

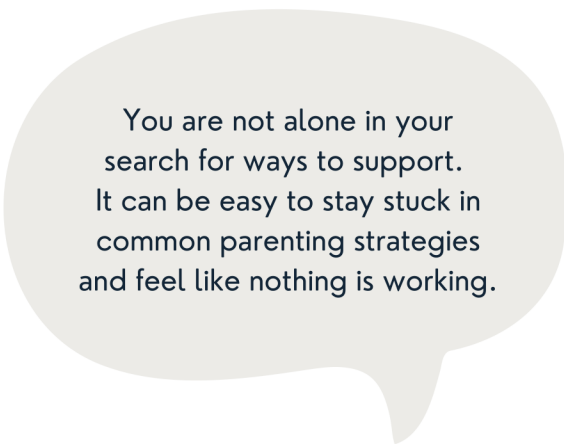
My Top 5 Trauma-Informed Parenting Strategies

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It can be hard enough knowing that your child has gone through a difficult life event.

Trauma, or an overwhelming or threatening experience, happens to everyone. When it happens to children and teens, it shows itself most often in behavior. How a kid reacts or expresses themselves may catch you off guard.



You are not alone in your search for ways to support. It can be easy to stay stuck in common parenting strategies and feel like nothing is working.

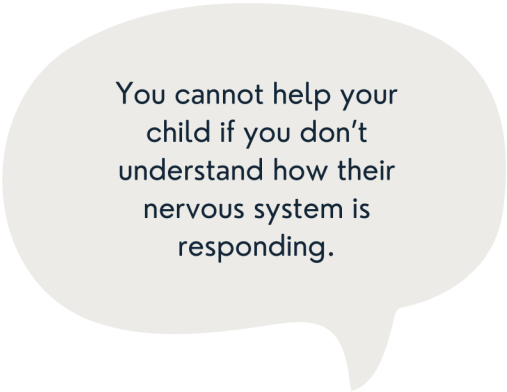
There's an overload of information on raising kids, and you may be at a loss to sort through it. Let me encourage you - It's possible for your family to feel stability again with some simple tools applied consistently.

Here's my go-to top 5 strategies for parenting a child who's experienced trauma. This list is not exhaustive and if you're really struggling, get help! Your child's mental health is worth it. Be curious about what is working, and be sure to access to a professional right away.

Is it Fight, Freeze, Flight, or Fawn?

Trauma Responses: Ways that trauma shows up in our bodies, words, thoughts, or feelings.

A trauma response can be an impulse to argue (fight), to numb (freeze), to withdraw (flight), to please (fawn).



You cannot help your child if you don't understand how their nervous system is responding.

We are all born with a body that is wired for survival. Trauma can change the nervous system's sensitivity to stress and how someone typically reacts to everyday situations. You may be confused when your child erupts or shuts down when exposed to too much stress. Parents often share with me their frustrations when teens don't communicate their needs. It can be paralyzing to not know what to do to support them in the best possible way.

Identifying the threat response - fight, freeze, flight, or fawn - helps you choose what strategy to apply next.

Fight - focus on de-escalation (pg 4)

Freeze - focus on 1-2-3 breathe (pg 5)

Flight - focus on check backs (pg 6)

Fawn - focus on routines & simplifying activities (pg 7)

STRATEGY #2

De-escalate to Regulate

De-escalation: Transferring your sense of calm to your child. Setting boundaries that reduce tension and open a pathway to resolution.

De-escalation sounds complicated but it truly is simple. Giving clear observations of what your child is feeling and validating their need to feel emotionally safe.

It's hard to truly grasp de-escalation until you've experienced it. Let me paint you a picture...

Your child comes home from school and immediately retreats to their private space. You try to engage them and you get a myriad of eye rolls, short responses, or heated tones. You get into it with them. "Come down for dinner." It doesn't go well. You are now in the power struggle. All the ways you were supposed to avoid this go out the window. What do you do?

De-escalation is when we hook our boat back to the dock. If all you do is slow your words and breath, that will be enough.

Regulating yourself means you will have a greater chance of clearing up the fog that has descended on your relationship. Think of it like unwinding yarn, back away slowly out of the argument. Touch base. Use short prompts.

"We're upset. That's okay. Let's try again later."

STRATEGY #3

1-2-3 Breathe

Hearing our own breath calms our body down naturally. Breathing for 10-30 seconds is enough to quickly settle the tension that may be building in yourself or your child.

Try It! It's cheesy, I get it. But let's try it together. 1-2-3 breathe. In and out. Let your lungs fill and release. Do it two more times. You are here, now.

Seeing someone else take a breath is a powerful coping mechanism. As long as your breath is slowing down and intentional, you're doing it right. Notice how your child's body language changes when all you do is breathe.

We experience much urgency in family life. Breathing says that we can be free of the need to solve or fix. Breathing communicates presence and love. It shows that you are noticing this is a physical thing as much as it is emotional.

Breathing connects your thoughts to your feelings to your body. It's like the thread that sews you back up when things get chaotic.

Let's try it again. 1-2-3 breathe. This time notice what it sounds like, what it feels like. Trust that every Body has a way to calm itself, to pay attention to what it needs.

When the parasympathetic nervous system is activated (network of nerves that relaxes your body after periods of stress or danger), your breathing rate slows, sending a message to your body that you are safe.

STRATEGY #4

Check Backs

Check backs: A way to give space and hold space for your child to try self-regulation. Giving short periods of time to encourage them to sort through it on their own AND checking back so they know they are not alone.

Say no to urgency in trauma-informed parenting. Teens grow more confident in managing their emotions when they have bite-sized opportunities to be successful.

Add "check backs" into your parenting repertoire.

"You're telling me you want to be alone right now. I get it, and I need to check back with you in 10 minutes to make sure you're okay."

Check backs tend to be helpful when you're worried but you aren't getting anywhere with the inquiry. Wait to ask more questions until they've had time to sort through it themselves. Give a predetermined amount of time so they know what to expect.

Normalize that they may be able to handle it with enough time and space. Check backs says "I'm here from a distance" and gives you a sense of calm before going back into the parenting arena.

Use that time to refocus on what's the priority. Do you need to know they're safe? Do you need to know they can cope? Do you need to know anything at all?

When you check back, try a simple choice like "I'm here to see what you need. Can we talk or do you need more space?"

It's okay to do a few check backs until you know they are okay. "I can give you another 15 minutes and then we'll sit and talk about it."

Routine

Routine: A predictable schedule, not a rigid one. Having regular, ongoing enrichment activities, downtime, and social outlets has significant impact on mood and mental health. Looking forward to things gives teens a sense of healthy control and fulfillment.

Teens' brains are immediacy oriented. Delayed gratification is difficult when the nervous system is overloaded. Simplify your expectations of their accomplishments week to week.

This can be one of the most obvious and yet hardest to implement trauma-informed parenting strategy. Simplifying expectations of your teen can be difficult and may come with another slew of worries.

Will they keep up with school? Will they be able to participate in gymnastics, sports, theater like they used to?

How can I balance their schedule with other siblings and my own?

When the whole family practices simplification of routines, everyone benefits. Slowing down helps you pay attention to subtle changes in mood and wellbeing in your child. You may even feel empowered by saying "no" to the usual demands of family life.

This models to your teen that they can "no" to what is draining or unnecessary, leaving space to say an enthusiastic yes to what is hopeful and helpful.

Examples:

- Saying "no" to a birthday party and saying "yes" to individual time with friends.
- Saying "no" to full time school days and saying "yes" to a job that offers flexibility and empowerment.
- Saying "no" to competitive sports to saying "yes" to a recreational team focused on skills and social development.

Need more help?

I've spent years practicing trauma-informed therapy for teens, and there's always more I'm learning about what works for them.

Here are my favorite quick, easy resources for emotional support (not to replace a therapeutic professional):

Calm app

Headspace

(the app and check out their programs on Netflix!)

Analog regulation

(coloring books, painting, fidgets)

Looking for a therapist? Find me and other therapists on TherapyDen, Psychology Today, or google "teen therapist near me".

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