



UNIVERSITY OF  
**GEORGIA**

# Trauma Informed Teaching Toolkit

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# Trauma-Informed Teaching<sup>1</sup>

Trauma can take many shapes and forms, it can impact different individuals in many different ways, and it can last from a single instant to many years. It can be related to events in an individual's personal life (e.g., bad relationship, death of a loved one, car accident, and so on), or it can be a result of an event or situation that affects a large group of people (e.g., 9/11, COVID-19, campus shooting, student suicide, etc.).

Whatever the specific situation, we know that trauma can have significant and lasting impact on an individual, and that impact can affect their ability to learn – both in the immediate term and for a long time afterwards. This impact is due quite simply to ways in which a person's brain is shaped and trained in response to trauma. With this in mind, it is useful to consider ways in which we can engage in our teaching through a *trauma-informed* lens.

## What is Trauma?

*Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.*

### **Trauma is the Result of Harmful Events or Circumstances**

Whether caused by a single event or ongoing stressful circumstances, trauma involves exposure to something that causes physical or emotional harm, or the threat of such harm. Traumatic events can include physical or sexual abuse, experiencing or witnessing violence or an assault, neglect or abandonment, the death of someone close, a serious illness, injury, accident, natural disaster, or military combat. Circumstances marked by chronic stress can also result in trauma. For example, poverty, housing instability, food insecurity, parental separation, living with someone who has a mental illness or engages in substance abuse, or living through a global pandemic can all create conditions that meet the definition of trauma. Trauma can also affect families, communities, and groups in a collective way. Historical trauma is the “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences” (Brave Heart, 2003). African Americans experience the shared “multigenerational history of slavery, race-based segregation, racism, prejudice, and discrimination” (Williams-Washington & Mills,

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<sup>1</sup> Source: [https://ctl.uga.edu/faculty/teaching-resources/trauma-informed-teaching/#collapse\\_7\\_2](https://ctl.uga.edu/faculty/teaching-resources/trauma-informed-teaching/#collapse_7_2)

2018). Native Americans and descendants of Holocaust survivors are groups that are also affected by historical trauma.

### **How Someone Experiences Events or Circumstances Determines Whether the Events are Traumatic for That Individual**

Individuals experience potentially traumatic events and circumstances differently, meaning that what is traumatic for one person may not be traumatic for someone else. For example, how survivors understand the meaning of the events, the level of disruption they experience as a result, and the support systems they are able to access can all impact whether or not a specific situation functions as a trauma for an individual.

### **Trauma Has Long-Lasting Adverse Effects on Someone's Well-Being and Daily Life**

Traumatic experiences interrupt and interfere with regular activities, relationships, and emotions. Everyday activities and interactions may become very difficult in the aftermath of trauma. Even when the traumatic events or circumstances are no longer occurring, survivors still put lots of time and energy into maintaining their daily routines and responsibilities. Trauma changes cognitive processes and functions, which impacts survivors mentally and physically. Their bodies and minds may continue to respond as if the traumatic event were ongoing. This can have a lasting impact on health, resulting in chronic disease or mental health challenges.

## **Why a Trauma-Informed Approach In College Environments?**

When an individual experiences a trauma, their body's fight, flight, or freeze response is typically activated. The emotional response center of the brain is often compromised, leading to difficulty dealing with negative input (e.g., a bad grade) or changing circumstances (e.g., adjusted due dates). In addition, the part of the brain responsible for abstract thinking, language, and decision-making often goes offline. This makes it very difficult to process complex new information – which is of course exactly what is needed in most college classes.

These effects can arise when a trauma is first experienced, for several days, weeks, or months after the fact, when memories of traumatic events are triggered, and so on. As a result, students who would otherwise succeed in their coursework can end up struggling and falling behind, often without the instructor understanding why.

A trauma-informed approach to teaching takes the impact and prevalence of traumatic experiences into account. By attending to the needs of your students you can create an environment conducive to learning for all students, thereby increasing your instructional effectiveness while positively impacting the minds and lives of your students.

## **The Prevalence of Trauma Among Students**

Today's students are quite likely to have experienced trauma before starting college and are at risk of experiencing new trauma during their time as a student. Here are some quick facts about today's students and trauma:

- 66% of incoming first-year students report having experienced a traumatic life event (Read et al., 2011).
- 62% of adults report having experienced at least one potentially traumatic event before they turned 18 (CDC, 2019).
- College students experience an average of 6 potentially traumatic events over the course of four years of study (Lalande & Bonanno, 2011).
- Women and students of lower socioeconomic status experience higher rates of trauma exposure (Read et al., 2011).
- Nearly 26% of young adults live with a mental illness, and nearly 75% of mental illnesses in adults onset by the age of 25 (Oswalt et al., 2020).
- Anxiety and depression are the most common and increasing in prevalence among college students. Rates of anxiety increased from 9% to nearly 15% from 2009 to 2015, and depression from 9% to just over 12% (Oswalt et al., 2020).

## **How Can I Apply Trauma-Informed Approaches In My Teaching?**

1. Create Consistency & Routine with Room for Flexibility
2. Be Transparent about your Goals and Expectations
3. Create a sense of Physical Safety in your Physical Space
4. Manage the Risk of In-Class Triggers
5. Provide Students Opportunities to use their Voice and Exercise Choice
6. Intentionally Articulate Interest in your Students' Well-Being
7. Build Trust through the Instructor-Student Relationship
8. Build Community through Student-Student Relationships
9. Help Students Engage with a "Growth Mindset"
10. Take Care of Yourself

### **Create Consistency & Routine with Room for Flexibility**

All students – and specifically those who have experienced trauma – benefit from knowing what to expect in the learning environment. This helps their brains' reasoning and emotional centers prepare to engage effectively, thus mitigating some of the effects of trauma.

Aim to establish predictable routines in your course, and let students know what is coming next. These strategies can help your students acclimate to your course and to you as their instructor, which then makes it easier for them to adjust to variety and change.

- Provide students with an outline, agenda, or set of learning outcomes at the beginning of each class session.
- Start and end each session with a similar activity.

- Be explicit about changes to routine (e.g., “Today we will be doing things a little differently...”) and give advanced notice of major changes (e.g., create a course announcement to identify specific updates).
- Format similar activities in similar ways and (where possible) use the same or similar criteria or rubrics for assessing work.
- Provide timely feedback and communicate with students about their progress at regular intervals.
- Be clear about your expectations for students and maintain them throughout the course.

As a complement to the benefit of routine, there will be times when students will benefit from flexibility. Demonstrating a willingness to work with students during difficult times can be crucial to their success.

- Build flexibility into deadlines and course expectations, thereby giving students an “out” to deal with arising difficulties. For example, you might allow for a certain number of non-penalized “late days” where no explanation is required.
- Consider requests for extensions or re-submission of completed work in the context of the needs of your course, combined with compassion for the difficulties students might be managing in their personal lives.
- Adjust your lesson plan or modify your course schedule in the case of a significant event on campus or in the surrounding community.

### **Be Transparent about your Goals and Expectations**

Discussing course goals and expectations – and the reasoning that supports these choices – can help students feel more equipped and motivated to learn. For students who have experienced trauma, transparency in your approach to teaching and learning may also help to establish a greater sense of mental or emotional security. They can then take more risks in their learning and face challenges with greater self-confidence, believing that they have what they need to succeed and identifying a path for them to follow on their way. Here are some ways to increase your transparency as you teach:

- Be open about your course goals and learning objectives. State them clearly and inscribe them in a broader context as well. What will students take from the course that will help them in other parts of their lives?
- Connect activities and assignments to these objectives. Discuss with students what they will be doing, how they will go about it, and why they are doing it. What will they learn or what skills will they develop as a result?
- Connect assessments in the same way, explaining how the assessment task connects to the formative parts of the course.
- Provide students with information about why you do things the way that you do.
- Explain the reasoning behind your various course policies.
- Consider increasing your own personal transparency (to the extent you are comfortable). For example, if you miss a class you might explain to students where you are going. We often expect students to have a certain level of openness with us related to the course; reciprocating that can go a long way.

## **Create a Sense of Physical Safety in your Physical Space**

Talk to students about the learning space so that they can then focus on the learning itself. Here is some information that you might provide at the beginning of the semester to help students feel more prepared and more comfortable:

- locations of entrances and exits;
- emergency procedures specific to your classroom (see [the OEP's Classroom Preparedness Checklist](#));
- locations of gender-neutral bathrooms and nearby water fountains;
- your commitment to meeting students' needs in terms of classroom accessibility;
- your expectations for the space (for example, whether or not students should ask you before leaving the room).

## **Manage the Risk of In-Class Triggers**

One important aspect of a trauma-informed teaching practice is the importance of maintaining sensitivity to possible “triggering” events or exchanges that can happen in the classroom. For example, a discussion of a rape case in a journalism class likely creates an unexpected encounter with content that could cause problems for a student who has suffered sexual assault or abuse. The goal is not to protect students from difficult subject matter, or even to anticipate every situation that might give rise to a negative experience by a student. Instead, the goal is to create an environment where the risks are mitigated, and where students are less likely to be forced into situations that may be detrimental to their mental health and well-being. For example, you can:

- Give students advance warning of potentially difficult topics that will be discussed or considered in a class. Where appropriate you might also provide them with the option to do something else in place of engaging in that discussion, without requiring additional justification for their reasons.
- Provide students with multiple options for assignment topics, so that they can (when appropriate in the context of your course) avoid topics or content that may be damaging to their well-being.
- Create a course policy that makes it clear to students that they are welcome to step out of your class meeting space temporarily if they need a break or some other escape.
- Remind students of available campus resources.
- Explicitly acknowledge when something has happened in the context of your class that may have had negative impact on students coming from specific backgrounds or experiences. Share your perspective with your students and consider inviting them to share their perspectives as well (provided you don't think it will do further damage!).
- Pursue lines of questioning to help students identify useful and appropriate ways to articulate their views.
- If necessary, contact UGA's [Equal Opportunity Office](#) to discuss problematic interactions involving potential harassment or discrimination.

It is important to recognize that each student experiences the classroom differently, and what feels “safe” for some may not feel that way for everyone. By taking the time to

examine our assumptions and consider our approaches and practices from a variety of perspectives, we can work to make the classroom a place where learning can occur.

### **Provide Students Opportunities to use their Voice and Exercise Choice**

Traumatic experiences involve a loss of agency, choice, and control. When we give students choice, we affirm the value and importance of their preferences, and we give them the chance to exert some control over their learning process. All students benefit from the agency of exercising choice and voicing their preferences and providing those opportunities can help them to become active partners in their own learning. For those who have experienced trauma, that agency can further serve to mitigate some of the negative effects that can manifest as barriers to learning.

Here are some concrete ways to engage students by providing them with opportunities to use their voice and exercise choice in their learning:

- Allow students to choose between an array of engagement options in your course.
- Provide choice among several project topics or options.
- For an in-class activity, allow students to work individually, with a partner, or with a group.
- Incorporate peer feedback activities (e.g., students give each other feedback on drafts of papers).
- Ask your students for suggestions about adjustments to make in your course and/or ask for their perspective on the strengths of a specific assignment (and respond with changes or explanations that take their comments seriously).
- Provide opportunities for students to discuss their ideas – either with the whole class or in smaller groups.
- Engage the class in defining course expectations, co-creating a project or assessment, and/or identifying means for giving and receiving feedback on student work.

### **Intentionally Articulate Interest in your Students' Well-Being**

Students who have experienced trauma may have particular difficulty managing their stress and regulating their emotional responses. As stress levels increase – as often happens through the course of a semester – their difficulties may also increase.

Sometimes it is enough to simply let our students know that we care about their well-being, or to remind them to take care of themselves. At other times it is helpful to point students toward resources to help them manage their responses to stress and trauma. Consider adopting the following practices:

- Include UGA's required [Mental Health and Wellness Resources syllabus statement](#) in your syllabus, and mention it on the first day of class.
- Include comments in your syllabus and/or on the first day of class about the importance of mental health.
- Talk about student well-being during class time. For example, as Spring Break approaches remind your students to take care of themselves and reach out for help if they need it. As the middle or end of the semester approaches, remind

students to eat, sleep, shower, and exercise – on account of how those things will help them stay healthy.

- Incorporate brief well-being activities into your class (e.g., ask students to close their eyes and take several deep breaths, share moments of gratitude in partners, pause for a stand or stretch break, etc.).
- In times of collective hardship or loss, acknowledge the situation and commit to moving forward together. You can share your own experiences or insight and invite class discussion as you feel comfortable.
- List campus resources in your syllabus and through course announcements scheduled for key points during the semester.
- Connect care, empathy, and well-being to your course objectives or content. You can highlight those connections for students in a way that works for your subject (e.g., discussing the role of empathy in professions in your field, including course materials with perspectives on care, designing scenario-based tasks in which possible outcomes include a well-being or mental health component, or creating activities where students imagine or research care and well-being in a specific context, like a work of fiction or historical period).

### **Build Trust through the Instructor-Student Relationship**

Students who have experienced trauma may have a difficult time trusting others or experiencing relationships in a positive way. They may have experienced harm or abandonment from an adult or someone in a position of power. For this reason, we cannot expect instant trust from students, but we can work toward creating a learning environment marked by a growing sense of trust and safety.

We can build relationships with students by showing them that we see them as individuals and that we value them as whole people, whose lives and experiences outside of the classroom matter. Through meaningful and respectful interactions with our students, we can create conditions under which learning can occur. Consider exercising the following options as you teach:

- Learn and use your students' preferred names.
- Listen actively to your students, giving them your full attention. When a student wants to ask a question or discuss a concern, pause what you are doing and make eye contact. If you have to hurry to another class or meeting, or if you think the conversation would be better to have during office hours, explain that to the student and set up a plan for when and how you will talk next.
- Ask your students about their interests, activities, and goals – and share your own (within the bounds of an appropriately professional relationship, of course!).
- Inject relevant personal information into your course interactions. For example you might use a personal photo related to the topic at hand, mention a national park you've visited, defend the superiority of hockey to every other professional sport, or tie in a movie you've recently seen. Even simple connections can help build community, understanding, and trust.
- Talk about your motivations behind your work, teaching, and/or research.



- Make sure your students know how to reach you, and what they can expect in terms of response time. Where possible, provide both text-based and verbal options for connection.
- Reach out to check on students who seem to be struggling in (or absent from) your course. Ask them if there's anything they need to help them succeed in the course, and follow-up with campus resources when warranted.
- Reframe your thinking about the reasons behind a students' behavior and engagement in your course: adopt the perspective that they want to succeed and are doing as well as they can, given the circumstances. Ask them questions to help identify the barriers they are facing, and solutions for moving forward.

### **Build Community through Student-Student Relationships**

In addition to meeting goals and learning objectives in our courses, students benefit from developing relationships and social networks with their peers. During the semester, students can support one another, and they can form friendships that they will take with them into other courses and aspects of collegiate life.

Students who have experienced trauma may struggle to maintain existing relationships, to initiate new relationships, and to experience the positive benefits of healthy relationships. By providing opportunities for students to engage meaningfully with one another, we can provide an easier path toward the benefits of student-student relationships, as the more general benefits of a healthy community dynamic. Here are a few ideas for creating space for peer-to-peer interaction:

- Give students the opportunity to share about their lives and interests during class.
- Incorporate opportunities for students to talk to each about what they are learning, during class.
- When used early in the semester, begin pair and group activities with an introductory task that helps students get to know one another.
- In a large class, use a shared discussion board where students can ask questions about assignments, and encourage them to respond to each other's questions as well.
- Create opportunities for students to provide each other with feedback on their work.
- Incorporate cooperative and collaborative tasks that allow students to use their skills and learn from one another.
- Create a space in class or online that is social or fun. For example, you might include a weekly "share a meme with your neighbor" activity, or some other short and light-hearted engagement opportunity.
- Use self-enrollment groups in eLC to allow students to sign up for a study group.

### **Help Students Engage with a "Growth Mindset"**

Carol Dweck's research on growth vs. fixed mindsets has been widely discussed in academic settings (Dweck, Walton, & Cohen, 2014). Students with a *fixed mindset* toward their academic pursuits believe that their intelligence or talents are already

determined and limited in quantity. They tend to give up easily and are demotivated or embarrassed in the face of challenge.

Students with a *growth mindset*, on the other hand, believe that their intelligence can increase and develop as they put effort into their learning. They tend to engage with resilience and independence, and learn to see risk of failures as opportunities.

All students – and particularly students who have experienced significant setbacks due to trauma – will benefit from developing a growth mindset in the classroom. Finding ways to help students adopt a growth mindset in your class, then, can help keep students motivated and can thereby positively impact their learning.

Consider the following as ways to incorporate lessons-learned from the growth mindset literature into your teaching:

- Express belief in your students' potential for continued learning and development.
- Help students explore, identify, and apply their strengths. This could be through a formal strengths-identifying tool, or simply by providing them with reflection questions to consider in light of their engagement in your course.
- Provide feedback that emphasizes areas for growth rather than simply identifying incorrect responses (which is also sometimes necessary).
- Ask students to reflect on their own work and progress, thinking about their approach to work in the course, and how they might need to adjust their strategies to find success.
- Emphasize learning and developing proficiency rather than performing well. If a student wants to improve on a test score, for example, talk through what the score represents in terms of their journey toward proficiency and content mastery, rather than the grade itself. What skills can the student develop further? How they can more effectively demonstrate their learning and understanding when answering a test question?
- Highlight the long-term implications of the course goals and skills, such as how students might incorporate them in future careers or interpersonal relationships.

As an added bonus, you can also work toward a growth mindset in your teaching. Remember that your teaching skills and knowledge can grow and change over time. When faced with situations that do not seem to be working out the way you'd like, engage in reflection and take the time to identify new strategies to apply. Engage with the CTL and your colleagues, and find your way iteratively forward!

### **Take Care of Yourself**

The emotional impact of teaching a population affected by trauma can lead to *compassion fatigue*. Compassion fatigue is a type of *secondary traumatic stress* (STS) that results from the demanding nature of encountering the traumatic experiences of others. With this in mind, it is important to attend to your own needs for support, self-compassion, and self-care.

Pay attention to your own mindset – in general and specifically with respect to your teaching. If you are finding yourself increasingly indifferent to or irritated by the needs of your students, you may be experiencing compassion fatigue.

To help yourself, try to incorporate some of the following strategies in relation to your teaching:

- Set aside specific times to engage with your students, allowing yourself to take time away from your teaching (e.g., tell your students that you will not reply to emails on Sundays).
- Build mechanisms into your course (such as many described in the strategies above) to take care of your students without major additional emotional effort from you.
- Talk with colleagues or friends about your frustrations.
- Engage in stress-relieving activities like rest, physical activity, taking time for fun and creative activities, or spending time with friends or family.
- Reach out to those in your personal or professional networks for support.
- Seek support from mental health professionals when needed.

## **Campus Resources for Students**

- [Student Care & Outreach](#) connects students with resources on campus.
- [BeWellUGA](#) through the [University Health Center](#) offers resources and programming for student mental health and wellness.
- [Disability Resource Center](#)
- [International Student Life](#)
- [Financial Hardship resources](#)
- [LGBT Resource Center](#)
- [Multicultural Services and Programs](#)
- [Student Veterans Resource Center](#)
- [Therapy Assistance Online \(TAO\)](#)
- The [Student Affairs](#) website lists many more programs, including student organizations, that can provide resources, support, and community.
- At times, faculty may be able to connect students with an on-campus mentor. Students may also benefit from joining the [Mentor Program](#).

## **Campus Resources for Faculty**

- [HR's Work Life Balance page](#)
- [Therapy Assistance Online \(TAO\)](#)
- [UGA's Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#)
- UGA's Well-being Coordinator: [wellbeing@uga.edu](mailto:wellbeing@uga.edu)

## For Further Reading

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## Trauma-Aware Teaching Checklist

This doc lives at: <https://bit.ly/traumachecklist>.

*This checklist has been prepared for higher educators as a tool to reflect on their teaching and courses, regardless of modality. The [six principles of trauma-informed care](#) developed by SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) are a foundational concept in the trauma field. In this checklist, they are adapted to the field of education to assist teachers in creating more trauma-aware classrooms.*

### 1. Safety

A sense of safety is a baseline for learning. If we are poised for an incoming threat (whether real or perceived), our systems are built to scan for and prepare for said threat. Higher order thinking will take a backseat to self-protection. Unsafe learning environments are a barrier to teaching and learning. All students will be harmed by unsafe learning environments, but they are particularly damaging for our learners with trauma histories. Trauma strips away our basic sense of safety and of being at home in our bodies. Creating safe and welcoming classroom environments benefits all students and teachers.

- Do your students feel safe in your classroom? Do you? Consistently and clearly communicate any safety concerns to your campus leaders and community. Remind them that a sense of safety is a precursor to learning.
- We can make assumptions about students' perceptions of safety. We can also ask them. Have you surveyed your students about how they feel in your class?
- Students should not be required or expected to disclose trauma to you in order to receive attention to their safety. Be mindful of how you talk to your students about safety, and let students know that disclosure is their choice. Respect students' privacy.
- Consider that the concept of safety varies for different populations (and within populations). What it takes for a White man in your class to feel safe might be very different than what a Black woman needs to feel safe. If you are from a non-minoritized population, continue to educate yourself and listen to the needs of minoritized communities.
- Work with your students during the first week of class to set community guidelines for the course.

- ❑ Pay careful attention to course discussions, whether online or in-person. Do you have a plan in place to keep students safe while encouraging creative and divergent thinking?
- ❑ Make clear to students how, when, and why they can contact you to report any concerning incidents in class (including those that arise from your own behaviors).
- ❑ Your ability to create trauma-aware courses rests heavily on the extent to which you manage your own well-being. Reflect upon the impact of trauma and toxic stress in your life. Trauma is treatable and [resources are available](#).
- ❑ Read: [Racial Battle Fatigue in Higher Education](#), Chapter 5: "Traumatic Pedagogy: When Epistemic Privilege and White Privilege Collide" by Tapo Chimbanga.

## 2. Trustworthiness and Transparency

Can students learn without trusting their teacher or each other? Possibly. But certainly, a trustworthy learning environment is much more efficient in support of the teaching and learning process, in addition to being trauma-aware. People who've experienced significant trauma are often hesitant to trust others. They might be particularly wary of trusting authority figures who they may feel have failed them in the past. Working to earn and keep our students' trust will benefit all learners.

- ❑ In order to enter into a trusting collaboration with your students, you will need to reveal something of yourself as a fellow human being to them. Michelle Pacansky-Brock's [model of Humanizing](#) is an excellent guide. What humanizing elements are included in your course? Can you add one or two to boost the trust factor?
- ❑ Trust rests on the truth. The truth is often uncomfortable, sometimes extraordinarily so. Tell it anyway. Tell it to yourself, your colleagues, your leaders, and your students. Make telling the truth a rigorous, serious, daily practice in your life.
- ❑ Telling the truth does not mean ignoring our students' needs. For example, when providing feedback on assignments, we can be honest with students about their areas of opportunity without belittling or embarrassing them. Focus on strengths. Be kind and direct. Encourage your students. Quality feedback should leave students feeling hopeful and motivated, not discouraged.
- ❑ Being trustworthy and transparent includes healthy boundaries. Set clear, consistent, professional boundaries in your relationships. You can be human, real, and honest with your students while maintaining boundaries.
- ❑ Many of us never learned healthy boundaries in our home environments or elsewhere. If the concept of boundaries is new to you, seek out resources including readings, workshops, and therapy. Develop a working definition of what boundaries mean to you.

For me, a boundary is a flexible but firm guideline that I set for myself to guide my choices, relationships, and behaviors. I cannot set boundaries for others because I cannot control anyone's behaviors but my own.

- ❑ Be transparent in your decisions about course development, assignments, and grading. Let students “behind the curtain” and invite their feedback when possible. When in doubt, ask your students for their feedback.
- ❑ If you screw up (and you will, because you are a human being), name it, apologize, make it right, and move forward.
- ❑ Read: Brene Brown's [“The Seven Elements of Trust.”](#)

### 3. Peer Support

You are an expert in your field with valuable information to share with your students. You are a leader in your course. And, it's also true that your students know things that you don't know, and they are also potential leaders in your course if you create space for them to step into that role. It is imperative that you create structures for your students to connect with their peers and to lead themselves and one another. This can happen both synchronous and asynchronously in any modality.

- ❑ Begin the course with ample time for students to connect with one another. This might happen in an introductory discussion or activity. Prioritize connections over reviewing the syllabus. Put first things first.
- ❑ In an online course, consider a tool like [FlipGrid](#) or [VoiceThread](#) to allow students to see and hear one another, if they so choose. But remember, [forcing students to be on camera](#) is not trauma-aware.
- ❑ For online students, synchronous sessions can be a powerful tool to build peer connections. [Use them mindfully](#), and create options for students to engage with you and one another.
- ❑ For BIPOC learners, LGBTQ students, and learners with disabilities, the opportunity for peer connections may be even more critical to their success. Does your course acknowledge the needs of these populations? Consider connecting these students to campus groups or resources outside of your class. Post that content in a course toolbox for easy access.
- ❑ Encourage (but don't require) students to find a course “buddy” with whom they'll exchange contact information. This is especially important for online students who can be prone to isolation.



- ❑ Whether or not you choose to tackle formal group assignments, have students working with their peers regularly.
- ❑ Read: [Sharing is Caring: 50 Collaborative Google Apps Activities](#).

#### **4. Collaboration and Mutuality**

The old model of higher education teaching was that of a sage on the stage. The professor might have even stood behind an actual podium, communicating a sense of distance and separation between them and their students. They were the only leader in the classroom, and students were often seen and treated as beneath the teacher. Most educators are now moving away from this rigidly hierarchical model toward a more collaborative, learning-centered approach.

- ❑ Reflect on your philosophy of education. To paraphrase Yeats, do you see teaching as the filling of a bucket or the lighting of a fire? Or perhaps, the creation of space for students' existing fires to burn more brightly?
- ❑ Review your course and note places where students have input on course content, discussions, and assignments. If there aren't any, add some. Where can you shift some authority from yourself to your students?
- ❑ Do we want to help students be able to work as part of high-functioning teams in their future? If so, we need to model and teach that in our classrooms. Consider how making students partners in your courses teaches them critical success skills for life, community, and their future careers.
- ❑ Ask students to set and share their learning goals at the start of the class. Revisit these periodically. Encourage students to edit their goals. Goals are meant to evolve.
- ❑ If issues arise over late work or other challenges, ask students, "What do you think should happen? What is your suggestion?" to involve them in the decision-making process.
- ❑ Teach students how, when, and why to advocate for themselves. Encourage help-seeking by answering students questions and then asking them, "Does this answer your question? If not, please let me know."
- ❑ Recognize that just as you are teaching your students, your students are also teaching you. Rethink teacher-student dichotomy.
- ❑ Read: Paulo Freire's [Pedagogy of the Oppressed](#).

#### **5. Empowerment (Voice) & Choice**

One of my favorite teaching quotes comes from Thomas Carruthers: “A teacher is one who makes himself progressively unnecessary.” We can help our students to find and use their voices, to speak truth to power, and to become more confident thinkers, writers, creators, and citizens. People who’ve experienced trauma were often in situations where their rights and choices were taken away from them. Trauma-aware classrooms empower students.

- ❑ Balance choice with structure. Choice is an important element to empower students to be more self-directed. Too much choice can cause students to become confused. Get to know your students and their unique needs.
- ❑ If you’re new to infusing your course with choices for learners, start small. Overwhelming yourself will overwhelm your students. Pick one assignment or topic through which you can offer students a few choices.
- ❑ Some less-confident learners might get anxious about choices. They might ask you to tell them what to do. If they’ve never had choices in their learning before, they need to be taught how to make these choices. Consider meeting with those students 1:1 to help them process their options.
- ❑ Scaffold choices in the classroom by offering a “most popular” choice option. Again, for less confident learners, this lets them make a choice but provides them more structure.
- ❑ Consider choice in the context of [Gerald Grow’s Staged Self-Directed Learning Model \(SSDL\)](#). Recognize that learners will have different levels of confidence with choice. Aim to meet students where they are and provide the appropriate level of direction/facilitation.
- ❑ Begin lessons by asking students to share what they already know about a topic. Create space for ALL students to share, either in a Zoom chat or in-person via think-pair-share type of activities. This will set the tone for the lesson by showing students that the foundation for learning is their own existing knowledge.
- ❑ Craft assignments in such a way that students are encouraged to utilize their own life experiences to learn and consider course content. Remember, students know things.
- ❑ Empowering students is not about forcing the issue. Remember, we want to give students choices. For example, requiring students to do a research project on the impact of COVID-19 on their community might be empowering for some and traumatizing for others, particularly for those in communities that are disproportionately harmed by this pandemic. Make sure there is a backup choice that would be less personal for students who so choose.
- ❑ Create spaces for all voices in the classroom. Do not ask minoritized students to speak on behalf of entire populations of minoritized people. Ijeoma Oluo’s book, [So You Want](#)

[to Talk About Race](#), includes excellent, practical guidelines on holding important conversations about race.

- ❑ It's okay to be nervous about releasing the illusion of control in the classroom. Learning and living are messy. You aren't alone in those feelings.
- ❑ Read: ["Does offering students a choice in assignments lead to greater engagement?"](#)

## 6. Cultural, Historical, & Gender Issues

If you wish to be trauma-aware, you must acknowledge anti-Blackness, all forms of racism, misogyny, ableism, and bigotry toward LGBTQ folx. To deny any form of oppression is an example of retraumatization. You are not asked to be perfect in your awareness; you are going to fail and fail often. You are asked to keep trying and to fail with greater awareness. You are asked to interrogate your own privilege and to act to dismantle that privilege. You are asked to think and feel deeply about how trauma impacts each of us differently. There is a tension here, because trauma does not care how much money or privilege we have. Anyone can experience trauma at any time. That said, money, privilege, and power also protect people from all manner of trauma. Both are true.

- ❑ Do your own work. Seek out existing resources on all types of oppressions and bigotry.
- ❑ Consider [incorporating discussions of race](#) into your classroom. Seek support for this work. Does your institution have a space for you to talk about your experiences with other educators?
- ❑ Cite Black women. <https://www.citeblackwomencollective.org/> Include many diverse voices in your assigned readings and course content.
- ❑ Recognize that minoritized individuals have immense intelligence, wisdom, strength, and creativity as both individuals and communities. As Whitman said, we contain multitudes. That said, be extremely cautious of [conversations around grit](#), which can often discount systemic forces like racism and place blame on individuals. You will see this arise in the trauma literature under the topic of "resilience." Resilience can sometimes be used to ask trauma survivors to practice a "chin up" mentality. This can lead to retraumatization. Remember, trauma is something that by definition is unbearable, and it is also true that we have personal and community resources that can help us bear it.
- ❑ Read Dena Simmons's ["If we aren't addressing racism, we aren't addressing trauma."](#)

## **Closing Thoughts on Creating a Simple and Sustainable Trauma-Aware Teaching Practice**

This is a long list. Our time and energy are limited. We must develop practices that we can sustain. We cannot fill from an empty cup.

When I read, I underline a lot of important ideas. But some ideas jump off the page, and those will get some other type of annotation next to them, such as an \* or a !. Read through this checklist, and notice what jumps off the page at you. What ideas grab you? Which feel most critical to you? Pick one or two. Start there, and start slowly. Becoming a trauma-aware educator is not something that can happen in a day, a week, a month, or probably even a year. It is a lifelong practice. Start where you are.

I read somewhere once that the point of making a mistake is to learn how to make more. I think of that often, recovering perfectionist that I am. We are all only human. Do your best with this challenging work, accept that you will make mistakes, and then through facing those mistakes with humility, you will have the chance for true alchemy: transforming your mistakes into lessons, growth, and service.

Take care of yourself. Take care of each other.

# Crisis Hotlines

## **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**

Call: **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

[Lifeline \(suicidepreventionlifeline.org\)](https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

24/7 free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals. Also available for Spanish-speakers and anyone who is deaf or hard of hearing.

## **Veterans Crisis Line**

Call: **1-800-273-8255**, and Press 1

Text: **838255**

Chat: [Connect online](#)

24/7 free confidential support open to all veterans, military members, family, and friends.

## **Crisis Text Line**

Text HOME to: **741741** to connect with a Crisis Counselor

US and Canada: text 741741

UK: text 85258 | Ireland: text 50808

<https://www.crisistextline.org>

Message [Crisis Text Line on Facebook](#) [must be logged into a Facebook account]

24/7 free confidential support from volunteer counselors, supervised by a licensed, trained mental health professional. It may take a few moments to connect.

## **Disaster Distress Helpline**

Call or Text: **1-800-985-5990**

[Disaster Distress Helpline | SAMHSA](#)

24/7 free national hotline dedicated to providing immediate crisis counseling for people who are experiencing emotional distress related to any natural or human-caused disaster. Spanish-speakers can call the hotline and press “2” for 24/7 bilingual support.

## **Trans Lifeline**

Call: **(877) 565-8860**

<https://translifeline.org>

24/7 free confidential trans-led crisis intervention and can also offer guidance to anyone who is questioning their gender and needs support.

## **LGBTQIA+ National Hotline**

Call: **1-888-843-4564**

<https://www.glbthotline.org>

Email: [help@LGBThotline.org](mailto:help@LGBThotline.org)

Hours: M - F, 4pm–12am ET / 1pm–9pm PT, Saturday 12pm–5pm ET/ 9am–2pm PT

Free and confidential, providing an anonymous safe space where callers can speak on many different issues and concerns including, but not limited to, coming out issues, gender and/or sexuality identities, relationship concerns, bullying, workplace issues, HIV/AIDS anxiety, safer sex information, suicide, and much more.

## **Crisis Hotlines for Children & Youth**

### **YouthLine**

Text “teen2teen” to **839863**

Call: **1-877-968-8491**

YouthLine provides a safe space for children and adults ages 11 to 21, to talk through any issues they may be facing, including eating disorders, relationship or family concerns, bullying, sexual identity, depression, self-harm, anxiety, and thoughts of suicide.

### **Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline**

Call: **1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453)**

Text: **1-800-422-4453**

<https://childhelphotline.org/>

24/7 free confidential support for issues related to child abuse. Childhelp connects you with professional counselors to help in a crisis, and provide information on how to get help. They offer phone support in 170 languages.

### **The Trevor Project**

Call: **1-866-488-7386**

Text START to: **678678**

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org>

24/7 free confidential support for LGBTQIA+ kids and teens during a crisis, if they are feeling suicidal or need a safe space to talk about any issue.

## **Domestic Violence, Rape, & Sexual Assault Hotlines**

### **National Domestic Violence Hotline**

Call: 1.800.799.SAFE (7233) / TTY 1.800.787.3224

Chat: [Domestic Violence Support \(thehotline.org\)](https://www.thehotline.org)

Text "START" to: 88788

24/7 free, confidential support for anyone who is experiencing domestic violence and/or abuse, plus anyone concerned about a friend, family member, or loved one. Support in more than 200 languages.

### **National Deaf Domestic Violence Hotline**

Video Phone: 855-812-1001

Email: [hotline@adwas.org](mailto:hotline@adwas.org)

Live Chat: [The Deaf Hotline](https://www.thehotline.org)

24/7 free, confidential support with a trained counselor. The National Deaf Domestic Violence Hotline is a spinoff from the NDVH specifically for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals.

### **RAINN**

Call: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

Chat: [Online Hotline \(rainn.org\)](https://www.rainn.org)

For anyone who's experienced sexual abuse or assault. You'll be connected to a local organization in your area who can provide live support and direct you to resources.

### **State & Local Resources**

#### **The Cottage Sexual Assault Center & Children's Advocacy Center**

Call: **1-877-363-1912**

24/7 free, confidential support for individuals who have experienced sexual violence and child abuse.

#### **Georgia Crisis & Access Line (GCAL)**

Call: **1-800-715-4225**

24/7 helpline providing crisis assistance and access to resources and services for mental health crises, developmental disabilities and substance abuse crises.

#### **Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence Hotline**

Call: **1-800-334-2836**

Find a domestic violence shelter in Georgia.

#### **Georgia Elder Abuse Hotline**

Call: 1-800-252-8966

Hours: M - F 8am – 5pm