

# TRAUMA INFORMED CARE IN ADAPTIVE SPORTS INSTRUCTION

## General Guidance

- Use **CLEAR** communication:
  - Calming voice and tone;
  - Listen deeply;
  - Explain the how and why of what you are doing;
  - Ask engaging questions; and
  - Reduce distractions
- **Always ask before touching** an athlete!
- Ask the athlete what they like to be called. You may also want to ask them their preferred pronouns.
- When reading an athlete's file, take particular note of any indications of potential past trauma
- If a client is avoiding direct eye-contact, do not force it
- Set up the space and session in a consistent way, so athletes know what to expect
- Check-in with athletes about how they are feeling, what's happening in their bodies and minds, and what to expect for the day
- Share the expectations of the day and work with athletes to identify and prepare for potential moments of bad stress
- Be consistent in all your interactions and offer routine for athletes
- Focus in on one skill at a time

- Focus on progress rather than performance
- Build competence by recognizing small accomplishments and use that momentum
- Encourage expression of emotions – both verbal and non-verbal
- Offer choices of what to do throughout the session
- Offer opportunities for athletes to opt out and opt back in to play
- Reframe challenging situations in a positive, hopeful light that highlights the athlete’s strengths
- Engage athletes by inviting them for input
- Check in and debrief with the athlete by reviewing and asking “looking back” questions
- Support good stress by reminding athletes how they are positively handling the stress, encouraging them to stay in the game, and to pay attention to how they feel
- Stop bad stress by making athletes aware of their negative reactions, helping them articulate their feelings under pressure, and encouraging them to take a break
- No matter what happens, maintain your composure and project a sense of calm – athletes struggling to self-regulate will read and internalize your panic
- Offer a closing activity that is always a marker for the session ending and helps athletes leave on a high note
- Provide routine around the transition at the end of the session
- Be available for informal time before and after practice – create opportunities for informal connection

## Communication Matters

Avoid phrases such as:

- “It’s going to be okay. Trust me.”
- “There’s nothing to be scared of.”
- “Let me tell you all the reasons you don’t have to worry.”
- “Stop being such a worrier.”
- “I don’t understand why you’re so worried.”

Instead, you can acknowledge what a person is feeling without agreeing that the response or intensity is proportionate to the circumstances. Try to draw the person out of their thought pattern.

Some things you could say include:

- “We’re on the same team. I will help you.”
- “I can see this is hard for you.”
- “I understand you’re overwhelmed and that’s okay.”
- “That was really sad/frustrating/disappointing.”
- “Let’s take a break.”
- “You are safe.”
- “Would you like help/a break/to try again?”
- “I remember when you....”
- “Let’s come up with a solution together.”
- “Tell me more about that.”
- “I can hear you are upset but I don’t know what you need. Can you help me understand?”

If safety conditions permit, it is also sometimes appropriate just to maintain silence for a while and let the person process the situation more fully.

## Countdown Technique for Anxiety

Look around and notice:

- 5 Things you can SEE
- 4 Things you can FEEL
- 3 Things you can HEAR
- 2 Things you can SMELL
- 1 Thing you can TASTE

## Regulation Activities

The following activities can help a person self-regulate:

- Listen to the sounds around you
- Count to 10
- Touch something in nature
- Push against a wall
- Notice your surroundings
- Go for a walk
- Touch the furniture
- Drink a glass of water
- Feel the temperature
- Focus your attention on something you see

# De-escalation Techniques

If you notice an athlete is experiencing distress:

- Try to connect with the athlete – this is when we fall back on that personal connection we built
- Get the athlete to a place/position that feels safe to the athlete as quickly as possible – this is not the time to try to reason with the athlete
- Redirect the athlete's behavior or focus by providing reasonable options for alternative activities

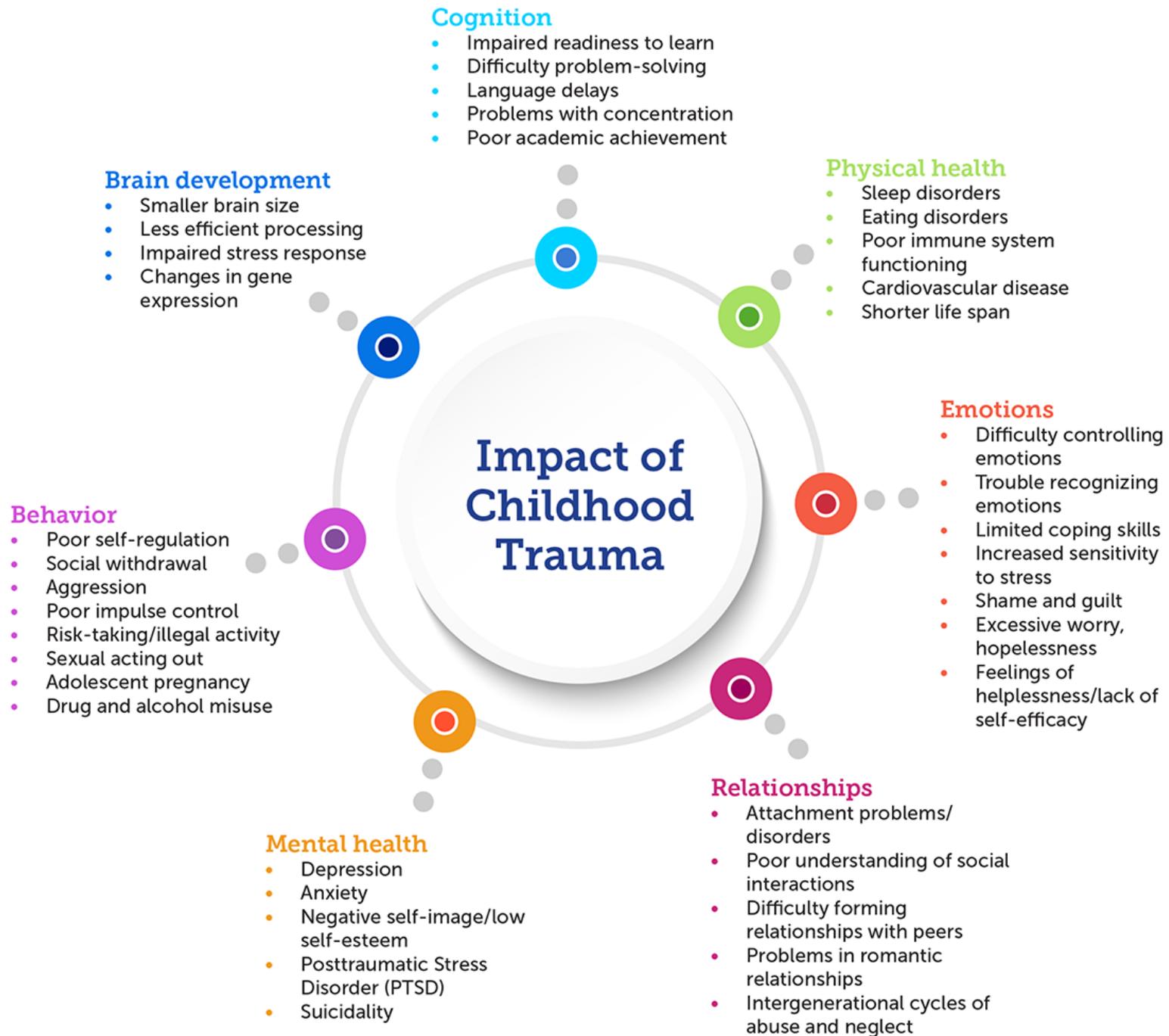
After the athlete is calm, you can try to discuss what happened and why.

**REGULATE** → **RELATE** → **REASON**

## Things to Remember

- Words may not always sink in – use visual cues
- Even if the situation doesn't seem that bad to you, it's how the athlete feels that matters
- There's a direct connection between stress and learning
- It's okay to ask athletes directly what you can do to help them make it through the session
- Kids who have experienced trauma:
  - Aren't trying to push your buttons
  - Worry about what's going to happen next
  - Need to feel they're good at something and can influence the world
  - Can really struggle with self-regulation

# Impact of Childhood Trauma



# How to Support Someone Who Has Experienced Trauma



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# “What do I do?”

## Trauma-Informed Support for Children

### 1 Create safety

If the child is overwhelmed, perhaps guide them to a quiet corner or allow them to decompress by visiting the restroom. If you are in a classroom, maybe you have a peace corner that you've outfitted with blankets or a screen so that it feels like a safe place.

### 2 Regulate the nervous system

Stress brings a predictable pattern of physiological responses and anyone who has suffered toxic stress or trauma is going to be quickly stressed into hyperarousal (explosive, jittery, irritable) or hypoarousal (depressed, withdrawn, zombie-like). No matter how ingenious our regulation strategies, how artsy-crafty we get with tools, the child has to find what works for them.

### 3 Build a connected relationship

This is the number one way to regulate the nervous system. When we are around people we care about, our bodies produce oxytocin, which is the hormone responsible for calming our nervous system after stress. If we stay connected, then eventually the calm discussion of each person's feelings and needs can take place.

### 4 Support development of coherent narrative

Creating predictability through structure, routines and the presence of reliable adults helps reduce the chaos a child may feel and allows them to start creating the kind of logical sequential connections that not only help them understand their own narrative, but are also the fundamental requirement of many types of learning.

### 5 Practice 'power-with' strategies

One of the hallmarks of trauma is a loss of power and control. When someone is wielding power over you with no regard to your thoughts or feelings, the toxic shame of the original trauma may come flooding back. As adults, we should use our power well. If we model a 'power-with' relationship with children it's our best chance of creating adults who will treat others with dignity and respect.

### 6 Build social emotional and resiliency skills

Trauma robs us of time spent developing social and emotional skills. The brain is too occupied with survival to devote much of its energy to learning how to build relationships and it's a good chance we didn't see those skills modeled for us. Learning to care for one another is the most important job we have growing up.

### 7 Foster post-traumatic growth

We know that there are qualities and skills that allow people to overcome the most devastating trauma and not just survive but find new purpose and meaning in their lives. Problem solving, planning, maintaining focus despite discomfort, self-control and seeking support are all known to lead to post-traumatic growth and are skills we can foster in children.