

Supporting Students with Social Emotional Learning and Trauma Response

Social Emotional Learning and Trauma Responsive Care opens doors to healing and academic success for our young learners. Sometimes we think of these resources only when children display challenging behaviors or when we have a child who is developing at a different pace than their peers. It's important to remember that ALL children have mental health needs, and you have a special role in promoting every child's social and emotional wellbeing. Research shows that Social Emotional Learning increases academic outcomes. Social Emotional Learning and Trauma Responsive Care also offer typically developing students an enhanced social and academic experience. Consider that challenging behaviors can actually be caused by trauma or a social emotional developmental delay. It's also important to keep in mind that not all children who have experienced trauma exhibit behavioral challenges; some withdraw and hide the pain they have experienced. Consider implementing these tips in your classroom and watch ALL your children achieve.

Social Emotional Tips for Teachers:

Build relationships: Start each day with some type of check-in with an individual greeting, sign-in chart, or discussion question. It's important for each child to know you care and value their presence.

Encouragement/Affirmation: Use positive and supportive language throughout the day. For example, "You look frustrated. How can I help?"

"I like the way you are working together to build the tower." "Wow! Nice work, you look very pleased." "I am so proud of you; do you feel proud of yourself?"

Books, Books, Books: Fill your library with multiple social-emotional books and read them with your students. Encourage children to use feeling words by reading stories that use feeling words.

Safe Space: Create a calm down area (chill out zone/zen den) for children to express their big emotions. Use sensory toys, books, and emotion charts to help children calm down and talk about their feelings.

Plan ahead: Identify alternative ways children can release negative emotions and teach these skills right from the start. For example, "It's not okay to hit our friends, but you can rip this newspaper, squeeze this playdough, etc."

Model: Model the behavior you want to see. Children do what we do! Children learn how to manage and express their emotions by watching how you manage and express your emotions!

Trauma Response Tips for Teachers:

Big Picture: Look beyond the behavior for what is really happening and why.

Reframe your Thinking: Instead of thinking "What's wrong with you?" try thinking "What happened to you?" AND instead of "They're just seeking attention," try thinking "They're seeking a connection or relationship."

Remain Calm: Leave your frustration at the door. Communicating kindness and empathy is vital, especially when managing behavior and redirecting.

It's Not Personal: Children's behavior is never personal to you; it is always about their experience and their limited tools that help them deal with stress and disappointment. Remember that they are still learning how to express emotions and interact with others.

Right Brain Thinking: Children think with their right brain. The right brain is the describing brain, and the left brain is the explaining brain. Describe what you see children doing, feeling, or saying instead of asking them to explain.

Teach to the child: Meet children where they are. This is different for every child, so the fewer expectations on your part, the better they're able to grow and learn at their own pace.

Connection BEFORE

Redirection: Before redirecting a child's inappropriate behaviors, be sure to make a positive connection with the child. Be consistent as this helps children feel safe with you.

For additional information, visit:

[Georgia SEEDS for Success—DECAL Inclusion and Behavior Support Specialists](#) are available for support.

[Resource Links for Teachers related to Social-Emotional Learning & Trauma Awareness](#)

Center Time Tips and Tricks

- At the beginning of the year, open centers/learning areas gradually. Use small group time as an opportunity to establish rules and demonstrate how to use learning area materials.
- Ensure all learning materials and centers are labeled and organized.
- Look for ways to involve the children in center maintenance by cleaning paint brushes, restocking paper, checking centers at clean-up time, etc.
- Post photos of the center at its best, so children have an example as they clean. This may be especially helpful in blocks.
- As you interact with children during center time, facilitate learning by asking open-ended questions. For example, "Tell me about the blocks you are using." "Tell me about what you have created." "What would happen if you added one more block at the top of the tower?"
- Always work in the centers where there are the most students playing; this increases your impact on language and problem solving and decreases possible behavior issues.

Beginning of the Year Reminders

Environment

- The classroom learning environment should be child-friendly, inviting, and provide various levels of learning materials for the students to explore. Quiet and noisy learning areas should be separated. IQ Guide for the Learning Environment (Guidelines Appendix R) should be completed within the first 30 days of school.

Planning and Assessment

- IQ Guide for Planning Instruction (Guidelines Appendix T) should be completed within the first 30 days of school. Lesson Plans should be accessible daily and include all instructional components. The [Off to a Good Start \(OTAGS\)](#) lesson plans have been updated and include 12 weeks of lesson plans. (If you are using the OTAGS lesson plans, don't complete Appendix T until you begin writing your own lesson plans.)
- Small Group Instruction is defined as 2-8 children, which includes flexible grouping, differentiation/individual support, and independent activities.
- Working Sampling Online (WSO) will open on August 10th for teachers. IQ Guide for Assessment (Guidelines Appendix V) should be maintained throughout the school year and used as a guide to successfully implement WSO.
- Ensure that all necessary equipment such as a camera, iPad, and internet are in working order and accessible. You will need to update your password to access WSO. WSO information for the class and students can be retrieved from the director once student data has been entered into PANDA. Enter student information in WSO as it appears on the PANDA Roster.

Classroom Management

- Establish four to five classroom rules using simple, positive words with pictures and post at the children's eye level.
- Establish and implement a "Safe Place" in the classroom for students to remove themselves from the group to maintain self-control, calm down, etc. A safe place may be permanent or portable and should not be used as punishment. Teachers will need to teach and model how to use the protected space correctly.
- Provide students with opportunities to move their bodies frequently in the classroom. Four-year-old children need opportunities to get their "wiggles" out and should only be expected to sit/listen for short periods of time.
- Redirection should be quick, efficient, and gentle. Be proactive, consistent, and monitor. Use positive statements like "Use your walking feet."

Professional Development System

- Check your profile in GaPDS to ensure your email address and employment information is correct.

Establishing the Classroom Daily Schedule

The daily schedule should incorporate opening/closing activities, large group/small group activities, self-selected center time, meals/snack time, rest time, and outdoor play. Teachers should complete the IQ Guide for the Daily Schedule (Guidelines Appendix S) within the first 30 days of school and whenever any revisions are made to the daily schedule throughout the school year.

Learning may be initiated by the student or the teacher; however, there should be evidence of a healthy balance of teacher-directed and child-initiated activities in the Pre-K classroom.

Teacher-directed activities are those activities that are led by the teacher and those where the teacher has control of the lesson and materials. Some examples include opening and closing activities, large group instruction, and small group instruction.

Child-initiated learning occurs when children make decisions about what they want to do and what materials they will need. For example, during center time, one child may choose to work in the block area and build roads, while another student chooses to paint at the art easel.

When creating the schedule, be mindful of balancing teacher-directed and child-initiated activities. Remember, movement activities throughout the day enhance children's ability to learn by helping them stay focused and engaged.

It is critical for students to have a visual reminder of the order of events in their day. Develop a simple daily schedule for the beginning of the school year using clip art or other symbols for nonreaders. After a few weeks, replace the clip art or symbols with actual photos of the children engaged in the individual activities. For example, you may use photos of children arriving in the morning, eating meals and snacks, engaging in

worktime, outdoor activities, and so on.

Establish a system to mark the schedule to display the current activity in which children are participating. You may consider attaching Velcro dots to each section and placing a symbol on the dot as they move throughout the day. You may also use a clip or colorful clothespin. It is important that the children be able to manipulate the schedule because it helps them acquire basic concepts of time in a very concrete way. This visual schedule also helps establish the daily routine and allows the children to know what comes next.

