



5 Principles of Trauma Informed Practice

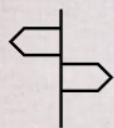
Guidance for Schools & ELCs



Safety
(not threat)



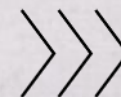
Trust
(not betrayal)



Choice
(not control)



Collaboration
(not coercion)



Empowerment
(not restriction)



Introduction

This guidance has been created to provide information for schools and ELCs. An audit has been included for teams to evaluate areas of strength & for development. We have drawn on a range of national/international information as well as robust research studies - all sources used to design this document and which may provide additional, useful links can be found on page ?

A trauma-informed approach is one that recognises the impact of stress and adversity, and responds with acceptance, validation and empathy. Trauma Informed Practice is informed by neuroscience, psychology and social science as well as attachment and trauma theories, and gives a central role to the complex and pervasive impact trauma has on a person's world view and relationships. It is applicable across all sectors of public service, including social care, physical health, housing, education, and the criminal justice system.

The NHS Education for Scotland's Vision is *"a trauma informed and responsive nation that is capable of recognising where people are affected by trauma and adversity, and that responds in ways that prevent further harm, support recovery, address inequalities and improve life chances."*

In Fife, Trauma-informed schools & ELCs are those that embed the principles of **safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration and empowerment** into all aspects of their work and commit to ensuring that physical environments, staff behaviour and organisational policies and procedures reflect trauma-informed principles and systems. Trauma-informed organisations also hold in mind the needs of staff in responding to people affected by trauma.

A Trauma Informed Approach also aligns with the child centred ethos of UNCRC, GIRFEC & Fife's Our Minds Matter Framework.



Sowing Seeds: Trauma Informed Practice for Anyone Working with Children & Young People



[Click here to watch this 10 minute video overview](#)



What is Trauma?

Trauma is everyone's business.

There are different types of trauma and many children/young people experience trauma. However, not all children and young people who are exposed to trauma will go on to develop difficulties.

'Trauma' is a widely used term, but in this context refers to a "an event, a series of events or a set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening."

NHS Education for Scotland

Most people are likely to know or work with someone who has experienced trauma and adversity in their lives. Many of us have directly experienced trauma in our own lives. When the work we do also brings us into contact with people who are affected by trauma, there is an added responsibility to recognise this, adjust how we work to take account of the impact of trauma, and respond in a way which supports recovery, does no harm and recognises the needs that people have.

Safe and supportive relationships are known to be key in fostering resilience and in enabling recovery following adversity and trauma. For this reason, it is important that we recognise the potential for each contact/interaction we have with children, young people & their families affected by trauma to afford safety, enhance resilience and promote recovery.



Potential Benefits of Trauma Informed Approaches

Education Scotland has identified a range of potential benefits of trauma informed approaches an educational context:

- Increases practitioner knowledge and awareness of the impact of early experiences thus increasing staff confidence about responding appropriately to children and young people's needs
- Provides a framework to develop understanding and support for children and young people
- Can help to develop a shared language for practitioners
- Originates from evidence based practice
- Encourages schools and early years and childcare settings and their wider communities to focus on early intervention and prevention
- Acknowledges the key role that practitioners can have in improving life chances for children and young people
- Helps the wider school community (including children, staff, parents and carers) to develop understanding about the potential impact of adversity and trauma on their own lives and the lives of others, thus aiding recovery



Potential Challenges of Trauma Informed Approaches

Likewise, Education Scotland has identified a range of potential challenges of trauma informed approaches an educational context:

- There is a possibility that highlighting the potentially negative outcomes related to adverse experiences can give an overly fatalistic view if not balanced with evidence on resilience
- When approaches are implemented in isolation without making clear links with national frameworks and priorities such as Getting it Right for Every Child and the wellbeing agenda, there is the risk of the approach being unsustainable and fragmented
- Each approach needs to balance understanding and awareness with a clear focus on appropriate intervention and support that leads to positive outcomes for children and young people. Further evidence needs to be gathered as to the impact of each of these approaches at a whole school level
- Complexity and confusion around language and terminology that is often used

We hope that this guidance document provides clarity over terminology & a structure on which staff teams can build professional discussions, identify areas of strength & for development.



The Impact of Trauma

Trauma reactions can look different at different ages and developmental stages, and can impact on a range of outcomes for children and young people. Our early experiences build brain architecture and while **toxic stress** can derail healthy development, **positive interactions** build strong brain architecture. Below is a summary of the types of behaviours which may be evident in response to trauma.

Fight	Flight	Freeze	Collapse
• Physically aggressive response (hitting, kicking, spitting) • Verbally aggressive response (shouting, swearing, arguing) • Refusal to complete work or destroying work • Refusal to follow instructions or requests • Unpredictable or impulsive responses • Physical symptoms (sore head, tummy etc)	• Running away • Hiding • Avoiding eye contact • Very distant/withdrawn/quiet • Distracted from tasks • Overly talkative • Poor attendance • Physical symptoms (sore head, tummy etc)	• Focused on danger / on edge (e.g noise/person) • Fidgety/agitated • Not able to smile / laugh • Not able to start a task • Unable to move • Over compliant – trying to please adults • Jumpiness • Frozen	• Distant / in a daydream • Glazed eyes • Can't find words • Slumped over table • Unable to complete tasks • Unable to engage / play with others • Struggling to get up • Feeling cold / shivery • Appears not to listen • Physical response (sore head, tummy etc)



Window of Tolerance

In supporting learners to regulate their emotions, we must recognise their window of tolerance, the zone in which individuals respond most effectively. This may be narrowed through adverse and traumatic experiences.

We should view all behaviour as communication, being open & curious to the potential hidden need rather than the behaviour itself.

[Click here to watch this short video clip, demonstrating the Window of Tolerance concept.](#)



Relationships matter and our daily interactions with learners & their families can make a big difference to outcomes.



Shifting Our Thinking

Within a trauma informed approach we have begun to shift our thinking to reflect on how we can best understand and support learners and their families.

The images below provide a useful summary of how this shift has evolved over time

What is wrong with this child?

What has happened to this child?

What contribution can be made at level of child/school/ community to support this child?

Non trauma informed	Trauma informed
Power over	Power with
Person needs fixing first	Person needs safety first
Us and them	We are all in this together
Labels, pathology	All behaviour is communication
Fear based	Empathy based
I am here to fix you	Support healing
Person made a bad choice	People who feel unsafe do unsafe things
Behaviour viewed as a problem	Behaviour viewed as solution
What's wrong with you?	What's happened to you?
Blame/shame	Respect
Goal is to do things the 'right' way	Goal is to connect
People are bad	People are doing the best they can



Regulate – Relate – Reason

To provide effective support for learners who may have experienced trauma and are exhibiting distress, it is essential to follow the optimal sequence of engagement:

Regulate: First help the child to regulate & calm their stress response.

Relate: Connect with the child through an attuned & sensitive relationship.

Reason: Support the child to reflect, learn, remember, articulate & become self assured.

Next, we will explore the 5 principles of trauma informed practice – safety, trust, choice, collaboration & empowerment. In turn, we will consider why each aspect is important and what this could look like in a school/ELC setting. Finally, reflective questions are posed as a prompt for self or team consideration.

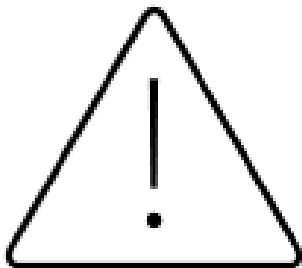


Safety

"All pupils, parents/carers, staff and visitors to the school should feel physically and emotionally safe in all areas of the school, including online spaces e.g. teams, Facebook, Twitter.
Common areas should be welcoming and privacy respected."

Why safety matters

- Everyone has a right to feel safe.
- If children & young people don't feel safe, they can't learn, if staff don't feel safe, they can't fulfil their role.
- Our schools & ELCs may be THE safe place for some of our community.



What safety looks like

Authentic Warmth

Smile – use open body language – be approachable – show you care

Clear Communication

Be consistent, clear & warm. Avoid triggering language & consider your tone of voice

Check-In

Regularly 'check-in' on others

No Surprises

Where possible, give notice of & explanations for changes of staffing or plans



Safety – Reflective Questions

"All pupils, parents/carers, staff and visitors to the school should feel physically and emotionally safe in all areas of the school, including online spaces e.g. teams, Facebook, Twitter.
Common areas should be welcoming and privacy respected."

Here are some reflective questions to consider with your team:

- How does the physical environment promote a sense of safety, calming and de-escalation for staff, children, young people & their families?
- In what ways do staff members recognise and address aspects of the school/ELC environment that may be re-traumatising or triggering, and work seek to improve the situation?
- How does the school's/ELC's written policies and procedures include a focus on trauma and issues of safety and confidentiality?
- How does the school/ELC ensure that all staff are aware of potential triggers & approaches to mitigate escalation for learners & their families e.g staff professional learning?
- How does the school/ELC facilitate ongoing workforce development in trauma informed practice?
- What support is offered to staff for supervision or an opportunity to discuss difficult situations?
- Are staff given opportunities to come together & reflect?
- How does the school/ELC support staff deal with emotional stress?





Trust

"All relationships in the school community are mutually respectful and based on trust. Communication should be transparent and all parties should feel heard and valued."

Why trust matters

- Trust is vital for secure attachments to form, to build and maintain positive relationships.
- Everyone needs to know what to expect from each other.
- We need a network of trust throughout our school & ELC communities.



What trust looks like

Consistent

Routines, behaviours & responses should be predictable, reliable & consistent

Persistent

Don't give up – hold on to positivity & hope

Predictable

You'll say what you'll do & do what you say

Trusting

You place trust in others & ensure others place trust in you by maintaining professionalism & confidentiality



Trust – Reflective Questions

“All relationships in the school community are mutually respectful and based on trust. Communication should be transparent and all parties should feel heard and valued.”

Here are some reflective questions to consider with your team:

- How is trust promoted between ALL members of the school/ELC community staff?
- How is trust promoted between ALL members of the school/ELC community & children/young people?
- How is trust promoted between ALL members of the school/ELC community & families?
- How does the school's/ELC's written policies and procedures include a focus on trauma and issues of trust and confidentiality?
- How does communication/information sharing reflect an ethos of trust, respecting the positive relationships which have been built between ALL member of the school/ELC?
- How does the school/ELC ensure ALL staff receive basic professional learning on trauma, its impact & strategies for trauma-informed approaches?



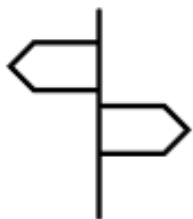


Choice

"Pupils, parents/carers and staff have a clear understanding about their rights (consider UNCRC) and have a sense of agency about decisions and choices made about their educational experience."

Why choice matters

- Lack of control/choice can trigger a fear response.
- Having a choice promotes independence & resilience.
- Individuals are more motivated & are more likely to strive/thrive.



What choice looks like

Stepping Back

Not making all of the decisions but creating an environment where it is safe for children, young people & their families to make choices for themselves

Open Minded

Acknowledging that individuals might make different choices (at different times) – Trying not to judge the decisions of others

Scaffold

For some children, young people & their families who find making choices hard, being supportive & limiting choices
– Being clear about consequences or what's next

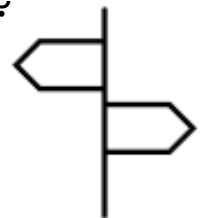


Choice – Reflective Questions

“Pupils, parents/carers and staff have a clear understanding about their rights (consider UNCRC) and have a sense of agency about decisions and choices made about their educational experience.”

Here are some reflective questions to consider with your team:

- How can staff, children, young people & their families be involved with developing a plan for improving engagement and involvement within the general school community?
- How can staff, children, young people & their families be involved with developing a plan for improving engagement and involvement within the learning, teaching & assessment process in school/ELC?
- How can staff, children, young people & their families be involved with developing a plan for improving engagement and involvement within supporting the learning, teaching & assessment process at home?





Collaboration

"Pupils, parents/carers, and staff should work together to make collective decisions about all aspects of school life (values, policies, procedures and ethos)."

Why collaboration matters

- Being involved promotes skills & confidence.
- A genuine team around the child promotes positive outcomes.
- Stronger communities & systems are built together.



What collaboration looks like

Not being the expert

Recognising that the expert of the child is the child, the expert of the family is the family, the expert of the teacher is the teacher etc

Reaching Out

Proactively asking for input from others (especially those who are less well represented)

Breaking down barriers

Acknowledging & addressing physical, psychological & other barriers to working together



Collaboration – Reflective Questions

“Pupils, parents/carers, and staff should work together to make collective decisions about all aspects of school life (values, policies, procedures and ethos).”

Here are some reflective questions to consider with your team:

- How does the school/ELC show & communicate its support for collaboration across the whole community?
- What policies and procedures are in place for including all staff, children, young people & their families in making decisions, creating policies or providing feedback?
- How do staff members help children, young people & their families to feel valued, comforted and empowered?
- How does on-going staff professional learning provide opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills to work collaboratively and effectively across the whole school community?
- Is there a system of communication in place with other partner agencies working with the school/ELC?
- Are collaborative partners trauma informed?





Empowerment

"Pupils, parents/carers and staff should feel enabled to make active decisions that affect learning and wellbeing. Pupil voice and parental engagement should be encouraged and acted upon timeously."

Why empowerment matters

- Creates an environment of learning together.
- Every voice & idea can be heard & respected.
- Gives everyone confidence to contribute.



What empowerment looks like

Coaching Culture

Create a supportive environment to coach others but also invite coaching from others too

Invest

Time & effort is spent in understanding the whole school system/culture/community

Leave No-one Behind

Every voice is heard, every child, young person & family is supported to be a confident contributor

Celebrate Good Ideas

Listen to the ideas of others, incorporate & credit these



Empowerment – Reflective Questions

“Pupils, parents/carers and staff should feel enabled to make active decisions that affect learning and wellbeing. Pupil voice and parental engagement should be encouraged and acted upon timeously.”

Here are some reflective questions to consider with your team:

- How does the school/ELC show & communicate its support for empowerment across the whole community?
- What policies and procedures are in place for including all staff children, young people & their families in making decisions, creating policies or providing feedback?
- How do staff members help children, young people & their families to feel valued, comforted and empowered?
- How does on-going staff professional learning provide opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills to work collaboratively and effectively across the whole school community?
- Is there a system of communication in place with other partner agencies working with the school/ELC?
- Are collaborative partners trauma informed?





5 Principles of Trauma Informed Practice Audit

There is no one formula for what a trauma-informed school environment looks like. Each school has its own unique ethos and qualities. The five trauma-informed principles can guide our reflections on how we might contribute towards our school culture and environment becoming more trauma-informed.

Using the five Trauma Informed Principles, reflect on your own understanding and implementation of these in your school and consider:

- What works well, highlighting positive examples?
- What needs to improve, and examples of how this can be done?



Trauma Informed Principle	Principles in Practice	What works well? List some positive examples	What needs to improve?	Who & how will you take this priority forward?	What further information or support will you need? How will you link with your EP?	How will you dedicate time to advance this work after today?
Safety (not threat) 	All pupils, parents/carers, staff and visitors to the school should feel physically and emotionally safe in all areas of the school, including online spaces eg, teams, facebook, twitter. Common areas should be welcoming and privacy respected.					
Trust (not betrayal) 	All relationships in the school community are mutually respectful and based on trust. Communication should be transparent and all parties should feel heard and valued.					
Choice (not control) 	Pupils, parents/carers and staff have a clear understanding about their rights (consider UNCRC) and have a sense of agency about decisions and choices made about their educational experience.					
Collaboration (not coercion) 	Pupils, parents/carers, and staff should work together to make collective decisions about all aspects of school life (values, policies, procedures and ethos)					
Empowerment (not restriction) 	Pupils, parents/carers and staff should feel enabled to make active decisions that affect learning and wellbeing. Pupil voice and parental engagement should be encouraged and acted upon timeously.					



References

- [NHS Education for Scotland \(2017\) Transforming Psychological Trauma](#)
- [Scot Gov \(2021\) Trauma Informed Practice: A Toolkit for Scotland](#)
- [NHS Education for Scotland Nation Trauma Training Programme](#)
- [Pooky Knightsmith \(Mental Health Specialist\) – You Tube Channel](#)
- [Dr Chris Moore \(Educational Psychologist – EP Insight Website](#)
- [Dr Tina Rae \(Child Psychologist\) – You Tube Channel](#)
- [Louise Bomber \(Therapist & Specialist Teacher\) – You Tube Channel](#)
- [Fife's Promoting Positive Relationships & Behaviour Guidance](#)(Intranet Access)
- [Relationships, Behaviour & Wellbeing Audit](#)(Intranet Access)
- Fife's Relationships, Wellbeing & Behaviour Network GLOW Team – access code p8ikr15