

Relational EXCHANGE

Sharing trauma
informed practice
ideas and strategies
for the ACT's
early childhood
educators

Auditing our trauma responsive practice

Welcome

Welcome to our next blog piece for 2021, relating to trauma-informed practice for the ACT's early childhood education and care (ECEC) community.

These pieces will provide links to practice and questions for discussion that you might find useful in your work – particularly when reflecting on supporting and educating children who have experienced trauma, and their families.

Why Relational Exchange?

We have called this blog 'Relational Exchange' for two reasons. Firstly, because this reflects the importance of connection through relationship that underpins both child development and repair or healing from the impacts of trauma. The nature or quality of the relational exchanges we engage with children and their families are critical. And every relational exchange provides an opportunity for understanding and an opportunity for repair.

Secondly, because this can provide an opportunity for an exchange of ideas amongst early childhood educators and other professionals. The topics explored here and the discussion questions presented will provide you with opportunities for reflection and exploration across your team, your site or centre, your networks and the broader communities of practice.

Auditing our own practice

One of the misconceptions about trauma responsive practice is that it is all something new and means we have to completely overhaul our practice. While that might be true for some professionals, for the majority of us trauma responsive practice reflects a lot of what we are already doing and can even validate somethings that feel challenging to us. In many instances, trauma responsive practice is actually just good practice!

This blog introduces an audit tool you can use for yourself and/or for your team to review what you are already doing, where you might need to fill a gap as well as building a plan for key actions. The article itself also poses some questions to use in conjunction with the tool to continue your developmental journey toward truly trauma responsive practice.

Please note: It is strongly suggested that you complete the online training program and view one or two webinars prior to using the audit tool as it requires a solid understanding of the neurobiology of trauma to most effectively use it. There will also be a webinar available to view to reinforce the content of this blog article.

Introducing the tool

On the front of the tool you will see that each of the elements of the PRACTICE framework are delineated. There is also different application groups outlined. This is asking us to consider the application of trauma responsive practice with individual children, small groups of children, across the whole room or group, with the staff team, with families and across the centre or site as a whole. The tool asks you to consider, and record, what you are already doing in each of these areas. Don't worry if you can't put something in every box – that is part of the purpose of using the tool!

Questions to consider

As a reminder and summary of each element we have provided some questions to consider to start the audit process. of course, these are not the only possible questions but provide a starting point for reflection and discussion.

P - Predictable

- What do we do to build routines across the centre?
- Do we always prepare children, and families, for what is coming up next or for new or unexpected events?
- How do we support children when a staff member is away – planned or unexpectedly?

- What different ways do we communicate our routines? Eg: pictures, verbal reminders, songs, stories, etc.

R – Responsive

- What are the specific strategies we use to maintain relationships even while managing behaviour?
- Do we all understand the rupture and repair cycle of responding to behaviour?
- How do we describe behavioural expectations within each group or room? Do we frame it positively or punitively?
- Do we praise positive behaviour in ways that children can tolerate as we understand that too much praise may be too hard for them to hear because their sense of self that is often defined by shame?

A – Attuned

- How do we track and record the children's emotional state?
- What do we do if we identify patterns of emotional response that could be trauma triggers?
- How do we support each other as a staff team to understand our own emotional states or need for support?
- How do we track our families' emotional states to best be able to support them?

C - Connecting

- How do we help children build understanding of the physiology of their emotions?
- How do we help children to either increase or decrease the intensity of their emotional states, depending on whether they like or don't like that emotional state?
- How do we build connecting body to feelings in the every day activities of each group or room?

T – Translating

- How do we record each child's time with us in a way that we can share with the child?
- How often do we review that record during the child's time with us?
- How do we help families to connect to their children's time with us?

I – Involving

- How do we support children to build friendships?
- How do we help children to understand everyone's differences?
- How do we provide safe connections for children in our centre?
- How do we integrate our understanding of the sequence of developing the capacity to play into our programs and activities?

C – Calming

- How do we build a sensorily calm environment that meets the needs of each child?
- How do we understand what works for each child to help them to experience calm, and the safety that underpins it?
- How do we enable calm for ourselves, including through wellbeing and self-care?
- How do we support families to experience calm in their time in our centre?

E – Engaging

- How do we identify the key adult relationships for each child in our centre?
- Have we defined the qualities of relationships that are most important for us to apply in our interactions with children and families?
- How do we support each other relationally?
- How do we build relational safety across our centre?

Areas for further consideration

On the second page of the tool you will see some broad questions for planning for the staff team to consider. Each one then has a broad area of practice to address this issue. These suggestions for further consideration can add to the identified actions and strategies already in place and identified through the PRACTICE review. It can also provide a starting point for addressing any areas where you – as an individual or a member of the staff team – would like to work on in more detail to enhance your capacity to provide trauma responsive practice.

Where to from here?

You might like to reflect on – or discuss with your colleagues – your responses to the following questions:

- Could you use this tool as an individual professional?
- Would an audit of your PRACTICE be a useful first step in the developmental journey or is it better 'down the track'?
- What would be the first thing you would change?
- What is your area of greatest success in terms of providing trauma responsive practice?