

# Trauma-Sensitive Teachers

## TRAUMA SENSITIVE TOOL

### Transitions in Classroom

Classroom transitions are many, and what do we know about them? Transitions are typically LOUD, learning is low or non-existent, and there's usually a lot of sporadic movement. TRANSITIONS TRIGGER! As teachers, we often go from one activity to another with no thought at all; we just keep on that routine and move swiftly from one activity to another! It's time that we slow down and become mindful of all the transitions throughout our day. Take a moment and think about your day and jot down any and all 'transitions' that might occur through your day. Start with coming into the classroom, putting personal items away, getting to your desk, and any time a student may need to stop doing one activity and move to another. These smaller transitions may not be so obvious, such as leaving desk to gain access to supplies, leaving desk to grab a tissue, leaving desk at the request of a teacher for a quick chat. Any time one activity is interrupted to engage in another is a transition. Transitions happen often throughout the day and they TRIGGER our impacted kiddos. A triggered student is often mislabeled as being defiant: naughty, lazy, liar, not trying, mean, violent, attention seeking etc. When this is not the case for our students, they experience a deficit and need to be identified as such. The Impacts of Trauma at play when transitioning/triggered are ZERO executive functioning, memory deficits, hypervigilance, no ability to read social cues, and an inability to express needs/desires, just to name a few. In a nut shell, our impacted students are spiraling and feeling unsafe, and doing everything they can to gain control, a.k.a. Fight, Flight, or Freeze. Transitions = Triggered, so preplanning and supporting our students through transitions will help them feel more safe and secure, keeping them calmer and focused.

Becoming triggered by transitions will not look and feel great for you or your student, without a little pre planning and preparation. A kiddo who is triggered before, during, and after a transition might be hitting or pushing others in line. They might be the kiddo who is frozen in their seat, refusing to move. You might have a child tantruming, a child hurting others, or taking things that aren't theirs. A student who can't make a choice when asked what they want to do. Disrespectful, and not listening. A triggered child might also be overly quiet and not engaged in anything. That's what a triggered kiddo might look like in your class.

It does not feel good for either teacher or student, so with mindful practices we can help to decrease triggers and increase successful/safe transitions. These actions are often labeled as defiance, but in reality, the effects of trauma have created a hair-triggered limbic system that goes from zero to triggered in no time flat, due to a DEFICIT in their brain development.

Often times we don't realize how many small and big transitions happen during the day. Becoming mindful of ALL of the transitions and all of the moments that may trigger our students and setting up the classroom environment for success will help our trauma impacted student remain in control. Just like lesson planning for academic success, having a strategic plan for transitions is just as important. Predictability is key, making transitions and cues predictable.

Make a plan for transitions and treat them just as important as our daily lesson planning! The following are some ideas that will help your transitions become more successful (many are also listed on the sheet attached)

- Use a daily visual schedule on the students desk and in front of the class.
- CUT DOWN on the number of transitions, can you eliminate little transitions throughout the day?
- Slow down the transition, give more time to organize the brain and move
- Give a 5 minute warning BEFORE transitions (visual timers work great)
- Use CONCRETE Cues to signal the transition: bell, music, hand clapping pattern, sing a song. Pick your signal and USE THE SAME ONE!
- Use classroom "buddy"/community builder to help assist with transitions
- Use adult a proximity if available to model & assist, helping build the safety net at school
- Make sure all activities & materials are ready Before the transition, so waiting is minimal
- If waiting in line is difficult: use a transition tool, fidget, or give a job to the student who has difficulty in line
- Avoid moving the whole group when possible, moving in smaller groups feels safer and less chaotic

Let's look at this tool.

On the front side of the page, there is a list of transition times that may occur throughout the day, some obvious and some not so obvious, but all of them can trigger our impacted students. Read through the list, then brain dump on the back of the page or on a separate paper ALL of the transitions that occur throughout your day, beginning with 'arrive at school'. It might seem overwhelming, but take inventory. Think about your impacted students and decide if there are smaller transitions that can be eliminated, such as "getting activity supplies and bringing them to their desk." Having the supplies at the students' desk and eliminating that transition and those choices, will help your impacted students stay engaged. After deciding which transitions can be eliminated, choose your top transitions that you notice trigger your impacted students the most. This is where you will start to implement your strategic plan. Use the second column on the tool to list 4 strategies will you start to implement: desk schedule, 5-minute warning, teacher/student helper proximity and verbal cue! It might take a few tries, and some practice, but by starting with a few transitions, it will soon become the norm for your classroom to use at all transitions! Visual Cues, Auditory Cues, Adult or 'buddy' proximity and sameness are the key to our impacted kids feeling safe.

**01**

### **List**

List out all of the transitions that happen during the day, and keep in mind the external factors that can simultaneously occur while transitioning.

**02**

### **Eliminate**

Eliminate as many transitions as possible.

**03**

### **Plan**

Look at the ideas listed and come up with a strategic plan to help with transitions; visual schedule, 5-minute warning, proximity, auditory cue to move, etc. Planning for transitions are just as important as planning for your daily lessons.

## Example

*CURRENT activity: Silent Reading NEXT activity: Math groups*

*Teacher: "Ok class, 5 more minutes until reading is done." (sets visual timer)*  
– math group activities are already set

When timer dings, teacher is in proximity of impacted students.

*Teacher verbally states: "When I say go, we will move to our next station, (or if appropriate sings transition song, ex: clean up song or turns on transition music).*

*Teacher: "Ok, (impacted student's name). Look at the schedule, what time is it?"*

*Student: "Math."*

*Teacher: "Yes, you are at the yellow table (which is the same every day)"*

*Student: sits at yellow table, and is given a few minutes with a fidget, book or transition item to get focused before the math lesson begins.*

*Teacher: "Great job sitting at yellow table! You look ready for math. (HIGH FIVE!)"*

## Recap

This will probably seem overwhelming. Start by implementing a few strategies during a couple transitions a day. As you see the difference within the classroom, these strategies will become second nature. Visual cues, 5-minute warnings, auditory signals, and adult proximity are a great place to start. You've got this. We do hard work, and make a world of difference by making our students environments predictable and safe.



Impact Membership

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