

GETTING STARTED: Tier One Trauma Informed Afterschool Programs

Effective Staff

Building staff capacity

We encourage staff to ask questions like

- How regulated are director/s and program staff?
- Are staff modeling behaviors you would like to see reflected by youth?
- How did staff learn their social-emotional skills?

How can we expect self-regulation from students when staff are not demonstrating healthy self-regulation?

Social-emotional learning is a lifelong journey. Adults modeling their own learning by openly articulating their thought process when trying to solve a problem, or talking about how they are managing challenging emotions, can be transformative for youth —particularly youth whose familial models may not have strong social-emotional skills themselves. All social-emotional learning happens through modeling and observation, along with reinforcement at the right times.

As extra-familial adults in the lives of youth, we can be a strong influence through our modeling and reinforcement of social-emotional skills. For example, do you yell across the room to redirect youth, or do you respectfully approach youth who may need some behavior guidance and ask them what is going on and how you can help?

Along with the understanding of the importance of social-emotional learning is the notion that challenging behavior is often the result of a lack of skill. A child who becomes upset and acts out often doesn't have the ability to more skillfully manage their emotions; this provides an opportunity for guidance and learning rather than a time for punishment. The lens through which we view children who have challenging behaviors shifts, making us more empathic and more likely to take the time to slow down and help kids understand and manage their feelings more effectively.

**Afterschool Alliance Building a trauma informed care approach for afterschool programs & community-based organizations*

Relationship-Focused, Environmental Supports

1. Say yes to water and snacks.

- Allow water bottles and snacks for stable blood sugar levels (THINK PROTEIN NOT JUST CARBS) and hydration.
- Build in movement breaks for students during clubs or program times that are less active.

2. Be mindful of sensory needs.

- Recognize and be mindful of sensory needs in some children, such as sensitivity to bright lights, loud noises, or tactile aversion.
- Use noise cancelling headphones, fidgets, weighted items, soft lighting, or consider alternate activities for tactile sensitivities.

3. Keep the environment predictable.

- Establish and practice routines, such as how to ask a question. Post a schedule and give daily updates about any changes.
- Provide transition warnings daily: “We have five minutes until club ends”.

4. Use the power of connection.

- Have an afterschool program greeting.
- Be mindful of your voice tone. Use soft/kind eyes.
- Praise students’ behavior and follow it up with a character praise: “Thank you so much for picking up the reading corner. You are so responsible!”

Here are some great empowering phrases from the Council for Exceptional Children to keep in mind:

Back Pocket Words & Phrases

"I'm here for you."
"It looks like you could use some help with..."
"I like helping you."
"I'm ready to help - just ask."
"Can you trust me on this one?"
"You can count on me."

FOR ESTABLISHING TRUST

"What is the rule about...?"
"Where are you supposed to be?"
"Let's see if you can answer that question all by yourself."
"Do you think it would work better to tell me or ask me about that?"

FOR ADDRESSING UNHELPFUL ACTIONS

"I can tell this is important to you."
"It's okay to do this as long as you need to."
"Let me know when you're ready to..."
"Kid, I care about you too much to argue with you."
"I'll get back to you on that."

FOR REMOVING THE POWER STRUGGLE

"This could be difficult for you; what can you do to help yourself?"
"I'm not mad; breathe."
"Let's pretend to move this wall together."
"This feeling will pass. I'll stay with you until it does."

FOR COMMUNICATING WHEN A STUDENT'S DYSREGULATED

"I see you working hard."
"That's tricky and you aren't giving up. That takes courage."
"You did that all by yourself."
"Thank you for trusting me. I know that's hard for you sometimes."

FOR GIVING ENCOURAGEMENT

"What do you think I believe happened?"
"Would you like to know what some other kids tried in situations like this?"
"I've noticed you sometimes...What are some other things you could do?"
"We'll see how that works for you."

FOR BUILDING CAPACITY FOR TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

5. See behaviors as survival strategies.

- Reframe students' behavior as survival strategies instead of willful disobedience. Think of it as an opportunity to help them regulate.

6. Take an interest in students' lives.

- Listen, ask questions, ask a "check in" question.

7. Give students a voice.

- Offer choices, offer compromises and ask for re-dos ("Can you try that again with respect?").

8. Practice self-regulation skills.

- Try dysregulating activities like dancing in place, ball toss etc., then practice self-regulating or calming activities, such as deep breathing, pressure points, wall pushes, or chair sit-ups.
- Help students identify their level of alertness by using "engine plates" or "zones of regulation" (these can be discussed at afterschool and posters can be hung up to help students have visual reminders).

9. Be proactive.

- Teach self-regulating skills before they are needed. Help students identify feelings with a thumbs up, thumbs down, or sideways thumb for an "I'm not sure".
- Practice labeling emotions and then make a plan for how to handle them. For example, have each student list three things they can do when they are mad, sad, or scared.

10. Play and HAVE FUN!

- Is your program fun??? Playfulness disarms the fear response in children.

***Trust-Based Relational Intervention® Principles and Strategies for Trauma Informed Educational Programs.*