

# The Effects of Trauma and Chronic Stress on Learning: *What Teachers Can Do*

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# Clearing our minds



# Re-introductions



# Review

- 📖 Last workshop we reviewed the effects of trauma and chronic stress on the brain and body and what it means to create a trauma informed classroom.

# Reminders

- Teachers are not therapists
- Trauma informed does not mean probing for individual's traumatic stories and using that information in class, or even using “trauma stories” as a basis for language and literacy work; it is about understanding how trauma and chronic stress affects learning, and how we can be aware of that to create safe, stable classrooms
- If traumatic contexts are current for all involved—anti-immigrant fear, for example, situations that affect all students—that's different and can be brought into class.
- You are not alone! We encourage you to connect with your program Advisor and with culturally sensitive and trauma informed mental health and health professionals in your community.

# Goals

## *Today we will*

- ❏ explore strategies for creating trauma-informed (safe, stable, and predictable) classrooms to help students regulate their emotions and focus on learning
- ❏ review classroom methods and tools-- proactive and responsive-- that help lower anxiety and stress, promote inclusion, and promote mental health.

# Online Resource

- 📖 Many of the examples I will share with you are drawn from a two year project with ABE and ESOL teachers
- 📖 The information on this site will also address several of the questions you asked in your post it notes


[nelrc.org/managingstress/](https://nelrc.org/managingstress/)

# Self Care Plans

- What happened with your self care plans?
- What can we learn from this as it relates to us—and our students?



# Before we begin

 TRIGGERS! What are they,  
what are we supposed to do  
about them....

# Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis

**Affective Filter** is the term Stephen Krashen has used to refer to the complex of negative emotional and motivational factors that may interfere with the reception and processing of comprehensible input. Such factors include: anxiety, self-consciousness, boredom, annoyance, alienation, and so forth.

He suggests that lowering the affective filter allows for more “comprehensible input” in second language acquisition.

What can we do? PROACTIVE STRATEGIES

What are proactive strategies for creating safe, stable, predictable, inclusive classrooms?




***Brainstorm***





# Strategies we will examine today

1. Establishing participatory ground rules
2. Creating and maintaining routines and rituals
3. Promoting physical well-being (mind/body)
4. Creating safe, welcoming inclusive classroom space
5. Making room for laughter
6. Promoting self efficacy through self affirmation
7. Integrating expressive activities into instruction
8. Integrating psycho-education, when appropriate
9. Promoting collective action
10. Connecting with community resources

# Adapting strategies for YOUR students: consider:

-  language and literacy levels
-  Length of time you have been with students-  
establishing trustful environment
-  Willingness/resistance of students (safe and  
challenged at the same time)

# 1. Establishing Participatory Classroom Guidelines (Ground Rules)

-  Review our Discussion guidelines from last session
-  If we changed our discussion guidelines/to classroom guidelines (ground rules) what could we include?

# Your Experiences

- 🌀 Have you created guidelines/ground rules with students? with students? What gets included?
- 🌀 How do you use those guidelines?

# Possible additional ground rules

- 🌀 Respect time limits
- 🌀 You can pass on something, or pass and come back
- 🌀 You can opt out of an activity; you have a choice



# Sample from a Program



Conversation Class Tuesday and Thursday 6 – 8  
Class Rules

- Don't smoke in class.
- Music is ok.
- Cell phone – don't use your phone in class. Turn it off.
- Drinking water is good.
- If you can't come to class, call Lisa
- Try to come to class on time. If you need to leave early *sometimes* it's ok.
- If you don't have someone to watch your kids sometimes, it's ok to bring them.
- Don't speak your native language in class.
- If you're very hungry in class, it's ok to eat. Can collect money to buy pizza or other *healthier* food.
- It's ok to invite guests to come in. It's best if we know ahead of time before they come.
- If we are having a conversation as a full group, everyone should participate

## 2. Classroom Rituals and Routines

- 🌀 Why have them?
- 🌀 Do you establish rituals and routines?
- 🌀 What kind?
- 🌀 How do you maintain them? Is it hard to maintain them?

# The Value of Classroom Ritual

- Creating safety and stability is key role for teacher
- Creating **predictable** consistent learning environments
- Classroom rituals: each student knowing what they need to do can provide a formal scaffolding that facilitates learning



# Creating Rituals and Routines

## **Upon Entering** (to provide transition, settle in )

### **Physical/psychological grounding**

- ❏ Worry Bowl
- ❏ Feelings check in- using scale to register emotions (Jami)
- ❏ Deep breathing
- ❏ Brain gym/cross crawl/stretching
- ❏ Jean Louis example

### **Learning Tasks**

- ❏ Student folders
- ❏ Calendar/date/time
- ❏ New words (Deb L's example)


# Jean-Louis' Routine

- 📖 Aftermath of earthquake in Haiti was of great concern to students, distracting them from learning
- 📖 He set up a computer to check in on daily events/updates and spent the first 30 minutes of class exploring current events and how it affected students. Done in Creole.
- 📖 After that, students settled into the lessons of the day

# Jami's Example

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 5 | <p><u>I can't stand this and ready to explode.</u></p> <p>I want to hit someone, something, or throw something. I need an adult to help me go to a safe place so I can calm down.</p> |    |
| 4 | <p><u>I am getting too angry.</u></p> <p>My brain isn't working clearly. I might say or do something I will be sorry for later. I need to go to my safe place to calm down.</p>       |    |
| 3 | <p><u>I am getting really irritated.</u></p> <p>I need to walk away from a bad situation. I will tell my teacher that I need a break.</p>   |    |
| 2 | <p><u>I am doing OK.</u></p> <p>I'm not pleased, but I'm not upset. I can stay where I am and keep working. I can control my anger by myself.</p>                                     |  |
| 1 | <p><u>I am doing great.</u></p> <p>I feel good about myself and about what is going on around me.</p>   |  |

# Jerri's Example

 *The two stress reduction activities I found my students to be most consistently fond of this month are the starting of class with relaxing music and clay. On the one day that I was a little rushed in setting things up and didn't make the effort to play the music, a few people mentioned missing it and wanting it. As for the clay, I have been delighted and surprised by the beautiful things that students have sculpted with it. At the end of class, they show me what they've made with obvious pride and I haven't the heart to destroy them. Therefore, next to the Letting Go Bowl I regularly display their creations.*

# Upon Closing

## Physical/psychological

- Deep breathing
- Chair yoga pose
- Guided relaxation

## Learning Tasks

- Exit tickets
- Reflection time
- Dialogue journal

***Have you integrated closing routines/rituals with your class?***



# 3.Promoting Physical well-being

- 🌀 Movement! *Sitting is the new smoking*
  - 🌀 Stretching, improv, cross crawl-brain gym, walking outside, hokey pokey.....
  - 🌀 FIDGETS/Clay, manipulatives
- 🌀 What other things have we talked about already that promote physical well being?
- 🌀 Hint:



# Walking in Nature: overcome nature deficit disorder!

🌿 *A third creative writing activity took place when I took my class to a lovely park next to the Mystic River on a recent morning when the weather was warm and sunny. Together we observed aloud what we were experiencing with our various senses and then wrote about the experience individually. My students loved being outside. They kept commenting on how relaxing it was for them. They said that it took away their stress!*



# Providing tools for self regulation: fidgets/squeezables (physical well-being)





*By incorporating movement, stretching, visualization, deep breathing, and yoga, we are helping students prepare for learning, retain more information, and we are modeling healthy practices they can take home to use with their families.*

# Cook's Hookup

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8Ns-2yENgc>







# 4. Creating safe, welcoming, inclusive classroom space.

- 🌀 What do you think is important in setting up the room for students who may have experienced trauma?

# SAFETY: Access to the door; no blocked aisles





# Chill Out Spaces: in or outside of the classroom



# Choices and Time Outs

- Have chill space where students can rest/regroup
- Project Hope – Mandala for waiting time
- Have you created chill space?







# Classroom in a Bag



# 5. Make Room for Laughter!

## Laughter

- lowers stress hormones (cortisol, epinephrine), Benefits can last for 45 minutes after laughing;
- eases anxiety and fear;
- increases number of antibody producing cells, boosts the immune system; which helps body deal with stress
- releases endorphins and neurotransmitters (health inducing hormones), and
- builds a bond among students.



# Laughter

- allows shy students to feel part of the class;
- diffuses conflict; brings emotions away from anger;
- promotes relaxation and openness to learning;
- lowers the “affective filter” (Krashen, 1987)
- Laughter strengthens relationships by fostering well-being and positive bonds—this counters negative interactions.



Resources: Krashen, Stephen D. Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition. Prentice- Hall International, 1987. <http://www.care2.com/greenliving/8-health-benefits-of-laughter.html> <http://stress.about.com/od/stresshealth/a/laughter.htm>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HnbNcQlzV-4>





# 6. Self-Affirmation





# Self Affirmation: the Benefits

- 📖 According to Phyllis Siegel (2004), "Self-affirmation theory posits that negative reactions to threats to one's self-integrity may be eliminated by 'affirming some other aspect of the self that reinforces overall self-adequacy.' Indeed, the opportunity to self-affirm - **even in a domain unrelated to the source of the specific threat (to self integrity)** and even without removing the threat itself - has been found to attenuate the negative effects associated with those factors believed to threaten self-integrity." (p 590)

# Self affirmation boxes: Shirley

 [http://www.nelrc.org/managing  
stress/affirmation\\_boxes.html](http://www.nelrc.org/managing_stress/affirmation_boxes.html)



Confidently my dream  
will be in this direction  
Life is about creativity  
to have in your soul  
Wealth comes from  
God's providing hands  
It's mine O yes it's mine  
Grace of my style in the  
Palms of my hands  
Prosperity! Phenomenally  
That's me.



You can't hold a  
candle over my  
head because  
The light GOD has  
in my life was  
Planned

# 7. Integrating Expressive Arts

- What do you think the value might be of expressive arts in a trauma-informed classroom?
- What challenges might you encounter in trying to do this?
- Do you already integrate expressive arts into your teaching and learning? How?

# Expressive Arts

- Allows for exploration of new information as well as **displaying** new information.
- Promotes connectedness, provides a place of joy, creativity, often ignored in everyday life.
- Is a kind of rewards-based effort that can promote self efficacy (increases sense of competence and mastery—I have completed something!)
- Affords sensory balance, emotional regulation.
- Addresses multiple intelligences

# Three examples from real-life classrooms

 The Puzzle Project

 Altered Shoes

 Haitian Songbook

# Puzzle Project





# Altered Shoes Project





# Altered Shoes Project



# Haitian Songbook



# 8. Integrating Psycho-Education

- 🌀 Help students understand how chronic stress affects the body and learning
- 🌀 Using chronic stress as a topic for reading (science units, etc.)
- 🌀 Remember the continuum of approaches—from squishy clay (grounding) to higher level reasoning, analysis, etc.
- 🌀 Need to keep in mind where your students are.



# Sample of psycho-education: Stress Trees Project

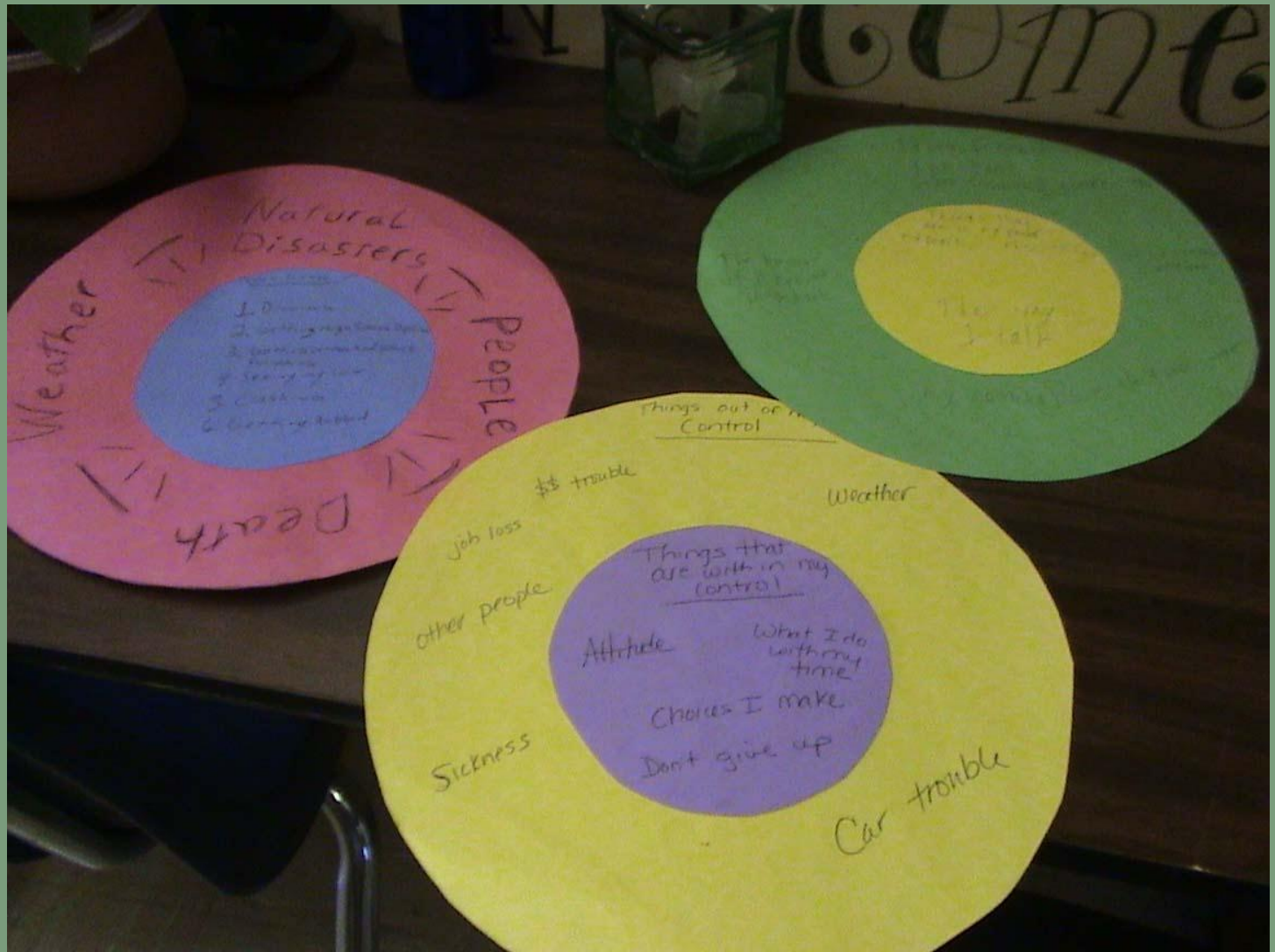


# Circle of Control/No Control






- Analyzing what we can control and cannot control.
- Looking at healthy coping strategies

# Circles of Control/No Control



## 9. Connecting to Community Resources

-  Culturally sensitive and knowledgeable mental health professionals – make relationships; create resource sheet and update it
-  Arrange classroom visits by health professionals
-  Field trips to health centers

# 10. Collective Action

- ❏ Trauma affects communities, not just individuals
- ❏ Collective Action/Political Action can help people take some control **together**
- ❏ Trauma of racism (pdf on line)
- ❏ Example of Welcome Project  
Playback theater on issue of bus and rate hikes in  
Somerville led to meeting with the Mayor
- ❏ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjqIX3GkN-k>



## Students in Somerville Take Action!

A Picture Story By Lisa Gimbel, the Welcome Project, Somerville

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Students talked about what would make it easier to be healthy in our community.



Could you do something like  
this in your classes?

# Wrapping up

- Ending routine for First Literacy is the Action Plan going forward
- Evaluation to reflect and give us feedback

# Action Plan and Evaluations