

What do I say?

Trauma Informed Language for Education Settings

Review the terms in the inappropriate term column and alter to suit your own school experience of commonly used language/descriptive phrases.

| Inappropriate Term | Suggested Alternatives |
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| <p>Chosen behaviour</p> <p><i>Why?</i> Assumes intentionality. Ignores role of brain architecture in response to trauma. Pits child against adult.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learned behaviour • Dysregulated behaviour • Survival response |
| <p>Aggressive / Confrontational</p> <p><i>Why?</i> Focus on risk child poses. Blame laden. Judgemental.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hyper-vigilant to threat • Misreading threat level and responding to perceived threat • Needs help to calm threat response • Is in survival mode • Dysregulated • Fight/flight response triggered • Sensitive to criticism or failure/low self esteem • Difficulty in taking chances/risks in learning |
| <p>Lacking Aspiration / Disengaged</p> <p><i>Why?</i> Not responding to need of individuals. Imposing value set of observers. Blame of those focused on meeting basic needs (Maslow).</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused on basic needs • Needs to feel safe/understood before able to learn • Difficulty in accessing learning • Reluctant to speak publicly – feels exposed to judgement of others • Requires sensory programme/stimulation |
| <p>Uncooperative / Disruptive</p> <p><i>Why?</i> Assumes intentionality. Blames child. Encourages / feeds adversarial relationship. Expects child to resolve issue.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finds it difficult to participate in class routines or meet expectations • Survival brain, withdrawn • Finds it difficult to access learning • Shut down • May benefit from sensory program/mindfulness activities e.g., box breathing • Needs time/assistance to regulate emotional state |
| <p>Uncommunicative / Truculent</p> <p><i>Why?</i> Assumes intentionality. Blames child. Encourages / feeds adversarial relationship. Expects child to resolve issue.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unable to communicate effectively • Needs time to calm/regulate verbal responses • Shut down and locked in behaviour • Requires sensory programme/stimulation |