

Trauma-Informed Classroom Routines: Regulation, Relationships, and Self-Awareness

This document will provide a brief overview and examples of three types of trauma-informed classroom routines: Regulation, Relationships, and Self-Awareness.

Regulation

Regulation refers to an individual's ability to manage and respond to emotions effectively.

Breathing Exercises

Breathing exercises are a self-regulation technique that helps individuals increase their awareness and slow their breathing. There are many variations and ways to practice Breathing Exercises.

Example 1: Belly Breathing

1. Sit or lie in a comfortable position.
2. Place hands on knees or belly, shoulders relaxed.
3. Inhale through your nose slowly to the count of five.
4. Feel your belly expand as you breathe in.
5. Breathe out slowly through your mouth to the count of five.
6. Repeat as necessary.

Example 2: Figure 8 Breathing

1. Print out a figure 8 or trace one on a surface (e.g., desktop, person's arm).
2. Individual places their finger in the center of the 8.
3. Individual traces their finger down the left side of the figure 8 and inhales.
4. Individual crosses their finger to the right side of the figure 8 and exhales.
5. Repeat as necessary.

Grounding Activities

Grounding activities are mindfulness strategies that encourage individuals to focus on the present while helping to regulate heightened emotions.

Example 1: Five Things

Look around you and identify and name:

1. 5 things you see
2. 4 things you feel
3. 3 things you hear
4. 2 things you smell
5. 1 thing you taste

Example 2: Stretching

1. Individual stands up.
2. Individual bends down and touches their toes.
3. Individual stands up and stretches up in the air.

Positive Self-Talk Strategies

Self-talk refers to the talk or thoughts one directs at oneself. Positive self-talk uses compassionate, affirming, and supportive talk and thoughts directed at oneself.

Example 1: Positive Reflection

Individuals are given a hand mirror and a list of positive thoughts and affirmations. Individuals then cut out and decorate their mirrors with positive thoughts and affirmations they have for themselves. Individuals are encouraged to practice reading the thoughts and affirmations aloud while looking at themselves in the mirror.

Example 2: Scripting

Individuals create and practice a script to recite to themselves that contains compassionate, affirming, and supportive talk and thoughts.

Relationships

Creating positive relationships with students helps teachers cultivate positive classroom environments. Relationship skills are also part of the [CASEL 5 Framework](https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/#relationship) (<https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/#relationship>).

Positive Greetings at the Door

- Greet the student at the door.
- Include the student's name.
- Have a positive interaction:
 - Example 1 - General positive interaction: "I am glad you are here today" or "I like your backpack."
 - Example 2 - A brief positive statement that communicates expectations: "It is nice to see you today, Tonya; please get your notebook and begin the activity on page 9."

Student and Family Surveys

The teacher can send home family surveys to ask caregivers about their child's strengths, challenges, and background information they may want to share to improve their student's classroom experience.

Student surveys can ask students to share personal information that they want to share about their interests, how they like being praised, and any home environment information that they may want to share.

These surveys equip the teacher to make connections and learn more about the students and families in their classrooms.

Morning Meetings or Classroom Check-Ins

Morning meetings or classroom check-ins are scheduled times designed for students to check in and share as a group intentionally. This gives students an opportunity to greet one another, connect, and share information to build stronger relationships.

Play Games

Team-building or problem-solving games can assist in critical thinking skills for students. In addition to creating fun, they assist in bonding and socialization that will aid in building relationships with students. Games can be done in small groups or collectively through mediums such as [Kahoot](http://www.kahoot.it) (www.kahoot.it).

Self-Awareness

CASEL defines self-awareness as the ability to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.

Feelings Identification

Creating a common language to identify and label emotions by staff and students can increase self-awareness. Examples include using a general emotions poster that labels feelings such as happy, sad, mad, etc., with a corresponding picture depicting the emotion. You can also create Feeling Zones. Feeling Zones identify groups of emotions and readiness for engagement in learning.

Feeling Zone Example:

Blue Zone

- Sad
- Sick
- Tired
- Bored
- Moving Slowly

Green Zone

- Happy
- Calm
- Feeling Okay
- Focused
- Ready to Learn

Yellow Zone

- Frustrated
- Worried
- Silly
- Excited
- Loss of Some Control

Red Zone

- Mad/Angry
- Scared
- Frustrated
- Disinterested
- Out of Control

Journaling

Journaling is a strategy that encourages students to express themselves while also practicing their reading and writing skills. Guided journaling provides meaningful prompts for students to write about and can help students explore and examine their inward thoughts and feelings, increasing their self-awareness.

Examples of guided journal prompts:

- What are some things that bring you joy?
- Describe a time you helped or were helped by a peer at school.
- What are some goals you have for this school year?
- What is something about yourself that you want others to know?

Teach and Explore the Connection Between Thoughts, Feelings, and Actions

Thoughts, feelings, and actions are connected. Helping students understand what thoughts, feelings, and actions can help them increase self-awareness and problem-solve in healthier ways.

Once students understand the connection, [Thoughts-Feelings-Actions worksheets](https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/cbt-for-kids) (https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/cbt-for-kids) can be used to deal with emotions and problem-solve as needed.

Example:

A student has a big test and is so worried that they cannot focus and study. They can be prompted to explore their thoughts, feelings, and actions connection. The thought (I'm going to fail the test) leads to the feeling (worry), which leads to the action (not studying). Students can be prompted to work through their thoughts to change their feeling and actions. The thought (I have passed many tests before) can lead to the feeling (hope/success), which leads to the action (ability to focus and study).

Michigan's MTSS Technical Assistance Center is funded by the Michigan Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.