

BC Safe Haven Language Curriculum Training: Building Compassionate Learning Communities through Trauma-Informed Teaching Practices

Why are Trauma-Informed Practices important in BC Safe Haven classes?

- About 1 in 3 refugees and asylum seekers experience high rates of depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD). - [BC Refugee Hub](#)
- Refugee claimants may experience trauma in pre-migration (war, violence, persecution), during migration (displacement, loss of loved ones, refugee camps) and settlement (discrimination, fear of deportation, loss of connection and identity) phases of their journeys - [AMSSA](#)
- When teachers working with students who have experienced trauma do *not* have an understanding of trauma’s impacts on learning, there is a risk of re-traumatization.
- To help our students “move beyond merely coping with trauma and explore their own resiliency and positive transformative changes that can occur beyond trauma — allowing positive emotional growth and a greater sense of well-being.” – [Diana Jeffries, PIRS](#)

What does it mean to be Trauma-Informed?

*“Trauma-informed practice involves the long-term work of transforming schools into **compassionate learning communities**. Trauma-informed is **not about doing more** in the classroom and community but rather, **about doing things differently**.” - [My Training BC](#)*

Being Trauma-Informed is:	Being Trauma-Informed is not :
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treating clients as rich, complex individuals capable of growth & recovery • An injury framework (“What happened to this person?”) • Doing things <i>differently</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Being sensitive to trauma; avoiding re-traumatization ○ Asking, “What can I do to help?” • Strength-based • Proactive, preventative work • Universal, benefits all students • Working <i>with</i> clients; collaboration in problem-solving; “softly” inquiring • Human-centred • Being genuine • Understanding coping/survival strategies & helping to build positive ones • Creating the conditions in our classrooms that we would want to see in the world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining clients solely by their experience of trauma • A sickness framework (“What is wrong <i>with</i> this person?”) • Doing <i>more</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Providing actual treatment or diagnoses ○ Saying, “It’s not my job” • Deficit-focused • Reactive, crisis-driven responses • A process of labelling “traumatized” learners • Pushing <i>for</i> results; directing supports students may not be ready for • A “one-size-fits-all” approach • Being “the expert” • Seeing classroom behaviour as “problematic” & trying to “fix” traumatized learners • Only focusing on trauma’s impact in the classroom

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How can teachers apply Trauma-Informed Practices in their classrooms?

1. Ensure **physical and emotional safety**.
2. Increase **trust and transparency** by making tasks, expectations and boundaries clear.
3. Offer **peer and self-help** resources and services.
4. Aim for **collaboration and mutuality** to create partnerships and levelling of power dynamics.
5. Promote **empowerment, voice and choice** for autonomy and a client-centred approach.
6. Practice sensitivity to **cultural, historical and gender** differences.

SAMHSA, *qtd.* in *“Trauma-Informed Practice for Service Providers Working with Refugee Claimants”* (BC Refugee Hub, 2025)

<p>Physical & Emotional Safety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set predictable routines & class schedules • Reduce environmental stress • Use emotionally-safe language • Provide clear, consistently enforced expectations • Focus your group on the present (e.g. mindfulness) 	<p>Trust & Transparency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build trusting relationships • Explain the “why” behind classroom rules and decisions • Make tasks, expectations and boundaries clear • Admit mistakes as a teacher • Communicate clearly and respectfully about support systems 	<p>Peer & Self-Help</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster student-to-student relationships • Share and practice empathy skills (e.g. active listening, validating feelings) • Help bridge students to their communities • Celebrate collective successes
<p>Collaboration & Mutuality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide shared decision-making opportunities (e.g. choosing topics, class projects, activities) • Acknowledge when students bring expertise or knowledge you don’t have • Plan classroom projects that invite students’ experience, knowledge, skills & abilities 	<p>Voice & Choice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage personal agency (e.g. offer options for demonstrating learning) • Provide opportunities for goal-setting and self-reflection • Offer strength-based feedback emphasizing skills & growth • Foster leadership roles that enable students to contribute meaningfully to the classroom community 	<p>Cultural, Historical & Gender Sensitivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure representation in classroom materials • Model respect for names, pronouns, and identities • Create environments where students from different backgrounds feel safe & free from discrimination • Validate and support traditional practices

Where can teachers go to learn more?

- Pacific Immigrant Resources Society’s (PIRS) resource guides: pirs.bc.ca/what-we-do/trauma-training-for-service-providers
- BC Refugee Hub’s mental health toolkit: bcrefugeehub.ca/publications/mental-health-resources-for-refugees-and-refugee-claimants
- BC Ministry of Education’s Trauma-Informed Practices workshop packages: mytrainingbc.ca/traumainformedpractice
- The Immigrant and Refugee Mental Health’s Project’s (IRMHP) online courses & community of practice message board: learn-irmhp-psmir.camhx.ca