“Students at trauma-sensitive schools have reaped the benefits of greater academic achievement, more time spent on learning, reduced disciplinary referrals, improved relationships with peers and adults, and more supportive teaching in the classroom.”

Helping Traumatized Children Learn, volume 2

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"Trauma results from an event, series of events or set of circumstances that is experienced by and individual as physical and emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s physical, social, and emotional, or spiritual well being.”

SAMSH, 2012

Trauma is a loss of safety.

- Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary human’s capacity to cope which result in a perceived loss of safety.
- Traumatic experiences often involve a threat to life or safety, but any situation that leaves a person feeling overwhelmed and isolated can be traumatic, even if it doesn't involve physical harm.

Exposure to trauma cause the brain to develop in a way that will help the child survive dangerous situations.

Trauma triggers activate the “survival brain” causing students to react as though a pervious traumatic experience is happening here and now.

When youth experience continuous threats/trauma, the brain is put into a chronic state of fear, activating the “survival brain” (mid/lower areas of the brain). The learning brain is not functioning.
CLASSROOM STRATEGIES / PRACTICES

- Structured, predictable days with check-ins/self-reflection
- Self-Regulation Activities (incorporated into lessons or as a transition activity)
  - Music
  - Art
  - Mindfulness
  - Yoga / Stretching
  - Repetitive movement activities
- Choices-agreement-follow-up
  - **Choices**: Think of ways to embed choices into discussions with students so they can use autonomy and have a say in the final agreement.
    - Use coping skills list to help find options
    - Role play possible options
  - **Agreement**: Focus on agreement as the goal (not compliance)
    - **Three types of students**: willing, willing-disorganized, unwilling
  - **Follow-up**: Ask the student if it’s alright to follow up in a specific timeframe. Model responsibility.
- “Tear it up” after a difficult or challenging event
  - Ask students to reflect in writing to a difficult or stressful situation (1-3 sentences)
  - On a scale of 1-10 rate how they feel about situation
  - (1 great, able to deal with it – 10 extremely upset, unable to cope)
  - Instruct students to rip their response into very small pieces.
- Scaling activities
  - Check-in with the group
  - Check in with the whole class
  - Creating scaling art in-class assignment
  - Referring to the scale when speaking to a specific student
  - Referring to the scale when speaking to the class
- Grounding Scripts (whole class or with an individual student)
  - Grounding is a technique that helps us reorient to the here-and-now, to bring us into the present. It is a useful technique for students that feel overwhelmed, intensely anxious, or dissociated from their environment.
  - Grounding is paying attention to what is actually going.
It is the opposite of dissociation or numbing out. It uses 5 senses and balance to focus on present, concrete reality.

There are physical, mental, and soothing strategies for grounding.

Grounding can be used as a whole class activity or students can listen to grounding scripts electronically. Teachers can use grounding in a class project by having students make their own video or script. Additionally there can be a grounding box in classroom, games can use grounding techniques, or art project can demonstrate grounding activities.

- Assigning a grounding-related activity for students to complete (either in class or as homework)

- Coping Skills
  - Providing a specific student with a coping skills sheet/menu
  - Using a coping skills sheet as an in-class assignment
  - Incorporating safe coping skills into a lesson

**GROUNDING SCRIPTS**

Youtube: Safety Focus Exercise, WAWC
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=88AuyGF2J3I

WHAT IS GROUNDING? Grounding is a set of simple strategies to detach from emotional pain. Distraction works by focusing outward on the external world, rather than inward toward the self. You can also think of it as “distraction,” “centering,” “a safe place,” “looking outward,” or “healthy detachment.” (The following scripts were adapted from Seeking Safety).

MENTAL GROUNDING. “Start by reminding yourself that you are safe. Now let’s try to imagine putting a buffer between you and all of your negative feelings. Imagine that your negative feelings are bundled up and put in a container. Next, think of something you can put between you and that container of negative feelings. Perhaps it’s a wall, a suit of armor, or a big open field in the country—anything that creates safe distance between you and your negative feelings. Good!

Now let’s focus on the room. Look around the room. *Silently*, name as many colors as you can. Good. Now name as many objects as you can: How many chairs are there? Are there curtains? How many windows? Look out the window, what is the weather outside? Good. Are there paintings or posters? If so, choose one and describe it, not judging it, but just describing everything you can about it: colors, shapes, content. Excellent! What color is the carpet or floor? How many doors are there? Are the lights fluorescent or yellow? What color is the paint...
on the walls? Do you see any words printed anywhere in the room (on a poster or book jacket)? If so, read each letter backward (the reason we read it backward is that you just want to notice the letters themselves—as if you’re seeing these letters for the first time). Terrific!

Next we’ll try naming some facts. Think of the names of cities—as many cities as you can name. Wonderful! Now try naming all the sports teams that you can remember. How about TV shows? Name as many as you can. Now take the number 100; subtract 5 from that and notice the new number; subtract 5 again, and notice the new number. Don’t worry if you can’t get the math

**PHYSICAL GROUNDING.** “Now we’re going to try physical grounding methods. Please keep following along with me. Notice your feet on the floor. They are literally grounded, connected to the floor. Wiggle your toes inside your shoes. Dig your heels gently into the floor to ground yourself even more. Good. Now, touch your chair: Notice anything you can about it—what material is it made of? Now touch the table (or desk): What is it made of? Is it colder or warmer than the chair? Good. Now, find any object that’s near you—perhaps a pen, or your keys, or something here on the desk. Pick it up and hold it, and notice everything you can about it: What it’s made of, how heavy it is, whether it’s cold or warm, what colors it is.

Now clench your fists; notice the tension in your hands as you do that. Now release your fists. Good. Now press your palms together, with elbows to the side; press as tightly as you can. Focus all of your attention on your palms. Now let go. Excellent! Now grab onto your chair as tightly as you can; then after a few moments, now let it go. Finally, roll your head around in a circle a few times. Excellent.”

**SOOTHING GROUNDING.** “Now let’s move on and try soothing grounding. Let’s start with favorites. Think of your favorite color: What color is it? Good. Think of your favorite animal: What animal is it? Think of your favorite TV show: What TV show is it? Excellent. Now, think of your favorite season of the year: What season is it? Now think of your favorite time of day. What time of day is it? Think of a favorite person—it may be someone you know, or it could be a famous person. Picture that person. Good! If you want to, think of a favorite, upbeat song, and try to remember the tune and the words.” Give students at least a minute or so to do this.

“Now, try to think of a safe place. Still keeping your eyes open, think of a place that is very safe, soothing, and calming for you: Maybe the beach, the mountains, a walk in the city, a favorite room, or a park? If you can’t think of a safe place, that’s okay too—just let yourself notice this room, since we’re safe here. Good. Now, try to notice everything you can about your safe place. Notice everything you love about it—the colors, the textures, the shapes; and the safety and calm of the place. Good. You have done a terrific job.”
RESOURCES

1. **Helping Traumatized Children Learn (Volumes 1 and 2)**

   - [http://store.samhsa.gov](http://store.samhsa.gov)

3. **Trauma Toolkit for Educators**

4. **Unlocking the Door to Learning: Trauma-Informed Classrooms and Transformational Schools**

5. **The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma** by Bessel van der Kolk, M.D.

6. **Seeking Safety: A Treatment Manual for PTSD and Substance Abuse** by Lisa M. Najavits