



Building a Safe Place

1

What Is Safety?

Pronunciation: \ˈsāf-tē\

Function: Noun

From the Middle English *saufte*, from the Anglo-French *salveté, saufté*, from *safe* safe

Definition:

1) the condition of being safe from undergoing or causing hurt, injury, or loss

2

Safety and Trauma

- Physical safety is not the same as psychological safety.
- Children's definition of "safety" will not be the same as yours.
- To help children feel safe, you will need to look at the world through his or her "trauma lens."
(Continued)

3

Give a Safety Message

- Partner with the social worker or caseworker.
- Get down to the child's eye level.
- Promise to keep the child physically safe.
- Ask directly what the child needs to feel safe.
- Follow the child's lead.
- Let the child know that you are ready to hear what he or she needs.

4

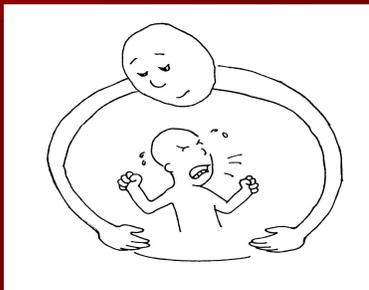
Explain Rules

When explaining program rules:

- Consider the child's history.
- Don't overwhelm the child.
- Emphasize protection.
- Be flexible when you can.

5

Be an "Emotional Container"



6

Be an “Emotional Container”

- Be willing—and prepared—to tolerate strong emotional reactions.
- Remember the suitcase!
- Respond calmly but firmly.
- Help the child identify and label the feelings beneath the outburst.
- Reassure the child that it is okay to feel any and all emotions.

7

Manage Emotional “Hot Spots”

- Food and mealtime
- Sleep and bedtime
- Physical boundaries, privacy, personal grooming, medical care

8

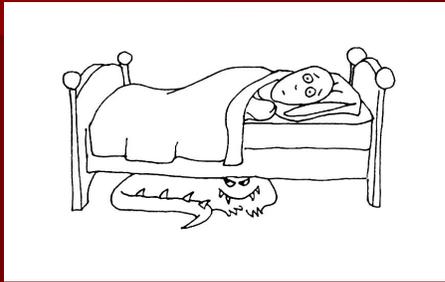
Food and Meals

- Be aware of children’s history.
- Accommodate food preferences, if possible.
- Set consistent meal times.
- Involve children in planning and making meals.
- Keep mealtimes calm and supportive.



9

Sleep and Bedtime



(Continued)

10

Sleep and Bedtime

- Help the child to "own" the bedroom.
- Respect and protect the child's privacy.
- Acknowledge and respect fears.
- Set consistent sleep and wake times with predictable, calming routines.
- Seek help if needed.

11

Physical Boundaries

Children who have been neglected and abused may:

- Never have learned that their bodies should be cared for and protected
- Feel disconnected and at odds with their bodies
- See their bodies as "vessels of the negative memories and experiences they carry, a constant reminder not only of what has happened to them but of how little they are worth"

12

Physical Boundaries

- Respect the child's physical boundaries.
- Make the bathroom a safe zone.
- When helping younger children bathe, ask permission before touching and be clear about what you are doing and why.

13

Trauma Reminders

People, situations, places, things, or feelings that remind children of traumatic events:

- May evoke intense and disturbing feelings tied to the original trauma
- Can lead to behaviors that seem out of place, but may have been appropriate at the time of the original traumatic event



14

Trauma Reminders' Impact

Frequent reactions to trauma reminders can:

- Keep a child in a state of emotional upset
- Be seen by others as overreacting to ordinary events
- Result in avoidance behaviors
- Isolate the child from peers and family
- Make a child feel ashamed or afraid of going "crazy"

15

Identifying Trauma Reminders

- When your child or adolescent has a reaction, make note of:
 - When
 - Where
 - What
- When possible, reduce exposure.
- Share your observations with your child's caseworker and therapist.

16

Coping with Trauma Reminders: What Parents Can Do

- Ensure safety
- Reorient
- Reassure
- Define what's happened
- Respect and normalize the child's experience
- Differentiate past from present

17

Coping with Trauma Reminders: What NOT to Do

- Assume the child is being rebellious
- Tell the child he or she is being dramatic or "overreacting"
- Force the child to face reminder
- Express anger or impatience

18

Coping with Trauma Reminders: What Children Can Do—SOS

- **Stop**
 - Stop and take several long, deep breaths.
- **Orient**
 - Look around and take in immediate surroundings.
 - Make note of physical reactions (breathing, heartbeat, etc).
- **Seek Help**
 - Use a “stress buster” to help calm down.
 - If needed, call a trusted friend or reliable adult.

19

SOS: Identifying Stress Busters

- Activities (running, playing a particular song)
- Things (a toy, a stuffed animal, a picture, a favorite blanket, a particular food)
- Places (a spot in the yard or a park, a room)
- People
- A specific thought, phrase, or prayer

20

Coping with Trauma Reminders

How did the residential Counselors . . .

- Reorient the child and ensure safety?
- Help the child understand what happened?
- Differentiate past from present?
- Give the child new options for coping with a reminder?

Would you have done anything differently?

21

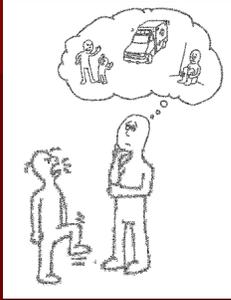


Illustration by Ernie Spahn, Jr. Used with permission.

Dealing with Feelings and Behaviors

22

Seeing Below the Surface



Child's behaviors

Child's feelings, thoughts, expectations, and beliefs

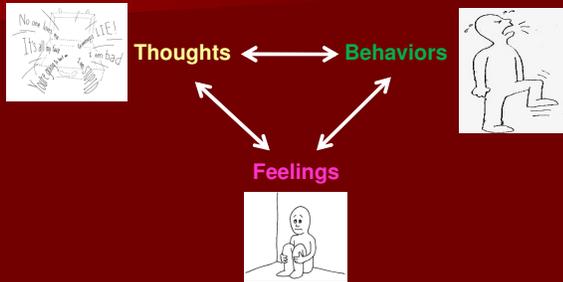
23

Essential Elements 3 and 4

3. Help children to understand and manage overwhelming emotions.
4. Help children to understand and modify problem behaviors.

24

The Cognitive Triangle



25

Trauma and the Triangle

Children who have experienced trauma may find it hard to:

- See the connection between their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors
- Understand and express their own emotional reactions
- Accurately read other people's emotional cues
- Control their reactions to threats or trauma reminders

26

Trauma and the Triangle

Children may act out as a way of:

- Reenacting patterns or relationships from the past
- Increasing interaction, even if the interactions are negative
- Keeping caregivers at a physical or emotional distance
- "Proving" the beliefs in their Invisible Suitcase
- Venting frustration, anger, or anxiety
- Protecting themselves

27

How You Can Help

- Differentiate yourself from past caregivers.
- Tune in to the child's emotions.
- Set an example of the emotional expression and behaviors you expect.
- Encourage positive emotional expression and behaviors by supporting the child's strengths and interests.
- Correct negative behaviors and inappropriate or destructive emotional expression, and help children build new behaviors and emotional skills.

28

Differentiate

Take care not to:

- "Buy into" the beliefs in their invisible suitcases
- React in anger or the heat of the moment
- Take behavior at face value
- **Take it personally**

29

Set an Example

Express the full range of emotions:

- Stay clear, calm, and consistent.
- Be honest and genuine.
- Let the child know that it's normal to feel different (or mixed) emotions at the same time.

30

What happened?

- Why did this child react the way she did?
- What did her staff do right?
- Have you ever experienced something similar with the children in your care?

31

Encourage

Encourage positive behaviors:

- “Catch” your child being good.
- Praise, praise, praise!
 - Be specific.
 - Be prompt.
 - Be warm.
- Strive for at least six praises for every one correction.

(Continued)

32

Encourage *(Continued)*

Encourage and support the child’s strengths and interests:

- Offer choices whenever possible.
- Let children “do it themselves.”
- Recognize and encourage the child’s unique interests and talents.
- Help children master a skill.

33

Taking Stock

In the last week, how many times did you . . .

- Compliment the child for doing something well?
- Say "thank you" to the child?
- Ask the child's opinion about something?
- Give the child a chance to do something for him- or herself?
- Offer the child options?
- Laugh with the child?

34

Taking Stock *(Continued)*

In the last week, how many times did you . . .

- Tell the child to do something?
- Tell the child *not* to do something?
- Tell the child to *stop* doing something?
- Have to impose consequences on a child?
- Ask the child what on *earth* he or she was thinking?

35

Achieving a Balance

- What talents/skills/interests can you encourage?
- Where can you give the child some control?
- What fun activities/interests can you share?
- What kinds of praise would the child appreciate?
- What kind of rewards would be most meaningful?

36

Correct and Build

When correcting negative or inappropriate behavior and setting consequences:

- Be clear, calm, and consistent.
- Target one behavior at a time.
- Avoid shaming or threatening.
- Keep the child's age (and "emotional age") in mind.
- Be prepared to "pick your battles."

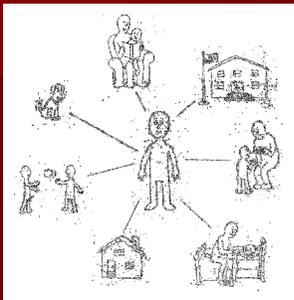
37

Correct and Build (Continued)

Focus on helping the child . . .

- Understand the links between thoughts, feelings, and behavior
- Understand the negative impact of his or her behavior
- Identify alternatives to problem/negative behaviors
- Practice techniques for changing negative thoughts and calming runaway emotions

38



Illustrations by Erich Ippen, Jr. Used with permission

Connections and Healing

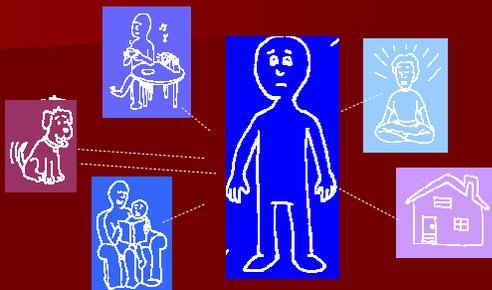
***When you feel
connected to
something, that
connection
immediately gives you
a purpose for living.***

Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD

What keeps you connected?

- Relationships
 - Family
 - Friends
 - Co-workers
- Life Stories – Past, Present, Future
 - Personal
 - Family
 - Cultural
- Places, things, rituals, and practices

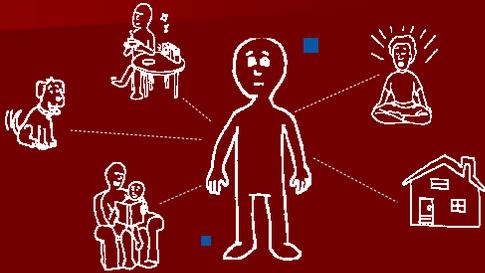
Name Your Connections . . .



(Continued)

Name Your Connections . . .

(Continued)



Children Define Themselves Through Their Connections

- Who am I?
- What is lovable about me?
- What am I capable of?
- How can I survive and make sense out of what's happened to me?
- Who will I be in the future?

Essential Elements 5 and 6

5. Respect and support positive, stable, and enduring relationships in the life of the children in our care.
6. Help the children develop a strength-based understanding of his or her life story.

***It takes two to speak
the truth.
One to speak, and
another to hear.***
Walt Whitman

46

Making It Safe to Talk

- Makes the “unmentionable” mentionable
- Reinforces the message that the child is not responsible for the trauma
- Provides an opportunity to correct mistaken beliefs
- Teaches children that trauma does not have to define their lives

Talking About Trauma

- **Expect the unexpected.**
- **Be aware of your reactions.**
- **Don’t make assumptions.**
- **Be ready to listen and talk openly with your child, rather than avoiding the topic.**

(Continued)

Talking About Trauma *(Continued)*

- Stop what you are doing and make eye contact.
- Listen quietly.
- Provide simple, encouraging remarks in a calm tone of voice.
- Avoid “shutting down” the child.

(Continued)

Talking About Trauma

- Offer comfort without being unrealistic.
- Praise the child's efforts to tell what happened.
- Provide constructive feedback.
 - Focus on the *behavior* of the caregiver, rather than making judgments.
- Be ready to share information with the child's therapist, and to report abuse or neglect that has not yet been reported.

Building New Connections

Build connections across the disruptions in your child's life:

- Document positive events and experiences (photos, scrapbooks, journals, etc.).
- Help “reconstruct” past experiences.
- Encourage the child to look forward to future goals and dreams.

Helping Children

Think about the child in your "My Child" Worksheet. How can you help this child. . .:

- Feel safe when talking about trauma?
- Build connections across disruptions?
- Look positively towards the future?
