

Responding to a Triggered Response

Sometimes a child with trauma will have extreme outbursts. During this time they will be highly unregulated with intense affect and will not respond to logic or argument. Have a prepared plan within the classroom and the school in case this happens. Include the child in the plan so they have some choice if they are triggered. When a child is triggered:

- *Establish safety*
 - Ensure all other students/staff are safe and move child away from others to safe space of their choosing.
 - Seek assistance from other adults if needed.
- *Maintain a calm presence*
 - The most effective way to help a dysregulated child is to be calm yourself.
 - Use a soothing tone when talking to the child, let them know you are there to help them.
 - Let child know what you are doing every step of the way: “I am going to walk closer to you now. I am here to help you”.
- *Calm the child*
 - Child may need a certain parent/care taker to join them when triggered.
 - Child may need time to be alone, let them choose what they need.
 - Child may need to go home afterwards.
- *Talk about it*
 - Once child is calm, talk about what was going on, especially before enacting any punishment.
 - Provide a story with what you saw, check for mistakes, misunderstandings.
 - Don't enter into argument if child does not tell the truth or blame others.
 - Reflect on social consequences, if other children are afraid or do not want to play with them after seeing triggered response.
- *Give natural consequences*
 - If something was broken, the child will have to fix it.

- If the child has hurt someone, they will have to apologize.
- *Debrief with other students*
 - Talk about what happened with the class, allow for concerns to air out.

(The State of Washington, 2011, Child Safety Commissioner, 2007)

After a Triggered Response

Reflect

- Acknowledge that the behavior may be a traumatic response to something bigger or more complex than what is observed in the classroom.
- Acknowledge and respect boundaries of child and parents.
- Assume there is a possible link between stimuli in the classroom and the complex behaviour of the child. Look for that stimulus configuration.

Remove triggers

- Take a role in removing the trigger. When possible, provide the student with choices. Remove the stimulus or support the student to remove the stimulus.
- Take steps to reduce any residual stress (embarrassment, shame, humiliation, or harassment) in the classroom.

Debrief

- Take care of your own needs. Do what you need to soothe after an event, go for coffee, eat a muffin, talk to friends.
- Seek support if it is available in your school.

(The State of Washington, 2011, Child Safety Commissioner, 2007)

References

Child Safety Commissioner. (2007). *Calmer classrooms: A guide to working with traumatised children*. Melbourne, Vic.

Retrieved from: http://www.ccyp.vic.gov.au/childsafetycommissioner/downloads/calmer_classrooms.pdf

The State of Washington (2011): *The Heart of Learning and Teaching Compassion, Resiliency and Academic Success*.

Washington, D.C. Retrieved from: <http://k12.wa.us/CompassionateSchools/HeartofLearning.aspx>