



TRANSFORM



# Trauma-Informed Practice for VET Practitioners

**Creating Supportive Learning  
Environments**

BY Meath Partnership

# Check in activity

Name and share a recent small positive experience or success you've had, either personally or professionally



Pre evaluation form to be filled



# Trauma

“Trauma is not what happens to you but what happens inside you”

— Gabor Maté, The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness and Healing in a Toxic Culture



# Defining Trauma

Individual Trauma: Results from harmful or life-threatening events, leading to long-term effects on emotional, physical, and mental health (SAMHSA, 2014).

Or

Trauma is a physiological and psychological response to any deeply upsetting or threatening situation.

## **The Three E's of Trauma:**

- Event: The traumatic incident(s).
- Experience: How the individual interprets and assigns meaning to the event.
- Effect: The lasting impact on the individual's well-being.

# Types of Trauma

## Shock Trauma (Single-Event):

- e.g., car accidents or natural disasters.

## Interpersonal Trauma (Complex Trauma):

- Repeated or ongoing threats, including abuse and violence. This is often more damaging and common.

## Collective Trauma:

- Experiences shared by communities, such as homelessness, racism, war, or displacement, often passed down intergenerationally.

# Types of Trauma Events

Examples of Traumatic Events:

- o Accidents (e.g., car crashes, fires)
- o Natural Disasters (e.g., floods, earthquakes)
- o Violence (e.g., community violence, terrorism)
- o Abuse (e.g., emotional, physical, sexual)
- o Grief (e.g., loss of loved ones)

Trauma is not always visible; it may remain hidden and unaddressed, making it important to recognize behavioural cues.

# Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

ACEs: Childhood adversities (e.g., abuse, neglect, family dysfunction) linked to negative outcomes such as mental health issues, substance use, and low educational attainment.

No Universal Response: Not everyone exposed to ACEs will experience the same outcomes; individual responses depend on factors such as resilience and access to support.

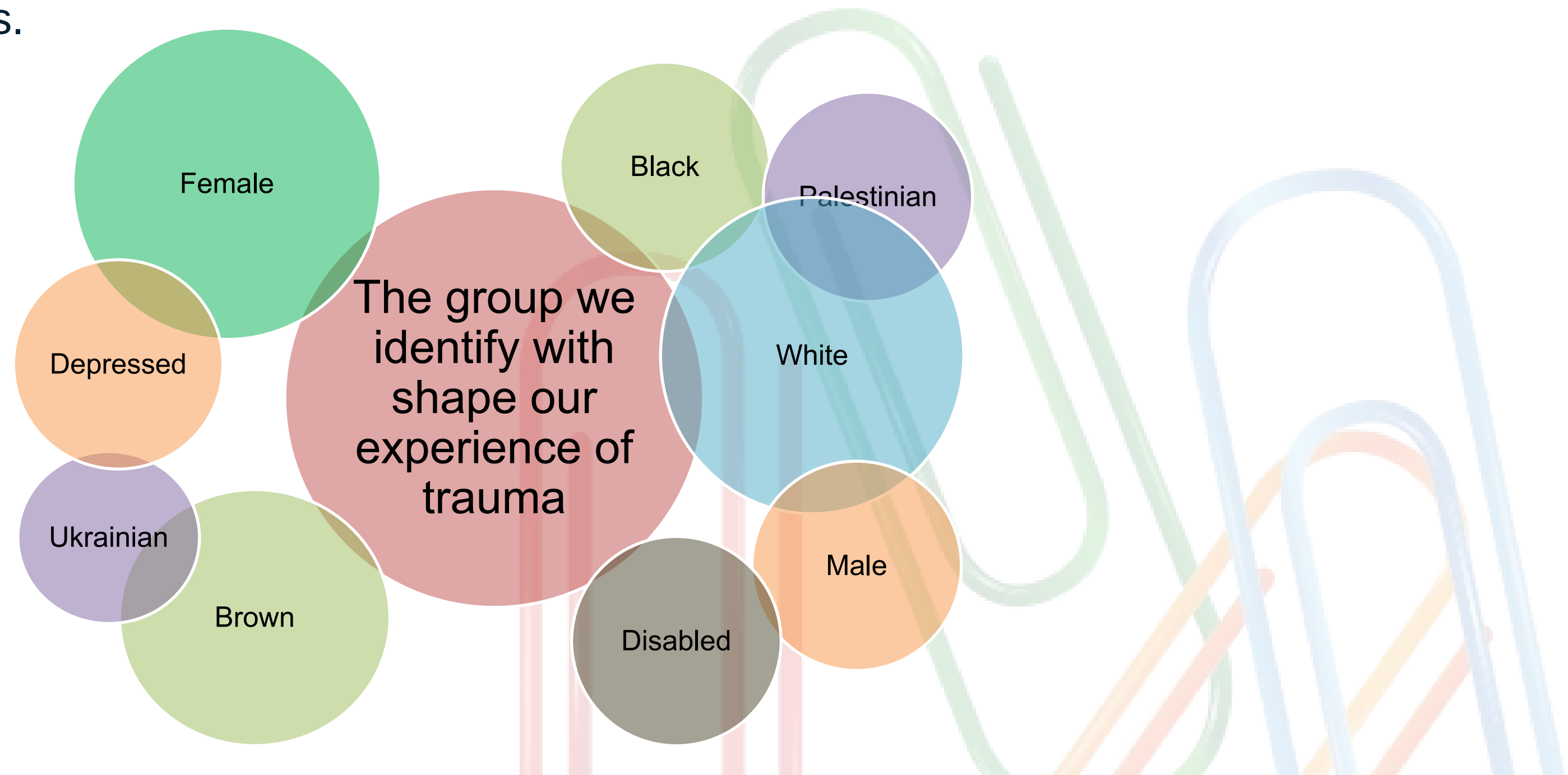
Felitti et al. (1998): "The Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults."



# Trauma in Different Contexts

## Cultural and Socioeconomic Influences:

- Trauma can affect anyone regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background.
- The way trauma is experienced and expressed can be influenced by cultural norms and socioeconomic status.



# Collective and Intergenerational Trauma

- Social Inequities: Poverty, racism, sexism, and systemic oppression often contribute to collective trauma, with lasting effects that can be passed down through generations.
- Impacts on Learning: Children affected by collective trauma may feel disconnected, struggle academically, or exhibit behavioural issues stemming from their trauma.

# Trauma's Hidden Effects

Trauma's effects may remain hidden for years, manifesting later in life as:

- o Chronic health problems.
- o Substance abuse.
- o Mental health disorders.

*It's crucial to approach every learner with the understanding that they may have experienced trauma, even if not immediately visible.*

# Trauma's Hidden Effects

“Not all addictions are rooted in abuse or trauma, but I do believe they can all be traced to painful experience. **A hurt is at the centre of all addictive behaviours.** It is present in the gambler, the Internet addict, the compulsive shopper and the workaholic. The wound may not be as deep and the ache not as excruciating, and it may even be entirely hidden—but it's there. As we'll see, the effects of early stress or adverse experiences directly shape both the psychology and the neurobiology of addiction in the brain.”

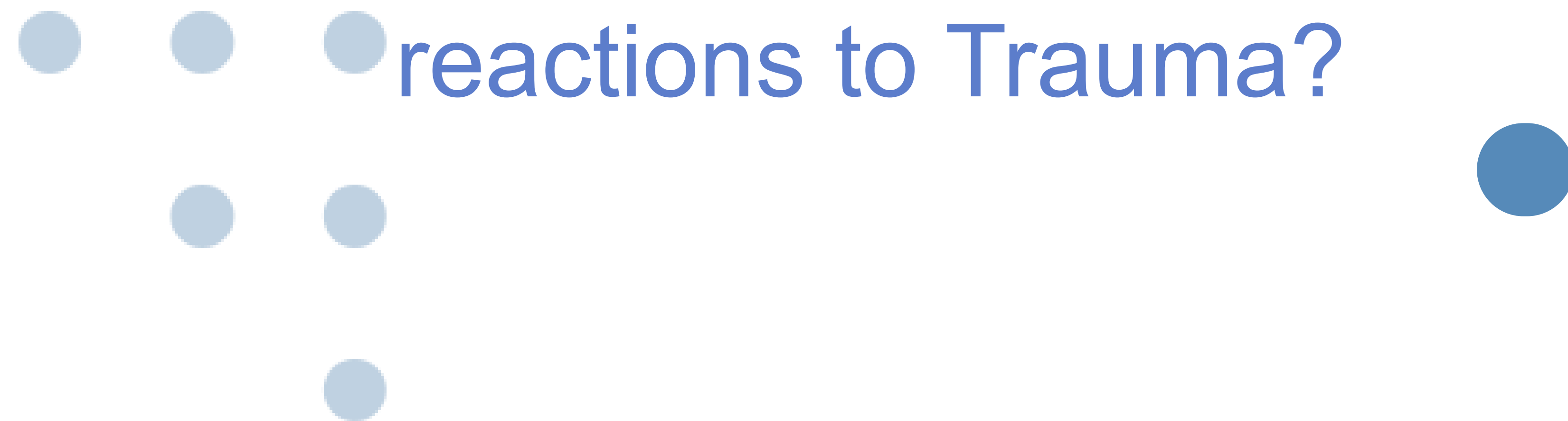
— Gabor Mate, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction*



- How does intergenerational trauma appear in a society?
- How does trauma impact different communities within a socio-economic context?

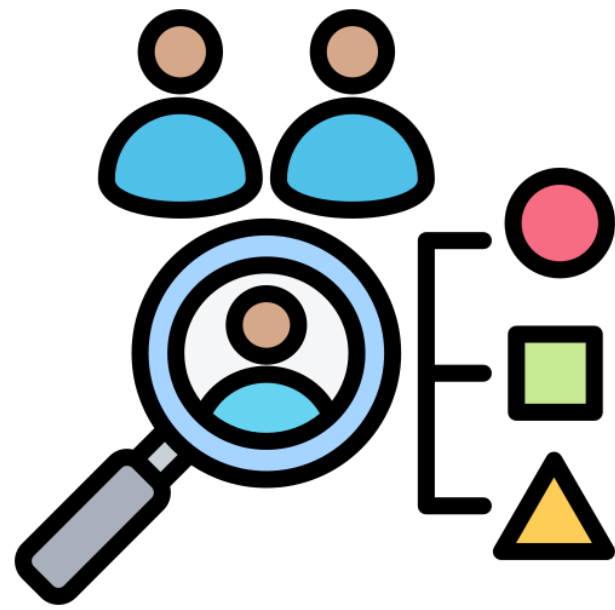


# What are some common reactions to Trauma?



# Neurobiological Response to Trauma: Polyvagal Theory

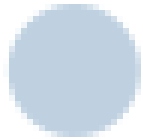
- Fight, Flight, or Freeze: When the body detects danger, the stress response system kicks in, triggering physical reactions.
- Unprocessed Trauma: Trauma can become "frozen" in the body, leading to chronic stress responses even when the danger has passed.
- Window of Tolerance: Children exposed to trauma may have a narrower ability to regulate emotions, leading to hyper- or hypo-arousal.



# Case studies

Understanding Trauma and Its Impact:

Personal Experiences and Survival Responses





# The Impact of Trauma on Learning

- Hyper-Arousal: Emotional outbursts, panic, or rage.
- Hypo-Arousal: Withdrawal, dissociation, lack of motivation.
- Cognitive Impact: Trauma can interfere with attention, memory, and processing, leading to disengagement or poor performance.



## Group A

What are sources of trauma/toxic stress for young people?

## Group B

How do you know when your students are experiencing stress? What does it look, sound and feel like?

# Protective Factors Against Trauma

As important as understanding trauma is recognising the factors that buffer against its impact.

Parental resilience.

Supportive relationships  
(teachers, peers).

Access to mental  
health resources.

Developing coping  
skills (e.g.,  
mindfulness,  
emotional  
regulation)

# The Role of Healthy Relationships in Healing

- Healing from Trauma: Research shows that the most important factor in recovering from trauma is having a network of healthy, supportive relationships.
- Relationship-Centered Practice: Establish safety, trust, and reciprocity in relationships with learners.

Reference: Perry, B.D. & Szalavitz, M. (2006): "The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog: And Other Stories from a Child Psychiatrist's Notebook."

# Introduction to Trauma informed practice



**Definition:** Trauma-informed practice is a framework that integrates knowledge of trauma's effects into teaching and interaction with learners.

**Purpose:** To create a safe, supportive, and empowering learning environment that minimises re-traumatisation and promotes healing.

# The Core Principles of Trauma-Informed Practice

- Safety: Creating a physically and emotionally safe environment.
- Trustworthiness and Transparency: Building trusting, reliable relationships with learners.
- Empowerment and Choice: Promoting learners' autonomy in decision-making.
- Collaboration: Working with learners as partners in their learning journey.
- Cultural Humility: Respecting and acknowledging diversity and identity.

# Teachers Are Not Therapists: Understanding our Role

Teachers should not assume the role of therapists, but they can provide emotional support to students.

**Teachers' Role:** Serve as caring, trusted figures who create a respectful and supportive classroom environment.

**Challenges:** Balancing emotional support with educational responsibilities, especially under pressure for measurable outcomes.

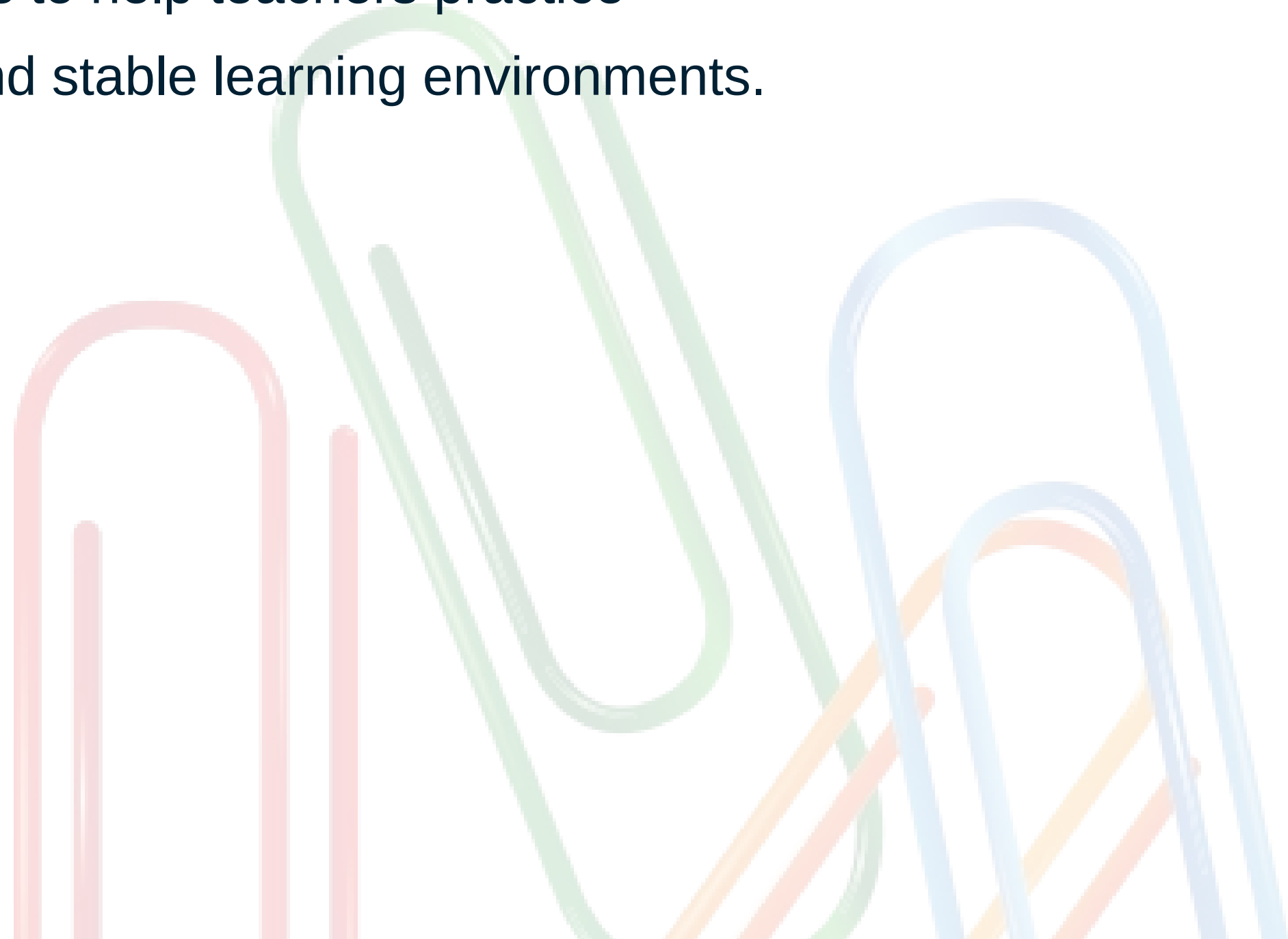
**Key Strategy:** Teachers can acknowledge and manage emotional moments in class, remaining present and calm without feeling the need to "fix" everything



# Practical approaches for Trauma informed practice

These are few practical, hands-on approaches to help teachers practice—proactively and responsively—creating safe and stable learning environments.

- 🕒 Classroom and Program Policies
- Classroom Environment
- 🕒 Rituals and Routines
- 🕒 Teaching Strategies
- 🕒 Using stressors as learning tools
- 🕒 Connecting to Community Resources







# Small group activity

Can you think of any strategies related to the principle of Trauma informed practice given to your group?

# Classroom Policies to Support Mental Health

**Guideline Creation:** Engage students in establishing classroom behaviour guidelines to create mutual respect and accountability.

**Ongoing Feedback:** Regularly check in with students about the class environment and teaching practices to ensure they feel supported and heard.

**Transparency in Policies:** Ensure students understand attendance, tardiness, and mental health-related policies through clear, accessible communication.

# Creating a Safe and Calming Classroom Environment

**Clear Pathways:** Ensure visibility and easy exit from all seating areas to promote safety, especially for students with traumatic backgrounds.

**Rest Areas:** Provide quiet spaces for students to de-stress, offering activities like journaling or listening to music.

**Fidgets:** Provide stress-relieving objects like stress balls to help students stay focused during learning.

# Incorporating Routines and Rituals

**Opening Rituals:** Consistent activities like breathing exercises, "worry bowls," or a question of the day help students transition into learning mode.

**Movement Breaks:** Integrate stretches and physical activities mid-class to regulate energy and reduce stress.

**Transparency:** Always communicate the day's goals and agenda to create predictability and reduce anxiety.

# Stress Management Strategies in Teaching

**Breathing Exercises:** Teach students deep breathing techniques to help manage stress during class or exams.

**Guided Meditation:** Introduce short, calming meditation sessions to promote relaxation and focus.

**Positive Affirmation:** Use activities like affirmation boxes or mandalas to encourage self-reflection and mental well-being.

# Using Student Stressors as Learning Tools

**Exploring Stress:** Integrate discussions about stress and its effects on learning into science, health, or writing lessons.

**Student-Led Activities:** Use activities like stress mapping or journaling to allow students to identify and explore their own stressors.

**Choice in Assignments:** Offer flexible topics for writing and sharing to avoid triggering trauma, such as asking students to describe a "favourite place" instead of painful past experiences.

# Addressing Triggers and Preventing Re-traumatisation

- Understanding Triggers:
  - o Certain classroom activities or settings may trigger trauma responses.



# Connecting Students to Resources

Community Resources: Teachers can help students by connecting them to local mental health and social services for more extensive support.

Resource Lists: Create a directory of nearby support services, turning it into a class project to build awareness.

Supportive Program Policies: Ensure the program provides clear policies on absenteeism and mental health accommodations.







Can you think of any changes to better support trauma-affected learners and challenges in implementing changes?



# Gallery walk

**Post Charts:** Post your charts on assigned trauma-informed principles and proposed changes on the wall.

**Circulate & Review:** Participants walk around, review charts, and add ideas with sticky notes.

**Review Feedback:** Groups return to their chart, review feedback, and share key insights with the larger group.

# Retraumatisation

## What is Retraumatisation?

- It occurs when a teacher's past experiences or traumas are triggered by situations in their professional environment.
- Common triggers include challenging pupil behaviours, high stress, or exposure to stories of trauma.

## Causes in Teaching Environments:

- **Overwhelming Workload:** Unrealistic expectations, lack of support, and constant pressure to meet targets.
- **Exposure to Trauma:** Hearing or witnessing pupils' traumatic experiences without adequate emotional support.
- **Unsafe or Unsupported Workplace:** Lack of recognition for teachers' mental health needs or limited access to resources.

# Retraumatisation

## **Signs of Retraumatisation:**

- Increased emotional exhaustion or burnout.
- Difficulty managing classroom stressors or heightened reactions to pupil behaviour.
- Feeling disconnected, helpless, or overly anxious.

## **Prevention Strategies:**

- **Self-Care Practices:** Prioritise mental health through regular breaks, mindfulness, or counselling.
- **Professional Support:** Access trauma-informed training and seek support networks among colleagues.
- **Boundaries:** Maintain professional boundaries to avoid emotional overinvestment.
- **Leadership Accountability:** Advocate for systems that support teachers' mental health and well-being.

## **Why It Matters:**

- Supporting teachers' mental health reduces burnout, improves classroom environments, and models resilience for pupils.



# Post Training Evaluation Form



# THANK YOU!

<https://transformproject.info/>

