



Ideas for applying trauma informed approaches in lessons.

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I have put these ideas together based on learning from those I have worked with as well as training, research and studies by many different people. There is information about some of these sources available at <https://www.readingwritingesol.org/research> This toolbox is a work in progress and will be changed and added to. If you have any thoughts, ideas or feedback I would love to hear from you. Please e mail me at shalsey@rweproject.org

Suggestion	How does it help?
Before a lesson	
<p>Policy and Procedure</p> <p>Think about your organisation's policies and procedures. Do you have clear guidance/training in areas such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trauma informed working? • Health and safety? • Equality and diversity? • Accessibility? • Safeguarding? • Incident management/Challenging behaviour? • Lone working (if applicable to your role)? • Working with people using substances? • Working with people who need support with physical or mental health? • Working with people with lower levels of literacy or who speak English as another language? 	<p>Trauma informed approaches should run throughout an organisation, including being reflected by policy and procedure. It is importance to acknowledge the role of policy and procedure in trauma informed working, as supporting staff, volunteers and learners and helping to create safe, welcoming environments.</p> <p>Among other things, policy and procedures should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Promote safety, inclusivity, accessibility and collaboration. -Give teachers a clear understanding of what is asked/expected of them in their roles and the support available to them. -Allow teachers the opportunity to ask questions about policy and procedure and identify areas for change/development. -Clarify the boundaries of different roles and support individuals to maintain these boundaries. -Promote person centred approaches and highlight the importance of collaboration with learners.

<p>Collaboration and building community. Do you have or can you build links with other services working with your learners, or who you could refer learners to for different types of support? Consider doing a mapping exercise of these services and finding out about referral routes. Could you invite feedback from other services about what would be helpful to include in your curriculum?</p>	<p>During the course of lessons learners may bring up different areas where they need advice or support. Being able to give learners information about other services that can help will help them to build connections in the wider community. Inviting input from other services, as well as learners themselves, into the curriculum helps to ensure that the content supports learners in the ways they need.</p>
<p>Safety and wellbeing Risk assessments-have these been carried out for the work you are doing? Are they up to date? Are you clear about the steps you may need to take in different situations? Do you know who you should/can go to for support if something unexpected or challenging comes up? Do you know the names/referral process of other services you can refer learners to if they need support with things outside the remit of your role?</p>	<p>Creating and maintaining safety is central to working in a trauma informed way. Effective risk/wellbeing assessments should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - show that safety is vital and thought has been given to this. - identify and mitigate potential risks but also identify opportunities for positive risk taking, within safe boundaries - discuss different types of safety (physical, emotional). - help teachers recognise the limits of their roles by identifying when and how to refer to other teams/organisations. - identify those who are available to support teachers and learners in difficult situations.
<p>Reliability and consistency Before starting classes consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the days and times classes will run and how regular they will be. Will anything interfere with this (e.g. room bookings)? - is there anything that might make it difficult for classes to be consistent? Can this be addressed? If not, consider if the classes should be taken forward. - what will be the process for informing learners if a class is cancelled or a teacher is going to be late? 	<p>Many people who have experienced trauma have a lot of difficulty trusting individuals and services. Reliable, consistent provision from the beginning is perhaps the most important part of the work. Building positive relationships and trust with learners is at the centre of trauma informed working. For this to happen we need to do what we say we will do, when we say we will do it.</p>

<p>Physical space. Familiarise yourself with the space you will be using. Think about room layout. How easy is it for learners or you to leave easily if needed? Is there enough space to feel comfortable? Is the décor appropriate? Is there any room for learners to be involved in the layout/decoration of the room?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Considerations of the physical space should be part of the risk assessment. -Helps to increase feelings of safety and create a welcoming environment. -Opportunities to give learners choice and control. -Discussion with learners encourages reflection and critical thinking skills.
<p>Check in with yourself. Notice how you are feeling before you start a lesson. Are you relaxed? Tense? Excited? Stressed? Think about how your energy might be communicated to and impact your learners. Try to be aware of this throughout the lesson. For example, if your patience is thinner than usual it's ok, acknowledge it and think about how you can avoid unintentionally acting it out in your lessons.</p>	<p>As teachers it's important to be aware of the energy we bring into a lesson and how we might communicate this to learners, sometimes without realising it.</p> <p>People who have experienced trauma can be very sensitive to non-verbal communication and it's important to keep in mind that behaviour is communication. Think about what our behaviour is communicating to our learners.</p>

<p>In the lesson</p>	
<p>Greet learners individually and by name as they come in. Have a 'check in' to ask how learners are.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Creates an opportunity for connection between teachers and learners and the learners as a group. -Can help to create feelings of safety and community. -Encourages learners to reflect on their emotional state and identify feelings.
<p>At the start of a course or a period of working together, discuss processes and procedures with learners including:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Gives a chance for connection as a group. -Encourages reflection and critical thinking skills. - Multiple ways to contact the teacher/organisation gives learners choice.

- How learners can communicate with you-if possible in multiple ways (by phone, by e mail, through support workers).
- What you and learners will/should do if you/they cannot attend or are late for a lesson
- What will happen if learners miss a lesson/multiple lessons.
- Safeguarding and confidentiality-be very clear about when you will need to share information that is shared with you and how this will be done, including how the learner can be involved.

Give this information in multiple ways if possible (verbally, in writing, in a WhatsApp voice note).

Problem solve with learners (what could you do if you can't come to class but have no credit on your phone? What could you do if you're running late for class? What could you do to remind you of your lesson each week?).

Discuss how technology can be used to help memory (e.g. alarms on phones to remind about lessons).

Put together a group agreement with learners. You might ask learners to think about:

- What helps them feel safe/comfortable in class?
- What helps them learn?
- What would they ask of others in the class?
- What might annoy them in lessons/make learning difficult?

- Gives clarity on the procedures of the organisation. Learners will know what will happen in different situations.
- Having information to refer back to is helpful for memory and allows learners to return to it in their own time.
- Giving information in multiple ways means learners have choice over how to access it and makes it more accessible for people with lower levels of literacy or English language.
- Encourages learners to problem solve which supports executive functioning.

- Gives learners the opportunity to reflect on what they want/need in the class.
- Gives opportunity for discussion and possibly sharing of experiences, opinions and feelings.
- Supports a sense of community and shared responsibility for the wellbeing of the group.

<p>After a process of discussion and reflection, decide the points you all feel should be in the group agreement and write this up. Have it on display in lessons and if possible give learners a copy to keep. Revisit and revise as time goes on.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Shows learners that their voices and opinions are important and valid. -Gives all members of the class something to refer back to if something happens in class they are not happy about.
<p>Make learners aware they can take a break from lessons if they need to and how they can let you know if they need to step out.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Can help to create feelings of safety. -Give learners a choice of actions they can take if feeling overwhelmed.
<p>Consider talking to learners in lessons in simple terms about how our brains work and how stress can impact learning. This can be coupled with introducing relaxation activities into lessons (see below).</p>	<p>Learners may already know this but if not we are sharing information that may help them better understand some of their learning patterns and behaviours. This may reassure learners that some of their behaviours in the classroom (and outside) are natural responses to their experiences.</p>
<p>Consider embedding mindfulness/grounding activities at the beginning of lessons. Give learners choice about whether to take part in this. This could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grounding activities (such as the 5,4,3,2,1 activity) • Simple art activities (simple origami, doodling, dot to dot). • Listening to a piece of music. • Bringing in nature (stepping outside, looking at pictures of nature, watching short clips of nature videos (BBC has great clips of their Autumnwatch and Springwatch programmes). You could combine this with a sensory activities (what can learners see and hear?). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Introduces a fun/creative element into lessons. -Supports emotional regulation. -Can help dampen the limbic system (emotional brain) to support relaxation and calming and enable the pre frontal cortex (thinking brain) to come online. -Learners can try techniques in lessons that they can use in everyday life. -Can be a different way of practicing language points/exploring prior language knowledge.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities involving movement or rhythms (for example throwing a ball to one another which could be combined with a vocabulary recall activity). <p>Be mindful that activities that focus attention inward or on the body (for example breathing exercises) can be triggering for some learners. Outward facing activities can be safer.</p>	
<p>Offer choice where possible, however small. For example</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • where would people would like to sit. • agree with the group if they would like a break and when. • Give choices of which activities to do in what order, where practical/possible (for example, if you have a reading and listening activity, could you have a vote on which to do first?). <p>Ask for learners' ideas for the curriculum and lesson content. What do they want/need in terms of their learning. Ask suggestions for classroom layout and decoration.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Gives learners an element of choice and control in lessons. -Encourages collaboration between teacher and learners in terms of lesson planning and content. -Encourages reflection and critical thinking.
<p>Encourage learners to make notes and give handouts that they can refer back to, to remind them of what you've done in class. Use visuals where possible.</p> <p>Revisit what was covered last week at the beginning of the lesson. Use prompts to support learners' recall. Revisit previous learning points in different contexts to consolidate learning.</p>	<p>Trauma can impact memory. Not being able to remember what was covered in previous lessons may cause learners additional stress. As well as helping with memory, these approaches support other skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Note taking is a skill and encourages learners to take control over their learning.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Notes/handouts give learners something to refer to at a later date and support independent study. -Recapping at the start of a lesson helps to orient learners in terms of time (what we did last week, today we are moving onto...). Also encourages recall and sequencing (first we talked about this, then we did that) and helps to consolidate learning.
<p>Think about how you give instructions. If there are multiple steps to an activity, break down instructions. (e.g. Turn to page 5 (pause), look at the picture (pause), write down 5 things you can see. Monitor and when finished 'talk to your partner about your ideas').</p> <p>Consider writing instructions using bullet points when appropriate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduces likelihood of learners feeling overwhelmed. - Makes instructions clearer/more accessible. - Considers some learners may have difficulties remembering things.
<p>Depersonalise potentially triggering material. For example, if discussing language for family, discuss a fictional family. If you want to have a discussion about family give learners the option to talk about the fictional family instead of their own.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Can reduce the risk of learners being triggered or becoming distressed by speaking about difficult personal information. -Can help learners to maintain feelings of safety, as speaking about their own situation/experiences may feel too distressing/exposing. - Can help teachers to feel more comfortable covering potentially difficult material, as it can be done in a way less likely to cause distress.
<p>Include activities that appeal to different learning styles, especially those that involve movement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -May make learning more accessible and increases the chances of learners enjoying lessons. May also help learners to identify what helps them to learn most effectively.

<p>Include opportunities for pair, group and individual work. Think about how you will work with learners who may be reluctant or refuse to work with others.</p> <p>Include opportunities for fun, creativity and play (in an age-appropriate way). These could be quizzes, games, online research projects, using art/music/drama/role play in lessons.</p>	<p>-Pair and group work encourages interaction and connection among learners. Independent learning gives learners space to think and work on their own. Both of these areas may present different challenges for learners, so take things slowly if needed.</p>
<p>Manage expectations kindly- for example if learners ask for extra work, or support with something that is not part of your role, be clear about what you can and cannot do ('I can't set you extra work every week but I can give you the name of a book/send you a link to a website with some great activities.').</p> <p>Recognise and name the positivity in what they have asked ('It's great that you want to do more study at home.').</p> <p>Make sure you carry through with commitments you make.</p>	<p>Showing learners that you are reliable and dependable is a key part of building positive relationships. Communicating clearly what you can and cannot do and carrying through on commitments key.</p> <p>Having clear boundaries to your role is important for your wellbeing. Referring learners to other services increased their support network and is an important part of collaborative working with other services.</p>

After the lesson	
<p>Take some time to reflect. This might be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking time alone to think about the lesson and perhaps making notes of things you notice. • Completing a reflection journal or worksheet. • Speaking to a colleague about the lesson. • Attending group or 1-1 reflective practice. <p>When reflecting you may want to think about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesson content-which activities went well or not so well, what did learners seem to enjoy/not enjoy as much? • Individual learners-did you notice anything about specific learners during the lesson? • Anything challenging or particularly positive that came up in the lesson. • Group dynamics and power structures. • Behaviour is communication-what was communicated by behaviour rather than words today? • Your interactions with learners and the group as a whole-what did you bring to the lesson? • What you would change/keep the same if delivering the same lesson again. • What did/do you need following this lesson? Have any training needs/areas for support come up for you? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reflecting enables us to continue learning, to identify areas of strength and things we would like to do differently. -Reflecting with others gives us an opportunity to hear and give different perspectives on the way we and others work. It also helps to remind us that we cannot have all the answers and should not think that we do. -Sometimes difficult or challenging things can arise in lessons, particularly in situations where we are supporting people with language to share their experiences. We may need emotional support following particular lessons, as well as space to reflect on how we have responded to difficult or challenging situations.



Over to you-make some notes below of your own ideas.



Suggestion	How does it help?