



# Helping Children Deal With Stress & Trauma

## 1. Safe Harbor

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### Understand the concept of “secure base.”

- Stay close by. *I can see you are trying to figure out that new puzzle. This is a new room; I will hold you for awhile longer.*
- Do what you say you will. *I will be done in 3 minutes. Let's set the timer. I will be here when you wake up.*

### Predictable schedule and routines.

- Post chart of daily routines: snack, naptime, meals, recess. *Remember after nap is snack time and then we will go outside.*
- Organized environment—toy shelves are labeled; everything has a place.

### Keep environment safe.

- Reinforce safety

## 2. Self-Regulation & Calming Strategies

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### Use common approach to calm down.

*Calm down. Stop. Breathe. Count.*

- Build a common language to verbalize and manage thoughts, feelings and emotions. *I can see you have some ‘big feelings’ today. Let's go to the ‘calm down box.’ Would you like some ‘calm down’ toys?*
- Talk about feelings and what to do. *You are angry that your friend took your toy, what should we do next?*

### Encourage comfort items.

- Calm down toys—stress ball, pinwheels, sunglasses, stuffed animals. *Do you want to bring your blanket to the dentist today?*

### Create a physical calm down space within each classroom.

### Encourage art, play, and music as outlets for expressing fears and other emotions.

- Self regulation games—*Hokey Pokey; Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes*
- Books that show ways to handle emotions—*The Terrible, Horrible No Good, Very Bad Day* or *The Little Engine that Could*

## 3. Consistent & Responsive Caregivers

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### Attunement

- Accurately and empathically understand and respond to children's actions, communications, needs and feelings. *I can see you need a little more time to say good-bye. I will stay a few more minutes.*
- Learn child's likes and dislikes. Match activities to skills and interest. *I know you love dinosaurs and we got a new book you might like.*
- Respond quickly and appropriately.
- Physically and emotionally available. *I will rub your back until you go to sleep.*
- Focused and engaged. *This toy is broken so I'm throwing it away so no one gets hurt. No throwing blocks. I need to keep the block area safe for everyone to play. This is a safe place. I will be here with you.*

## 4. Positive Guidance & Support

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**Observe and read cues.** *I see you turning your head away from the food. Are you all done? I hear your angry voice, tell me more.*

- Observe play. *Look for repetitive play or drawing about traumatic event.*

### Observe child's behavior to figure out his emotional needs & help organize his feelings.

- Look for the unmet emotional needs. *I can see you are sad today. Want to put some words to your tears?*
- Time in, rather than time out. *Seems like you need a hug today. Would you like to come sit on my lap?*
- Fill up their cup. Delight in. *Wow! You did it all by yourself!*
- Acknowledge strengths and effort. *You worked really hard. Seems like you really enjoyed painting that picture.*
- Help organize their feelings. *You are angry that your friend took your toy, what should we do next? You are crying and rubbing your eyes, I think you are feeling tired.*

**Use a trauma lens.** *I wonder what happened that she would respond like that?*

- Support child's unique needs. *I can see that it's hard for you to sit still today; would you like to stand beside me?*
- Provide safe and loving limits. *No biting. It hurts. It's not safe to run. Hold my hand.*
- Model trust, emotional regulation and empathy. *I'm really frustrated; I'm going to take a minute to calm down. I wonder how she feels when you say that?*
- Knowing when and who to call for help.

#### Sources:

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2. Devereux Center for Resilient Children. (2013). *Your Journey Together...Building the Resilience of Children and Families in the Child Welfare System*. Available at <http://www.centerforresilientchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/YJT-Info-Packet-May-2014.pdf>
3. Blaustein, M.E. & Kinniburgh, K. (2011). *Treating Traumatic Stress in Children and Adolescents: How to Foster Resilience through Attachment, Self-Regulation, and Competency*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.