

UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING TRAUMA IN THE CLASSROOM



Trauma can affect how pupils think, feel, learn and behave.

A trauma-informed approach helps create safety, trust and opportunity for healing and growth.

Children and young people may behave in ways that reflect past experiences, not current choices.



REMEMBER

Behaviour is communication. Behind every behaviour is a need. Connection, safety and understanding come first.



HOW TRAUMA MAY SHOW UP

- Big reactions to small things
- Difficulty trusting adults or peers
- Problems with concentration or memory
- Difficulty managing emotions
- Avoidance or withdrawal
- Low self-esteem
- Struggling with transitions or change
- Physical complaints with no clear cause
- Attention-seeking or risk-taking
- Difficulty forming relationships



WHY THIS HAPPENS

- Trauma can affect brain development and stress responses.
- The body stays in 'alert' to stay safe.
- It can impact learning, memory and emotional regulation.
- Pupils may have experienced loss, violence, neglect, bullying, domestic abuse or other traumatic events.
- They may not feel safe or in control.
- They need consistent, supportive relationships to heal.



WHAT PUPILS NEED FROM YOU

- Safety and predictability
- Calm, consistent adults
- Understanding, not judgement
- Connection before correction
- Choices and a sense of control
- Patience and flexibility
- Positive relationships
- Opportunities to succeed
- Space to express and regulate
- Hope and belief in them

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES THAT HELP



CREATE SAFETY

Greet pupils warmly, use calm routines and make your classroom a safe base.



BE PREDICTABLE

Use consistent routines, clear expectations and advance warnings for changes.



BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Take time to connect. Small moments of positive attention build trust.



USE CALM LANGUAGE

Speak slowly and softly. Use simple, reassuring words and tone.



OFFER CHOICES

Give appropriate choices to help pupils feel a sense of control.



REGULATE TOGETHER

Model calm. Teach breathing, grounding and other calming techniques.



BREAK IT DOWN

Chunk tasks into small, achievable steps and celebrate small wins.



ALLOW TIME

Give thinking time and time to process. Don't rush responses.



PROVIDE SAFE SPACES

Offer a quiet space or safe adult for when they feel overwhelmed.



FOCUS ON STRENGTHS

Notice strengths and progress. Build on what they are good at and enjoy.



WHAT TO AVOID

- Punishment or consequences for behaviour linked to trauma
- Shouting, blame or power struggles
- Ignoring or dismissing their feelings
- High pressure or unrealistic expectations
- Touch without permission
- Comparing them to others
- Taking behaviour personally



Avoid retraumatisation. Choose connection over correction.

QUICK CLASSROOM CHECKLIST

- ☐ Do I create a predictable and safe environment?
- ☐ Do I build positive relationships with all pupils?
- ☐ Do I notice and respond to stress signals early?
- ☐ Do I use calm, supportive language?
- ☐ Do I give choices and opportunities for control?
- ☐ Do I allow time and space to regulate?
- ☐ Do I celebrate effort and progress?
- ☐ Do I focus on strengths and what's going well?
- ☐ Do I check in with vulnerable pupils regularly?



Small, consistent actions create safety and build trust.



KEY TAKEAWAY

When we understand trauma, we can change how we respond.

When we change how we respond, we can change outcomes.



Safety. Connection. Consistency. Together we help pupils heal and thrive.



Understanding today creates a brighter future tomorrow.



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Stronger futures.

