



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 1.1.3

Helpful scripts to support learners

Overview

The scripts presented below are meant to help teachers and educators support their learners as they experience emotional dysregulation individually, or as they collectively experience climate change impacts that could potentially be traumatic. They do not replace efforts to self-regulate your own nervous system before addressing a crisis. They should be used when your own nervous system is as regulated as possible so that they have maximum positive impact on the learner or group of learners.

Curriculum linkage

The scripts can be mobilized in any class where emotions are involved.

Competences built

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

Prep Work

You should read the teachers guide sections related to climate emotions and climate trauma, as well as take the time to establish the culture of safety and care, including the support system that is required for you to take care of the emotional wellbeing of the learners you teach.

Competences/activities to practice first by the teacher:

- Creating a culture of safety 1.1.1
- Quick self-regulation techniques for teachers 1.1.2.
- Climate Emotions wheel 1.2.1

BASIC INFO

**Age range:**

6+

Duration:

2-5 minutes

Group size:

1–full group

Level of difficulty:

Basic

Materials/space required:

None

Location:

Flexible

Engagement of external stakeholders:

None



Situation 1: Supporting one learner with their dysregulation

These scripts and actions are meant to support one learner who experiences nervous system dysregulation, which can be due to overwhelming stress or trauma.

1. **Before starting an activity that can involve strong emotional responses**, acknowledge that learning about climate change may bring up a lot of emotions and feelings, and that these feelings are a normal response. Crying is a normal response, and some learners may express their emotions more than others, and in different ways.
2. **Remember** that trauma is a one off or ongoing experience of being unsafe without support and feeling helpless in that situation. It is as if a part of the nervous system freezes in that experience, and this can create a stuck memory in the body. If a trigger situation happens, the person who has experienced trauma is kicked back in time to the state of survival that was experienced at the time of the initial trauma. In that altered state, the learner has no choice about the way they behave. They should not be punished for what they are doing, nor told they are doing something wrong, nor dismissed.
3. **Slow down** everything and take a moment to be with the learner.
4. **Encourage the person to come back to the present moment** by saying: *'It's OK. I'm here. I'm here with you. You're in a state of distress. It's OK. We know that and I can help you'*. Remember that your tone of voice and your presence is going to be what co-regulates the nervous system of the learner. A sharp tone of voice or anything that sounds like telling off will only increase the stress. Hence it is important that you are regulated or practice self-regulation yourself (see activity 1.1.2) before speaking.
5. Facilitate sensory awareness while restoring their autonomy. This could include:
 - a. Inviting the learner to breathe slowly with you if they wish to. It is not about deep breathing. Your breathing becomes a safety reference for them without you making any demands. You can say: *'I'm here with you. I'm breathing. If you want, you can breathe with me. I'm just breathing slowly'*
 - b. Offering them to drink some water if they feel like it. It can help feel more grounded and can give a sense of care.



6. **Asking them** where they are most comfortable staying or sitting as they recover. You can ask: 'Is it OK with you to stay here for a moment?' 'Would you like your friend X to come and sit with you' or 'Is it OK with you if we just get up and move outside so you can get some air?' Asking 'What do you need right now?' might be too difficult to answer. It is important to keep the questions simple, favouring yes/no questions.
7. **Following up** with them in the following days or the next time you see them.

Situation 2: Supporting a whole group of learners who have experienced climate change impacts and potentially traumatic events

These scripts and actions are meant to support a group of learners who have experienced some extreme events associated with climate change (e.g. flooding, forest fires), which can have affected them in varied ways.

1. **Take part in or help organize an emergency staff meeting** to understand how the staff of the school and the school premises have been affected by the events, as well as the capacity and willingness that the school has to support recovery efforts for the community at large. Make sure that there is a plan in place to take care of the teachers and other staff, including emotionally, if they are to take part in the recovery effort, acknowledging the losses they may have suffered because of the extreme event themselves.
2. **Take the first opportunity you have** to talk about the extreme event with your learners. In case the event has not hit all learners equally, a possible script could be: *"Wow, this flood was a big deal! And it has affected everyone in our community in different ways. This classroom represents that community. Some of you here will have lost loads, will be anxious and scared, and will have been very badly affected. Some of you will be just having fun kicking through the big puddles. Since here we care about each other, we're going to take a moment to acknowledge that we're in different places. So if you are one of the people that is fine, please bear in mind that others aren't. What can we do? Let's start off by thinking, you know, how can we as a class support each other in the face of what's going on?"*
3. **Relax rules about attendance and homework**, so as to help learners be where they need to be at that moment to take care of the recovery of their



loved ones. The school can also help set up a place to gather clothes, food and water for those who need support with the help of learners.

4. **When resources are available, set up a safe** space within the school or organization for learners that have been hit the hardest so that they can get adequate emotional support. Such support can be provided by the safe person in the school, the school counselor, the pastoral staff or even the special educational needs person if they are sufficiently equipped to do so. If no support is available within the school, you may want to contact local authorities in charge of disaster response and enquire about a psychological support unit that could be dispatched to the school or organization. This safe space should be staffed and available all day for the next few days. This will help learners get the support they need so that they can get back to learning fully after that.

Remember that allowing a day or a week to attend to the practical and emotional needs caused by an extreme weather event actually means that learners are going to get back to functioning much more quickly. Doubling down on exam pressure in the face of a local disaster does not work. When children and learners feel they are safe and they matter, when their mental health needs are looked after, their academic capacity is way bigger.

Dos and don'ts

Do:

Please remember that somebody whose trauma has been triggered needs to have their own autonomy respected.

Don't:

Don't pretend that an extreme event did not happen, or that dealing with its impacts is not the responsibility of the school as it will negatively affect the learners' emotional and mental wellbeing, as well as their academic performances.

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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- <https://www.psychologytools.com/resource/window-of-tolerance>
- <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/ptsd/what-is-ptsd>
- Hayes, K., Blashki, G., Wiseman, J. et al. Climate change and mental health: risks, impacts and priority actions. Int J Ment Health Syst 12, 28 (2018).
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