

# Building a Trauma-Informed Classroom Through Relationships

Creating a **trauma-informed classroom** begins with strong, supportive **relationships** between adults and children. When students feel safe, respected, and supported, they are more likely to **engage** in learning, regulate their emotions, and **develop** positive behaviors.



## Key Relationship Practices

### Express Care

Students who feel seen and valued are more likely to feel safe. Listen, acknowledge their thoughts, and recognize their effort.

- Offer simple choices (hug, high five, or wave)
- Praise effort and positive behaviors
- Listen when students share feelings

### Provide Structure

Structure and consistency help children feel safe and supported.

- Maintain consistent routines and expectations
- Offer coping strategies when students feel overwhelmed
- Redirect behavior calmly with minimal escalation

### Expand Possibilities

Exposure to new experiences helps children grow and develop confidence.

- Introduce new activities and learning experiences
- Encourage curiosity and exploration
- Connect students with new interests

### Challenge Growth

Encouraging effort and persistence helps students build confidence and resilience.

- Set clear expectations for learning and behavior
- Encourage persistence during challenging tasks
- Help students reflect on mistakes and learn from them

### Share Power

Giving students appropriate choices helps build trust and independence.

- Work together to solve problems
- Allow students to make small choices
- Encourage students to share ideas and perspectives

## Understanding Pre-verbal Trauma

- Preverbal trauma occurs when children **face abuse, neglect, or other difficult experiences** before they can **talk or form** clear memories.
- Young children are very **vulnerable** because they rely entirely on caregivers.
- When teachers show care, handle big emotions, and stay supportive after **tough moments**, children begin to **trust and feel safe**.
- These experiences help children learn to **manage** their emotions.

## Responding to Behavior in a Trauma-Informed Way

Some behaviors reflect **unmet needs or attempts** to get attention, and thoughtful responses help keep the classroom **safe and supportive**.

### Helpful strategies include:

- Recognizing and **validating** students' emotions
- Giving students opportunities to **express** how they feel
- **Redirecting** behavior calmly without escalation
- Reinforcing **positive** behaviors frequently



## Supporting Transitions

Using **clear and predictable language** helps students understand what is **expected**. One tool teachers can use is **First/Then statements**.

**Example:** First, we clean up the toys, then we go outside.

### Why they work:

- **Reduce** negotiation or power struggles
- Help children **process** what is expected of them.
- Provide **structure** that builds trust and routine

Use the **same script** each time: **Consistency** helps children quickly understand and predict what comes next.

A First/Then board with **pictures or icons** can support children who may **not fully process** verbal instructions.