

Checklist of Early Childhood Practices that Support Social Emotional Development and Trauma-Informed Care



“The implementation of a trauma-informed approach is an ongoing organizational change process. A trauma-informed approach is not a program model that can be implemented and then simply monitored using a fidelity checklist. Rather, it is a profound paradigm shift in knowledge, perspective, attitudes and skills that continues to deepen and unfold over time.” There are practices, however, that teachers can use to infuse a trauma informed care approach in their work. As a teacher you may see children for the longest period of the day, you may even spend more time with a young child than his/her parents. You have a critical role to play in recognizing trauma, building positive relationships with children, helping children feel safe and secure, providing consistent routines and structure, and teaching children social emotional skills. Recognizing the impact of trauma can change the way you view children’s behavior and support their development and ultimately their healing.

Purpose: This checklist is a list of practices that will help guide your thinking about how to support the social emotional development of young children who have experienced trauma. This list of practices is not exhaustive nor is it meant to be a substitute for treatment or counseling for children and families. Many of these practices are part of the CA Teaching Pyramid Framework (from the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool), while other practices may not be explicitly described in the CA Teaching Pyramid practices yet they align well with CA Teaching Pyramid practices that you may already be using. Practices such as these can make a big difference in the life of a child and his/her family.

How to Use the Checklist: You can use this list of practices to reflect on your current practice as well as to consider new practices you may want to adopt. Choose two or three practices to implement in your class; even if you are already using some of these practices, you may choose to enhance and improve your practice by selecting new ones. Finally, you may develop additional new strategy/strategies for each category.

Instructions: First, read all the items in the checklist below. Next review each section one at a time. Make a check in the second column if you feel engage in the practice consistently. Make a check in the third column if you want to improve upon or enhance this practice. Choose no more than one practice in each section of the third column (i.e. chose one practice you want to concentrate on in the nurturing and responsive relationships section). Note that the practices in gray are practices that relate to working with families and other primary caregivers.

Practices:

Nurturing and Responsive Relationships (Foster Relationships that Emphasize Attachment, Trust, Collaboration, Empowerment)	I Do This Consistently	I Want to Concentrate on this Practice
Speak to children in a warm, positive, calm, AND supportive manner		
Actively listen to children, showing interest		
Help children feel noticed and 'known' (e.g. "You like this story so much! Let's read it." "I know it can be hard for you to calm your body to rest.")		
Respond to children's comments AND ideas by asking questions AND making comments (focus on noticing a child's emotional expression e.g. facial expressions, body language)		
Spend time with individual children and small groups of children – following children's lead in play and engaging in child-directed play with them		
Recognize children's efforts – offer positive descriptive acknowledgment (e.g., "You put so many colors on your paper.")		
Ask families about strategies they use to comfort their child and help him/her feel soothed and safe		
Share with family members the specific strategies that you are using to develop nurturing and responsive relationships with children		
Other ideas:		
Other ideas:		
Create a Safe Learning Environment using Positive Directions and Expectations	I Do This Consistently	I Want to Concentrate on this Practice
Encourage children to engage in developing expectations with examples for the class		
Post and visually represent expectations and examples (children can help create visuals)		
Post visual examples throughout the room		
Reference posted behavior expectations when redirecting children		
Organize space in a way that clearly communicates whether a center is closed or open and how many children can be in a center (i.e., using visuals)		
Make materials accessible by children so they can freely access the materials they need		

Create a Safe Learning Environment using Positive Directions and Expectations (continued)	I Do This Consistently	I Want to Concentrate on this Practice
Have space available for an individual child to be by him/herself when he/she needs a break		
Ask families how they redirect children and encourage positive behavior explore strategies with family members to enhance consistency and collaboration with families.		
Share classroom expectations and examples with families to promote consistent language at home and in the center		
Other ideas:		
Other ideas:		
Create Calm Predictable Transitions	I Do This Consistently	I Want to Concentrate on this Practice
Children are reminded of upcoming transitions with a consistent approach (i.e., at every transition the teacher says “5 more mins” or sings the same transition song every day)		
Visual prompts of the schedule and routines are available to show children		
Children who need more help with transitions are given individual reminders		
Focus on what behavior you want to see (i.e., what you want children to do: “Use walking feet” versus “Don’t run”)		
Offer children choices frequently (e.g., “Would you like to read a book or work on puzzle?”)		
Ask families about their routines and rules at home; share classroom routines, expectations and ideas		
Share strategies you use to create predictable and smooth routines and transitions with families		
Other ideas:		
Other ideas:		

Help Children Regulate Their Emotions and Express Their Feelings Appropriately	I Do This Consistently	I Want to Concentrate on this Practice
Respond to children’s feelings and expressions by commenting on their facial expressions, body language etc. (e.g., “You look worried”)		
Show children a range of emotions; adults should ensure that their affect reflects emotions such as joy, curiosity, concern, pleasure to be working with children etc.		
Teach children a range of vocabulary words related to feelings—using visuals of feeling faces, commenting on facial expressions, reading books about emotions etc.		
Read stories about children’s feelings and various common child experiences (i.e., the death of a pet, the arrival of a new sibling, etc.)		
Label one’s own emotional states and provide an action statement about them (e.g., “I am feeling frustrated so I better take some deep breaths and calm down”)		
Encourage children to express their emotions through music, art and play and recognize sensory cues from their bodies.		
Teach children (and regularly practice) strategies for regulating emotions such as mindfulness (i.e., mindful walking, eating, breathing, noticing sounds, sights, tastes, smells, the feel of things around them; deep breathing; tin man/wet noodle; quiet/loud; Tucker Turtle; red light/green light; Mother May I; smell the flower/blow the bubble etc.)		
Ask families how they express their feelings at home and what strategies help their child feel calm, safe and relaxed		
Share with families the strategies you are using in the classroom and encourage them to practice these at home		
Other ideas:		
Other ideas:		
Intensive Interventions that Consider the Child’s Experiences	I Do This Consistently	I Want to Concentrate on this Practice
Work with the child’s family to develop a support plan		
Work with the child’s family to develop a hypothesis about the meaning/ function of the child’s behavior that takes into account the impact of trauma (i.e., does he child feels unsafe, threatened, need to fight/flight/ freeze). Make use of “Toward a Better Understanding of behavior” tool.		

Intensive Interventions that Consider the Child's Experiences (continued)	I Do This Consistently	I Want to Concentrate on this Practice
Work with the child's family to identify potential triggers for the child's behavior		
Work with the family to develop a plan that include teaching replacement skills; preventing challenging behavior; and providing new adult responses		
Teach replacement skills throughout the day when challenging behavior is not occurring		
Other ideas:		
Other ideas:		

Adapted for use in California by CA CSEFEL on August 1, 2020. Downloadable at www.CAinclusion.org/teachingpyramid/walking-up-the-pyramid/