



iSOSY Personal Wellness



Trauma-Informed Support and Practices for Young Adults *There's Hope!*

Presenter, title, organization

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The purpose of this presentation is to provide Migrant Education Service Providers with strategies and support practices that are trauma-informed.

The strategies we will present have been carefully chosen as they can be taught or modeled with students.

There is a good chance you are familiar with Adverse Childhood Experiences – or ACEs – and understand the effects of trauma.

This presentation is focused on what you can do now to help.



Trauma-Informed Best Practices

Today you will learn:

- The right- and left-brain functions/relation to trauma
- Evidence-based strategies for working with young adults who have experienced trauma:
 - Connect and Redirect
 - SIFTing
 - Co-Regulation
 - HEAL
 - Building Self-Awareness
 - Creating Safe Spaces
- Resources available for emotional support

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In today's training we will learn about strategies to use with students who have experienced trauma.

The right- and left-brain functions will be presented as they relate to students experiencing an initial trauma, as well as a trigger or retraumatizing event that occurs later.

The evidence-based supports and practices that we will learn about are:

- Connect and Redirect
 - SIFTing
 - Co-Regulation
 - HEAL
 - Building Self-Awareness
- and
- Creating Safe Spaces



Trauma-Informed Best Practices

Part I: Right Brain and Left Brain

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The right and left brain have different functions.
Let's learn about the different hemispheres of the brain.



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Right Brain

VS.

Left Brain

Emotion/Feelings

- Responsible for emotions
- Sends and receives non-verbal communications, like facial expressions
- Remembers the big picture of an event (including its meaning and feel)
- Stores images and personal memories

Logical/Words

- Logical, literal, linear
- Likes order
- Understands cause and effect
- Names and labels objects
- Clear about personal actions (“I ate the cookie; I didn’t chew it.”)

Note: A person experiencing a traumatic or re-traumatizing event operates out of the right brain!

The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child’s Developing Mind by Daniel Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson

These are the different functions of the brain that control both the emotions and logic:

Right Brain – Emotion: responsible for sending and receiving non-verbal communications, like facial expressions, tone of voice, or gestures. It also specializes in understanding the big picture of an experience, its meaning and general feel, as well as images and personal memories.

Left Brain – Logic: logical, literal, likes words, and is linear, that is, it likes to put things in order. It excels in understanding cause and effect (“I push this button and the cow pops up.”), naming and labeling objects, and being clear about personal actions (“I ate the cookie; I didn’t chew it.”).

A person experiencing a traumatizing or retraumatizing event operates initially out of the right brain.

That means that they are most likely not able to think logically or understand the consequences of their behavior in the moment.

In order to help the student, we have to wait to provide logical strategies until they are no longer working out of right brain.

The strategies that follow can be taught to the students we work with so they can use the tools when they need them in the future.



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Right Brain

VS.

Left Brain

- Young minds are right-brain dominant (the brain does not finish developing until age 25).
- Connection and integration of the brain can be very much influenced by experience (nurturing, learning, interactions).
- The relationships the student has with you and other people are the most effective ways to facilitate brain integration.

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Young minds are right-brain dominant.

Emotions and living in the moment trump the left brain's emerging efforts to use language and logic to navigate the world.

The extent and strength of the connections between brain cells and parts of the brain, and how well they are integrated, can be influenced heavily by experience (nurturing, learning, interactions).

Relationships are key. You can make a difference.



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Activity:

Right Brain

VS.

Left Brain



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Objective:

Illustrate the difficulty in engaging in left-brain (logical) activities when a person is operating under the right-brain (emotions) due to adverse circumstances or trauma.

Materials:

- Two short literary passages from a non-fiction book or article
- Noise makers (i.e. drums, bells, whistles, etc.)

Steps:

1. Ask one participant to read one of the passages without interruption.
2. Ask the reader to summarize the paragraph.
3. Ask the same participant to read another passage, this time with at least two other participants making distracting noises nearby.
4. Ask the reader to summarize the passage.

Discuss:

The distractions illustrated that it is very difficult to learn or think logically when the brain is operating out of the right hemisphere (emotions).

Ask the reader:

How difficult was concentrating with all the noise?

Ask audience:

How does this illustrate the likelihood that students are ready to learn if they are having/have had traumatic experiences?



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Part II: Connect, Then Redirect

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The first strategy that we're going to talk about is Connect, Then Redirect. This strategy enables you to connect with the student in an emotional way (right brain) before introducing logic (left brain) to modify response and behavior.



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Connect, Then Redirect

- When the student has a trauma response, connect first to the emotions: “You look like you feel sort of mad.”
- If there is an affirmative response, ask what they are mad about.
- First provide empathetic responses: “Of course you feel that way.”
“You seem really frustrated/angry/worried.”
- Then normalize the feeling: “I get frustrated about things like that too.”
“That sounds hard/frustrating/scary.”

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This strategy was first discussed in Daniel Siegel's book *The Whole Brain Child*. As stated previously, connecting first to the emotions (right brain) allows the student to calm down before you introduce discussion about ways to apply logic and cause/effect (left brain).

You may need to prompt a student to open the discussion. “You look like you’re feeling sort of mad.” If you receive an affirmative response, ask what they are mad about.

Provide an empathetic response and then normalize their feeling. The message is, “I see you and I hear you.”



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Connect with the Right Brain (Emotional, Nonverbal, Experiential, Autobiographical)

- Logic is not the primary vehicle to calm our brains.
- Feelings and emotions are real and important.
- Use nonverbal signs:
 - Physical touch
 - Empathetic facial expressions
 - Nurturing tone of voice
 - Nonjudgmental listening



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In order to understand this strategy, we start with a basic review of brain structure and function.

Our brain has two hemispheres, the left and the right, which are connected through a pathway of nerves.

Although no task, action, or thinking process is conducted solely in one hemisphere, each hemisphere has an expertise or a type of processing which it dominates.

The left hemisphere tends to dominate linear, literal, and logical thinking. It likes to solve puzzles, especially using order and reason, and serves in linguistic expression.

The right hemisphere is often thought of as the more creative side of the brain. It dominates non-verbal communication, emotions, and creative expression through activities such as art or dance.

The Connection part of the process creates calm for the student's emotions and allows them to feel, and name, whatever emotion they are experiencing.

That increasing calm offers the ability to soothe the student.

Nonverbal cues are often effective.

Then you can engage in the next step of introducing logic..



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Redirect with the Left Brain (**Logical, Linguistic, Literal**)

- “Name It to Tame It”
- Sometimes the emotional waves just need to crash until the storm passes.
- Student may simply need to eat or get some sleep.
- Rules about respect and behavior still apply.
- Inappropriate behavior remains off-limits even in moments of high emotion.
- Good idea to discuss misbehavior and its consequences after the student has calmed down.



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When our brain's right hemisphere (emotional) has control, it does not always communicate with our left (logical) hemisphere.

When we are flooded with emotions, there is little space for the logical reasoning of the left brain. Although it may be tempting for us to respond to an emotional student in a way that applies primarily logic and reason to a situation, this approach will most likely lead to frustration for everyone.

Analysis and strategic thinking are activities dominated by the left brain. In the throes of emotion, there's little access to that left brain.

According to the "Connect and Redirect" strategy, we must first use our right brain (empathy) to connect with their situation, i.e. acknowledge and empathize with the student's feelings.

Empathy allows them to "feel felt" and relax. Once the student has calmed down, the left hemisphere is more available to participate in the crisis.

It might not be possible until several hours later, or perhaps even the next day.

Only when the emotional flooding has subsided, and the student has calmed

down, can we redirect them by helping them analyze what happened.

By connecting with the right brain and subsequently redirecting with the left brain, we integrate both sides of the brain, training the neuropathways to do this independently somewhere down the road.

To summarize the second step, when the student can name an accurate emotion, and not just any emotion, this will further help to calm the brain and help them make sense of their feelings.

There is something powerful about understanding the science of how this works. When we have such understanding, we are more likely to use it.



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Connect, Then Redirect

- It is important to integrate words into emotions and name the feelings.
- Only redirect once you have connected to the feelings.
- Later you can figure out:
 - Why did the student act this way?
 - What coping strategy do I want to teach?
 - How can I best teach it?

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As stated earlier, redirection can happen only when one has already helped the student connect to their feelings.

It is important to wait until the student is ready to understand why the behavior happened and is ready to consider what to do next.

Connection (aka relationships) can do wonders to keep lines of communications open and **support the emotional development of students.**

By using these scientific findings, we can guide students to navigate emotional issues, help wire their brains to deal with similar future situations, and improve our connection with them.



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Part III: SIFTing

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SIFTing is another right-brain/left-brain strategy that students can apply to themselves. It also comes from Dr. Dan Siegel's work,



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Activity: SIFTing to Calm Your Brain

SIFTing is:

- Training your brain to pause and allow the rational brain (frontal lobe) to give guidance to the emotional brain (limbic system)
- Intentionally taking a moment to consciously calm your brain's instinctual reaction
- Based on the concept of neuroplasticity

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With SIFTing, one is intentionally taking a moment to consciously calm the brain's instinctual reaction.

Because of neuroplasticity, over time and with repetition SIFTing can teach the brain to be less reactive and remain in a responsive mode.

It is really a mindfulness practice.

SIFTing was originally developed for parents/adults to take a moment before they act or interact with a child/student.

It is a strategy that students can be taught to do when those feelings resulting from trauma arise.

It requires them to take a pause when they are experiencing difficulties.

Basically, the method is training the brain to have new connections when faced with adversity - the process is called neuroplasticity.

With repetition over time the brain can continue to experience neuroplasticity at any age.



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SIFTing to Calm Your Brain

The four-step exercise to teach your brain to be less reactive and remain in a responsive mode:

Sensations

Images

Feelings

Thoughts



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The brain has two basic settings, reactive and responsive.

Reactive is the mode that is wired into our DNA – survival mode. This is the fight or flight response that helped our ancestors survive but may have negative consequences for us.

A responsive brain is actually the goal. This creates a calm brain, making one feel safe, relaxed, and peaceful.

The four-step process is called SIFTing.

It is a process of intentionally taking a moment to consciously calm the brain's instinctual reaction:

Sensations – Be aware of your body's reactions. Is your heart rate raising? Are you flushed?

Images – What images are running through your head? Do they relate to past experiences? Become aware of and identify any images that exist so that you can have greater control over them. Question their authenticity for you and reframe them if needed.

Feelings – What feeling do you experience when you have these sensations and images? It is important to name our feelings as a way of diffusing them. Work on accepting and exploring your feelings — not judging them.

Thoughts – Observe and identify your thoughts. Why are you reacting this way?

Are the thoughts valid?

With SIFTing, one may learn to calm the brain and body in a specific moment.



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Part IV: Co-Regulation

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Co-Regulation is the idea that one person can influence another person's regulation by modeling regulation in themselves.

The purpose of this activity is, again, to take a moment to calm the brain.

Participants may close their eyes if they choose to do so.

Guide the participants:

- Register your sensations. Is your heart racing?
- Identify the images that are running through your head in this moment. Do they relate to past experiences? Are they valid?
- Name your feelings related to your thoughts and images.
- Observe and identify your thoughts.

Discuss:

1. This technique was originally created for parents and other adults to calm their brains before speaking to their children.
2. With time and practice, brains can be rewired through repetition. This rewiring of the brain is called neuroplasticity.
3. How can this practice be helpful when working with students?



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Co-Regulation

- Self-regulation is the ability to manage thoughts and feelings in yourself.
- Co-regulation is the supportive process between caring adults and youth that fosters self-regulation development.
- Help the student recognize early signs, physical indicators, thought patterns, and emotions.

Source: Duke Center for Child and Family Policy for the Administration for Children and Families (ACF)

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Self-Regulation is the ability to manage thoughts and feelings to enable actions that are needed to succeed in education and life.

Co-regulation is a process between an adult and student to encourage self-regulation.

It is helpful for the student to become aware of their early signs of de-regulation, as well as the emotions involved.



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Co-Regulation

- Message: “You’re safe with me.”
- How?
 - Responsive/warm relationship
 - Structured environment
 - Teach/coach self-regulation skills
- Mirror neurons



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The brain is a social organ. People can help others regulate their emotions by sharing their own.

The most important point is being able to assure the students that they are safe by building a relationship with them.

[Later in the presentation we’ll go into creating safe spaces.]

Co-Regulation is based on the concept of mirror neurons – when someone performs an action and another observes the behavior, that action may be “mirrored” in the person observing.



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Co-Regulation for Young Adults

- Provide a warm, supportive relationship.
- Provide comfort and empathy; provide prompt and supportive coping strategies.
- Encourage effective planning, awareness of consequences, and task completion.
- Share perspective and provide coaching for complex problem-solving and decision-making.
- Allow space for the young adult to make his or her own decisions and experience the consequences.

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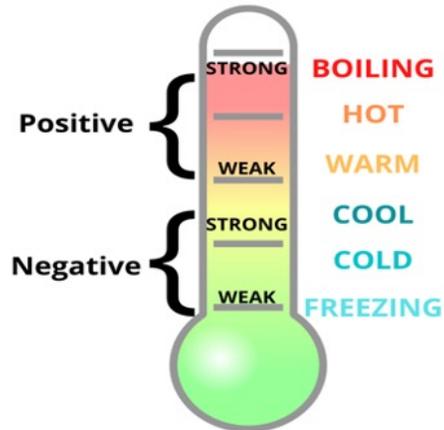
Co-Regulation in youth or young adults is fostered by:

- Providing a warm, supportive relationship
- Providing comfort and empathy; prompt and supportive coping strategies
- Encouraging effective planning, awareness of consequences, and task completion
- Sharing perspective and providing coaching for complex problem-solving and decision-making
- Allowing space for the student to make their own decisions and experience the consequences



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Activity: Co-Regulation - Recognizing Freezing and Boiling Points



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Reflect on circumstances that make you feel out of control and overwhelmed or that, conversely, relax you to the point of stopping you on your tracks.

Steps:

1. Print a copy of the Freezing and Boiling Point Handouts for each participant.
2. Ask the participants to think about the prior month.
3. What things made them upset, out of control, and overwhelmed (i.e. having to teach my child while working from home)?
4. What things made them relax, but also froze them from the outside world (i.e. checking social media)?

Discuss:

1. Sometimes when we are in either of these extremes, we need to recharge our batteries. That may mean finding alone time or doing some breathing/grounding exercises, doing something we love, or pausing to see the big picture.
2. Co-regulation is about helping someone else regulate. In order to be prepared for this, we need to self-regulate first.
3. Ask participants to think about how it would be useful in their work with migratory students to identify these extremes.



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Activity: Empathy vs. Sympathy Video



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Let's watch this video to learn about the difference between empathy vs. sympathy. We aim for empathy. It's all about connection.



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Empathy vs. Sympathy

According to the work of Dr. Brené Brown, to grow deeper relationships one must understand the difference:

- **Empathy** - *experiencing* someone else's feelings. It comes from the German *Einfühlung*, or 'feeling into.' It requires an emotional component of really feeling what the other person is feeling.
- **Sympathy** - *understanding* someone else's suffering. It is more cognitive in nature and keeps a certain distance.

"Empathy fuels connection, and sympathy drives disconnection."

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Social psychologist Brené Brown suggests one key to growing deeper relationships is to understand the differences of empathy vs. sympathy. While the concepts are similar and definitely related, there are crucial differences that lead to very different outcomes. According to Brown: "Empathy fuels connection, and sympathy drives disconnection."



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Empathy Characteristics

- Develop perspective
- Stay out of judgment
- Recognize the emotions

What makes something better is the connection!

Use empathy with balance - your personal story can lend to over/under involvement! (excessive response)

Say:

- “I don’t know what to say, but I’m glad you told me.”
- “I can’t imagine...”
- “That sounds so...”
- “I’m here to support you.”

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Connections make a difference in improving outcomes for students who experience an adverse event.

Take the perspective of the student.

Do not make judgments or assumptions.

Make sure to recognize their valid emotions and do not just look to point out a “silver lining” as that can be hurtful.

Say:

- “I don’t know what to say, but I’m glad you told me.”
- “I can’t imagine...”
- “That sounds so...”
- “I’m here to support you.”

Make sure not to over-empathize as that can make matters worse for you and for them.

Do not project your own feelings onto a student.

Remember that everyone’s experience is different.



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Part V: HEAL

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The HEAL strategy deals with mindfully “taking in the good” to promote positivity and brain resilience.



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Activity: HEAL - Changing Your Brain from Reactive to Responsive

- The HEAL technique is another strategy to change the brain from reactive to responsive.
- The four-step process for “taking in the good” is:

Have a positive experience

Enrich it

Absorb it

Link positive and negative material

Based on Dr. Rick Hanson’s *Hardwiring Happiness: The New Brain Science of Contentment, Calm, and Confidence*

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Your mind gives more importance and reacts more intensely to unpleasant experiences than to pleasant ones.

We can train our brains to be more responsive by intentionally internalizing positive experiences into our brains.

The four-step process for “taking in the good” is:

Have a positive experience – Notice a positive experience in the present or actively create one by becoming aware of positive situations or experiences in your life.

Enrich it – Once you have identified the experience, apply attention to it and sustain it.

Absorb it – Heighten the positive experience by prolonging and intensifying it. Sense or visualize the good. Taking in the good is like building a fire. Step 1 is lighting it. Step 2 is adding fuel to keep it going, and step 3 is feeling its warmth.

Link positive and negative material – It’s normal to have positive and negative feelings all at once. Be aware that they are not mutually exclusive. Practice keeping the positive experience more prominently in your thoughts.

By practicing the HEAL strategy, you will enable neuroplasticity to help your brain move from reactive to responsive.



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Part VI: Promoting Self-Awareness

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Self-awareness means being in “the now” and calming our thoughts and feelings when we are experiencing adversity.



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Activity: Teach Self-Awareness

- 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique using all senses:
 - 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
- Breathing technique:
 - Inhale for 4
 - Hold for 5
 - Exhale for 6
- 5-finger breathing technique:
Trace each finger with a finger from the opposing hand, inhale every time you go up, exhale each time you go down.



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There are several self-awareness techniques that involve breathing:

1. Inhale for 4, hold for 5, exhale for 6
2. 5-finger breathing technique – trace each finger, inhale as you go up, exhale as you go down

The 5-4-3-2-1 technique uses all 5 senses and includes noticing:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can feel (touch)
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste



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Challenging Unhelpful Thoughts

- Unhelpful or negative thoughts should be challenged and replaced with balanced thoughts.
- The best way to change your thoughts in the moment is through affirmations (thoughts you intentionally come up with).
- Coupled with a visualization, affirmations can change your mood.



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As already discussed in some of the techniques, negative thoughts are our most common and prominent thoughts.

Negative thoughts must be challenged.

Affirmations are the best way to change your thoughts.

You can identify your negative thought and then replace it with a balanced one.

Affirmations, also called self-affirmations, are thoughts you intentionally come up with to support, encourage, and calm your brain and body in the moment.



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Affirmation Examples



- *I am strong and resilient!*
- *I will get through this!*
- *It's okay not to be okay.*
- *I am safe.*
- *Tomorrow is another day.*
- *My mistakes do not define me.*

Can you come up with some more?

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There are several good affirmations you can say to yourself to enhance your positivity. Here are some examples:

- I am strong and resilient.
- I will get through this!
- It's okay not to be okay.
- I am safe.
- Tomorrow is another day.
- My mistakes do not define me.

Let's take a moment to come up with some more.



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Activity: Think of something unhelpful that often crosses your mind.

Can you identify:

"I am fat."



- Evidence to contradict?
- Patterns?
- Would you say this to a friend?
- Benefits/costs of this thinking?
- How will you feel in six months?
- Is there another way to look at it?

Balanced thought: "I have curves in all the right places!"



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Using the Unhelpful Thoughts worksheet, think of a negative thought that often crosses your mind.

Can you identify:

- Evidence to contradict?
- Patterns?
- Would you say this to a friend?
- Benefits/costs of this thinking?
- How will you feel in 6 months?
- Is there another way to look at it?

Here's an example:

"I am fat."

Now: Can you come up with a balanced thought?

Ex. "I have curves in all the right places!"



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Activity: Self-Awareness - Uncovering What's Below the Surface



It is important to be self-aware and dig deep to determine why we feel the way we do.

We need to be specific.

This is important for growth.

When you have a feeling, ask yourself a question about it, remembering that our feelings are just the tip of the iceberg.

Activity: Complete the self-awareness test on <https://inlpcenter.org/self-awareness-test/> (requires each participant to be in a device and connected to the internet).

Takes 15-20 minutes.



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Part VII: Creating Safe Spaces

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You can be a safe space or promote a safe space by ensuring a student's thoughts can be shared freely within that space.



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Trauma and Attachment

- Young adults who have their defenses up usually have had these experiences:
 - Unreliable, untrustworthy adults
 - Adults who are not dependable and not to be trusted
 - Do not know how to ask for help
- As a result, they act like porcupines – pushing people away; they have their “quills” (defenses) up.
- Creating safe spaces is a must to wear down those defenses.
- A safe space is place free of bias, conflict, criticism, or potentially threatening actions, ideas, or conversations.

A person
can be a
“safe space.”



Adapted from The Body Keeps the Score by B Van Der Kolt

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Students who have experienced trauma have trouble trusting others. They lack trust and have their defenses up (just like a porcupine). One strategy to wear down those defenses is creating a safe space. A safe space is place free of bias, conflict, criticism, or potentially threatening actions, ideas, or conversations. You can be a “safe space.”



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Tips for Creating Safe Spaces

- Create ground rules
 - Right to be heard
 - Respect
 - Confidentiality
- Foster a caring culture
 - Words
 - Actions
 - Struggles
- Be equitable and inclusive
 - Understanding
 - Them
 - Themselves
 - Others



Adapted from Youth Today by Gina McGovern

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There are 3 tips to create safe spaces:

- Create ground rules
- Foster a caring culture
- Be equitable and inclusive

Ground rules are important. Make sure everyone has a right to be heard, to be respected, and to know that whatever they share in that space remains in that space.

Foster a caring culture where words and actions matter and the student feels comfortable/safe sharing their struggles.

Make an effort to treat everyone equally. They should be aware of themselves, their own value, and the value of others.



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Part VIII: Emotional Support

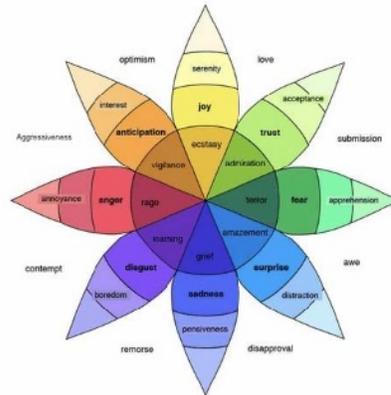
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It is important to reach out for help as needed so we can continue to develop, grow, and thrive.



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Activity: Visualizing Your Feelings



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Pass out paper and writing utensils to each participant.

Explain the power of visualizing our feelings.

Use one of the following prompts and give participants a chance to get creative:

- If your feeling was a landscape, it would look like...
- If your feeling was music, it would sound like...
- If your feeling was an object, it would be...

Discuss sensations:

1. How does this feeling make your body feel?
2. Name the sensation (i.e. smooth, chill, vibrating, twitchy, dull, sharp, achy, jagged, airy, trembling, shivering, etc.).

Have participants share their image with their table groups and discuss what they learned.

As a group, look at the feeling wheel graphic and have participants name the feeling that is portrayed in their image.



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**Activity:
Going to your
happy place/
30-second
vacation**



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Give the participants paper and writing utensils and direct them to draw their happy place.

Have participants share why this is their happy place.

Discuss whether there are any commonalities in the different happy places shared.

Discuss:

1. In a stressful situation (i.e. taking a test), taking a brief moment to go to that happy place can put one in a better mind frame to work through it.
2. How could this be helpful in their work with students?



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Tips for Seeking Emotional Support

- Think about your support network.
- Grow your support network.
- Know when to seek professional help.



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Emotional support can come from your family, a trusted friend or mentor, or a professional.

Know people you can reach out to who will help you with your struggles.

Think about when it is enough to seek help from your network versus when additional support is needed from a counselor or other professional.



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Please use the link to fill out an evaluation. Thank you!

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We appreciate your time and attention to this presentation about the importance of ACEs in the lives of migratory students. Your honest feedback is vital to our focus and efforts as iSOSY continues to move forward in the area of personal wellness and mental health. Please take just a moment to use the QR code on the screen to access a brief evaluation. Thank you.



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Presenter name
Email
Phone



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Thank you so much for your time and attention. Any questions/comments?