

# Trauma-Sensitive Classroom Activities Across the Grades

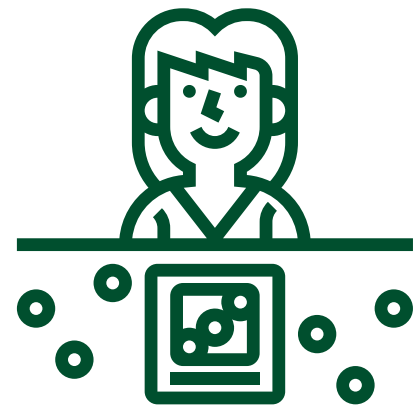
## Kindergarten to Grade 3

### 1) Trauma-Sensitive Content

Talking about trauma and adverse childhood experiences with students at this age is a demanding task for teachers. Most researchers discourage directly teaching about things such as trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as doing so may be a source of re-traumatization. However, teachers can provide opportunities to engage in social-emotional learning activities that support students' capacities to stay regulated, ask questions, and feel confident and proud. Using social-emotional learning activities such as social-emotional bingo, proactive self-regulation activities, and other teacher-facilitated games can start the process of children/youth learning about their unique experiences, and developing healthy and trusting relationships.

#### **Social-emotional bingo (SEB):**

- Educators can provide students with a game of bingo that utilizes emojis or other images that characterize emotions, instead of using words. Teachers will then draw from the bingo pool of emotions and state them aloud instead of describing the image on the students' sheet. Students will then be able to have an opportunity to match described emotions to the image (or emoji) on their bingo sheet. When students are unsure which image matches the description, teachers can provide an example by manifesting the emotion themselves. This can help students learn to identify their emotions as well as those of their peers. The students can make their own bingo cards for use. Alternatively, there are many online resources for teachers to use when facilitating this activity. Conversation during this game could revolve around questions like “What makes you feel this way?”, “When does someone show this face?”, etc.



### Self-regulation activity:

- Teachers can provide free time, followed by a yoga-like calm down activity. This type of activity can provide students with the opportunities to exhibit and release emotions before beginning class by going through a set of calming activities where breathing is used to settle before instruction time. This provides educators with a fun way to help students practice coping strategies. An example of this would be three “yoga poses” that can be completed sitting or standing that incorporate guided breathing with a teacher as a means to achieve regulation. This technique can also be used after more high-paced in-school activities such as returning from gym class before engaging in seated instruction.



### Facilitated games:

Games where patience is a necessary component, such as turn-based games (ex: Uno), can provide students the opportunity to exercise their patience in a teacher-facilitated setting. This also helps the child develop appropriate behaviours when playing with peers.



## 2) Locomotor Activities

Teachers can start class with a routine stretch or set of bodily movements that allow the children to regulate their bodies before sitting and preparing for lecture times. This could involve a set of yoga poses, flexing and unflexing of the muscles, or quick aerobic exercise on the spot. While engaging with this exercise, teachers can explain the mental benefits that go hand in hand with physical movement. This aids in teaching young students the effects that physical activity and loco-motor movement have on their minds and abilities to focus. Choosing locomotor activities suited to the ages and abilities of all students in the class is one way to infuse trauma-sensitivity into the experience. Another way is to understand the mind-body connection and to support students to practice those connections.

### 3) A Picture of My Day

In this activity, teachers can ask students to use art to describe how their day, morning class, week, etc. have gone. Teachers can provide students with a selection of art supplies with no limitations. This exercise can provide students with an opportunity for self-reflection. This also gives teachers an opportunity to survey the room and see who is struggling amidst their self-reflection. Not all students will want to participate, and these moments will give educators insight into why they do not want to engage in this activity.

#### Grades 4 to 8

### 1) Self-Compassion Writing Exercise

In this activity, teachers can instruct students to write a letter to someone they care about (such as a family member or a friend or themselves). They can imagine this individual is going through a hard time, and their words of compassion can make the individual in question feel better about themselves and/or their situation. After completion, teachers can instruct the students to read the letter again, but using their name in place of the person to whom they had originally written. This gives students an opportunity to practice positive self-talk in writing form while allowing them to reflect on the emotions they feel when describing themselves in a positive light.

### 2) Role-Playing Activities

Supporting students to be metacognitively aware of their more instinctive responses and reactions can support their development of healthy ways of interacting with others. Example: A student suspects another student has taken something of theirs. Instead of aggressive confrontation or any form of escalation, a role-play of the appropriate responses such as the student asking the other about the missing item, collecting their answer, and if still in doubt, can report the item as missing to the teacher while explaining where they think it has gone, can later be drawn upon in a time of crisis.



For all references and more information please see the full report