

Children and Trauma in Physical Activity Settings

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Objectives:

- Participants will broaden their understanding of how exposure to trauma affects children
- Participants will reconsider practices that may exacerbate adverse reactions
- Participants will explore strategies and activities that may help children feel safe and productive in physical activity settings

Exposure to traumatic events affects children's mood and their ability to regulate emotions. The severity of the event and/or repeated exposure to traumatic events compounds the level to which children are affected.

Creating a safe environment:

Create predictable routines - format for entering, an arrival activity that does not require any significant emotional or mental energy to ease the transition to physical activity and the gym or outdoor space, format for transitioning from one activity to another

Establish clear expectations - rules are explicitly taught and clearly posted. Specific acknowledgement/praise given for following them. Specific feedback given in a calm manner when students are struggling

Engage in activities that minimize the likelihood of a student finding themselves overwhelmed:

non-elimination games - examples: Stoplight Tag, Fox and Rabbit Tag, Odd One Out
games that provide autonomy and choice - examples: Clear the Castle [where running out of bounds is a choice], Square Ball [alternative to dodgeball-type activities which are especially problematic for these children]

Facilitating emotional regulation

Engage in activities that help facilitate or promote emotional regulation

Yoga - Cosmic Kids, Yoga Foster

Mindfulness/Breathing - Calm and Headspace apps, Cosmic Kids, Yoga Foster

Running/Walking club - ezmileageclub.com, Billion Mile Race, Marathon Kids, Girls on the Run

Cardio Drumming

Explicitly teach emotional awareness

Through activities - emotional BINGO, scooter challenge, basketball challenge

Provide a "Calm Down Corner" - Create a designated space where children can elect to take some space to regain control

Provide opportunities for meaningful reflection instead of just time out

Model and facilitate meaningful apologies with efforts to empathize and make things right