience with reading? Is she overwhelmed by the demands of reading instruction?</li> <li>• What is the teacher-student relationship with the special education teacher?</li> <li>• Is the classroom environment organized and predictable for Regina?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin class with with self-regulation strategies.</li> <li>• Help Regina understand her body and her brain.</li> <li>• Make sure Regina’s instruction and assignments are at the appropriate instructional level</li> <li>• Put schedules or assignments on the board.</li> <li>• Keep the learning environment organized and consistent.</li> <li>• Collaborate with the general education teacher to use trauma-informed strategies that will allow Regina to be as regulated as possible when she leaves the general education classroom.</li> </ul>



# Goals and Objectives



Goal/Objective	With a Trauma Lens
<p>Goal: Miquel will increase on-task behavior in small groups.</p> <p>Objective: When participating in small-group activities (a non-preferred task), Miguel will engage in no more than 20 minutes of disruptive behavior over the course of a week as measured through time sampling data.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What supports are in place to help Miguel stay regulated?</li><li>• Are the activities at an appropriate instructional level for Miguel? Are there scaffolds in place?</li><li>• How does the teacher interact with Miguel when she is helping him?</li><li>• How does the teacher react to Miguel when he is being disruptive?</li><li>• Does Miguel stay on task if he is working alone or one-on-one with the teacher instead of in small groups?</li></ul>



# Trauma-Informed Objectives

## Objective

When participating in small-group activities (a non-preferred task), Miguel will engage in no more than 20 minutes of disruptive behavior over the course of a week as measured through time sampling data.

## Revised Objective With a Trauma Lens

# Goals and Objectives



Goal/Objective	With a Trauma Lens
<p>Goal: Jenny will accept corrective feedback without becoming dysregulated.</p> <p>Objective: Jenny will accept consequences calmly 4 out of 5 times when they are administered by the teacher, as measured by teacher observation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How does the teacher respond to Jenny in the situations that require consequences?</li><li>• Does the teacher validate Jenny's feelings?</li><li>• Are the consequences delivered with empathy?</li><li>• Are the consequences designed to teach rather than punish (are they logical or natural)?</li></ul>

# Trauma-Informed Objectives



## Objective

## Revised Objective With a Trauma Lens

Jenny will accept consequences calmly 4 out of 5 times when they are administered by the teacher, as measured by teacher observation.

# The Use of Rewards and Consequences



Reward/Consequence	With a Trauma Lens
<p>The student will earn a star each time they behave appropriately during small-group time and a time-out when they misbehave.</p> <p>Student will be allowed extra recess time at the end of the week, if they have earned 5 stars.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is a time-out a consequence that teaches?</li><li>• Does the teacher help the child process the event that resulted in a consequence? Validate their feelings and show empathy?</li><li>• What if the child does not earn the reward? What will that do to stress response?</li><li>• Is the teacher “safe” for the child?</li></ul>

# Accommodations and Modifications with a Trauma Lens



## Self Regulation

- Student to be given frequent brain breaks and opportunities for movement during the school day
- Student to be given the option to go to a calming space in the room when frustrated

## Safety

- Student to be warned about changes to routines or schedules
- Teacher to use circles for morning meetings
- Student to be given additional time for oral and written responses
- Student's assignments will be shortened by 50%

## Relationships

- Student to have the option to check in with a “safe” adult
- Student to be given one-on-one time with the teacher to process their feelings and build trust

# Parents/Caretakers as Partners



- Just like trauma-informed education needs to be consistent across schools/districts, it needs to be consistent between school and home.
- Parents/caretakers and teachers should share strategies that are effective so they can be used in both environments.
- If there are disruptions in home or school, parents/caretakers and teachers should communicate to prepare the other to support the child.
- Parents/caretakers and teachers should be available to each other to collaborate on supporting the child impacted by trauma.

# Support for School Personnel



SUPPORTS FOR SCHOOL PERSONNEL	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Program trainings and/or supports for school personnel are needed for the student to advance appropriately toward attaining the annual goals, participate in the general curriculum, and be educated and participate with other students in educational activities. <b>If yes, specify what trainings and/or supports are needed, including when appropriate, the information that clarifies when the trainings and/or supports will be provided, by whom, in what location, etc.</b>	

School personnel need to be trained to:

- Understand trauma, its impacts, and strategies to support children who are experiencing the impacts of trauma.
- View behaviors as stress responses, not “bad behavior,”
- View negative behaviors as indications of increased stress levels
- View negative behaviors as an indication a child needs to work on regulation strategies, not be assigned consequences
- Build positive relationships with children
- Practice self-regulation and self-care strategies



# Language is Important



- Strengths-based perspective
- Avoid exacerbating a child's feeling of being different
- Purpose: To FIX or to SUPPORT



# Questions?



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