



Tool 1.1.

Fostering a trauma-informed learning environment

CLARITY Competence Area:

Taking care of climate emotions and trauma

GreenComp Competence Area:

Acting for sustainability

Why use this tool?

This tool is essential for all teachers or educators who are committed to supporting their learners in dealing with climate anxiety and other climate emotions, as well as in navigating the impacts of trauma that may occur because of climate change. Some activities offer concrete methods to deal with the nervous system dysregulation of one learner or of a group of learners. Other activities focus on you, the teacher or informal educator, and introduce some critical skills you need to build, and preparatory work that you need to undertake before creating spaces to talk about climate emotions with your group of learners.

Activity 1.1.2

Quick self-regulation techniques for teachers

Overview

This activity helps you, the teacher or informal educator, regulate your own nervous system, so that you can best support your learners when they feel anxious or are experiencing dysregulation as a result of trauma. These self-regulation techniques will support teachers and educators who are themselves suffering from strong anxiety and/or traumas related to extreme events associated with climate change. Some techniques can be performed in the classroom right before supporting a learner suffering from dysregulation. Other techniques can be performed before or in between classes.

INFO



This activity is transversal and should be practiced early on.



Curriculum linkage

This is a transversal skill not associated with a specific class or discipline, and to be acquired before opening up spaces to talk about climate emotions with your learners.

Competences built

Emotional regulation, self-reflection, inner compass, trauma-informed leadership

Prep Work

You should test all these self-regulation techniques outside of the classroom first, including to deal with everyday stresses. Please try as many of the techniques as possible in different contexts so as to see which ones work best for you. The more you practice, the more likely you are to use the techniques in stressful situations when you most need them.

Competences/activities to practice first by the teacher:

Climate emotions wheel 1.2.1

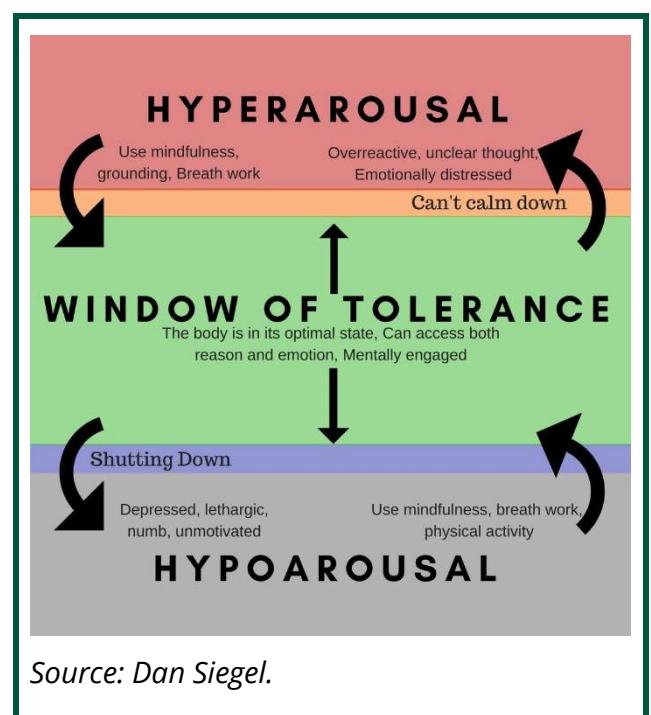


Preamble

In this activity card, you will find some examples of quick emotional regulation tools you can use on yourself. It is important to note they take practice so that your nervous system evolves. They are quick but the process to access them is repetition. The more you practice the easier they will be to use. It is critical that you build awareness of your own stress system. You can use the window of tolerance system below to familiarize yourself with your own window of tolerance. The more you are aware of your own stress responses and window of tolerance, the easier it will be for you to mobilize emotional regulation techniques at the right time.

Step 1: Assess your level of emotional dysregulation

1. Feel into your body to assess how you position yourself in the window of tolerance graph. This will be easier to do if you practice tracking your nervous system, when you are not in an emergency situation.
2. If you are getting closer to the red or the grey zones, take a mental note of it, take a pause and consider self-regulation techniques you can mobilize quickly. By acknowledging "I am very stressed right now" you are in a better position to manage your stress than if you do not acknowledge it.



Step 2: Practice an emotional regulation technique in the classroom

If you feel you are out of your window of tolerance while in the classroom, there are a few techniques you can use. If you practice them enough in non-emergency situations, they will be easier to mobilize on the spot, and you will know which technique(s) works best for you.

1. **Breathe.** Breathing is an important self-regulation tool because our breath is directly related to our parasympathetic nervous system, which is in charge of relaxing, resting and finding safety. Breathing techniques can include:



- a. Taking deep breaths 3 times
- b. Exhaling for twice as long as you inhale

Find some sensory help so as to help you connect to the place you are in in the present moment. This could mean:

- c. **Look at the room you are in**, and what represents safety in the room, such as the door or the clock, or what you see through the window. Mentally noting the time can help you be more in the present.
- d. **Touch** a familiar object. It can be an object on your desk or an object you keep in your pocket like a pebble.
- e. **Smell** the usual smells in the air
- f. **Drink** water. Take three sips of water consciously.

Change your posture by deliberately straightening your back and putting your shoulders down and inviting in your own dignity. When our back is supporting us and we stand on both feet with all our weight evenly distributed, it is easier to regulate our emotions.

Ground yourself. Notice that you are in a body, and that you are supported by the ground underneath you. Feel your feet on the floor and press them into the floor. This can help us feel safe in our body.

Use a mental declaration or self-talk that reminds you of your values. It could be:

- g. I'm committed to treating myself and everyone else with dignity.
- h. I'm committed to making this classroom a safe place.
- i. I'm committed to safety in this room. And that starts with me.

Step 3: Practice an emotional regulation technique outside of the classroom

If you have the opportunity to practice slightly longer self-regulation techniques before class or in between classes, you can:

1. **Breathe.** Breathing is an important self-regulation tool because our breath is directly related to our parasympathetic nervous system, which is in charge of relaxing, resting and finding safety. Breathing techniques that require more time can include:
 - a. Box breathing: this entails slowly inhaling (slow count of 4, for instance), holding your breath (slow count of 4), slowly exhaling (slow count of 4), holding your breath (slow count of 4) and repeat.
 - b. Alternate nostrils deep breathing



Find some sensory help so as to help you connect to the place you are in in the present moment. This could mean:

- c. Look** at the courtyard or park you are in, and notice how nature can be experienced through all of your senses
- d. Smell** any calming essential oils such as lime

Shake, stretch, soothe in a place that feels safe for you to do those movements:

- e.** Shaking allows the stress to move through your body, and your body to relax
- f.** Stretching gives a direct message to your nervous system that you are safe, while stress make us constrict ourselves
- g.** Soothing movements by stroking one's upper arms rhythmically with our arms crossed, or oscillating from the left to the right leg for a few minutes.

Humming creates a vagus nerve state of vibration with the breath. It has a calming effect that helps to regulate the nervous system.



Do's and Don'ts

Do:

- Know that if you have experienced trauma, deep breathing exercises and other exercises through which you connect to your body can be intense or distressing, and hence may not help you to self-regulate. Take it gently and follow your body's felt sense of safety and care.
- Acknowledge that we have been taught to dismiss these ways of self-regulation, so there is a tendency to resist them at first.
- Practice self-regulation techniques as much as possible.

Don't:

- Don't expect to be able to self-regulate during a crisis if you have not practiced before.
- Don't blame yourself for not managing to self-regulate properly in some crisis situations. In that case, acknowledge the situation when supporting a learner or group of learners, while highlighting that you are doing your best. Just keep practicing self-regulation techniques as much as you can.

Adaptations:

We invite you to adapt this activity to the specific needs of your learners, including by taking into account their neurodiversity. When adapting tools and activities for neurodivergent learners, please note it is not about treating others how you want to be treated, but how they want to be treated. Ask, listen, and stay open to different ways of learning and engaging.



References

This activity card was developed under the guidance of Jo McAndrews from the Climate Psychology Alliance, in dialogue with One Resilient Earth.

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- *Working definition of trauma-informed practice.* (2022, November 2). GOV.UK <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-definition-of-trauma-informed-practice/working-definition-of-trauma-informed-practice>
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