

## Examples of how **SIGHT** may cause a trigger:

- Someone who has similar traits or objects (e.g., clothing, hair color, distinctive walk), resembles the person involved, or who caused the traumatic event .
- Any situation where someone else is being hurt (raised eyebrow, verbal comment, actual physical abuse).
- The object that was used to hurt them (e.g. belt, wooden spoon, hair brush).
- The objects that are associated with or were common in the place where the traumatic event took place (e.g., alcohol, piece of furniture, time of year).
- Any place or situation where the traumatic event occurred (e.g., specific locations in a house, holidays, family events, social settings).

## Examples of how **SOUND** can cause a trigger:

- Anything that sounds like anger (e.g., raised voices, arguments, bangs and thumps, something breaking).
- Anything that sounds like pain or fear (e.g., crying, whispering, screaming).
- Anything that might have been in the place or situation prior to, during, or after the traumatic event or reminds her/him of the event (e.g., sirens, foghorns, music, car door closing).
- Anything that resembles sounds that the someone made during the traumatic event (e.g., whistling, footsteps, pop of can opening, tone of voice).
- Words of abuse (e.g., cursing, labels, put-downs, specific words used).

While smell, touch, and taste do not cause triggers as often as sight and sound, they can still cause strong reactions and reminders of traumatic events. A smell trigger may be a similar smell of an associated person or room they were in when the traumatic event occurred.

## **Smell**

- Anything that resembles the smell of the traumatic event or the people involved (e.g., tobacco, alcohol, drugs, aftershave, perfume).
- Any smells that resemble the place or situation where the traumatic event occurred (e.g., food, odors, alcohol).

## **Touch**

- Anything that resembles the traumatic event or things that occurred prior to or after the event (e.g., certain physical touch, someone standing too close, petting an animal, the way someone approaches you).

## **Taste**

- Anything that is related to the traumatic event that occurred prior to or after the event (e.g., certain foods, alcohol, tobacco).

The following are strategies that can be used to support students when triggers are impacting the student's education:

### **1. Communicate with Student Support Personnel**

Utilize the school's student support personnel (e.g., school counselor, school nurse, school social worker, school psychologist). They are great resources and can provide additional supports, strategies, and interventions for working with students who have experienced trauma.

### **2. Provide Structure and Consistency**

Create a safe learning environment through clearly defined systems and procedures (e.g., writing the daily schedule on the board, using entry and exit routines, establishing clear rules and expectations).

### **3. Ease Transitions**

Give plenty of warning before doing something unexpected (e.g., turning off the lights, making a loud sound, changing the daily schedule).

### **4. Provide Choices**

People with trauma history may experience a lack of control. Provide safe ways for students to exercise choice and control within an activity and within the environment (e.g., choice of seat or choice of book).

### **5. Develop Strengths and Interests**

Focus on strengths and interests that support a positive self-concept.

## **6. Be There for Students**

A lot of working with students with trauma history is just showing up, every day, and accepting the student no matter what behaviors emerge. Be the adult in that student's life who is going to accept and believe in them, no matter what - children can never have too many supportive adults in their lives.

## **7. Make An "Out" Plan**

Designate a space for the student to take a sensory break and regulate their emotions if they feel triggered or overwhelmed during class. You can also provide a sensory kit for the student as a calming strategy during this time (e.g., Silly Putty, coloring, puzzles).

## **8. Take Care of Yourself**

One of the most important things to remember, if you work with even just one student who experienced trauma, you can experience vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue. Use your own support system and make time to do things that fill your tank.

*-8 Ways to Support Students Who Experience Trauma, Alex Shevrin Venet, Edutopia*

When students are experiencing triggers, it is important to find ways to support and help them. Being able to understand that a student's behavior may be related to a trigger is a crucial skill when implementing a trauma-informed approach.

### **The following are a few strategies that can support students who are experiencing a trigger:**

Check-in with the student and help them process what may be upsetting them. When students are experiencing a trigger response, they often feel out of control. It is important to provide options of what they can do in order to deal with the trigger and calm down. Remember, you don't have to handle this by yourself. There are student support personnel (e.g., school counselor, school social worker, school nurse, school psychologist) in your school that you can refer to for help.

Take some time now to identify people you feel comfortable reaching out to when you have a student who is struggling with triggers. Have you

asked them for support before? Who would you reach out to if they weren't at work that day?

<https://youtu.be/eS13oNQNAOg>

We Are Teachers, published “Eight Ways to Help Your Students Build Resiliency” in April of 2015. These strategies are useful for all students, not just those who have experienced ACES. The first three are to be used in the moment the student experiences distress. The other five are long-term strategies

### **#1. Keep perspective**

Students may overreact to what you consider to be a small thing. Instead of minimizing their current concerns help the student problem-solve for the future.

### **#2 Capture the opportunity**

Allow students to make mistakes. Praise what you value and want to encourage more of, such as their efforts or creativity.

### **#3 Cool Down**

Teach cool down strategies before students get upset, then practice these strategies in the moment of distress. Strategies could include a cool-down corner with heavy pillows, calming music with headphones, or books. Another strategy is teaching older kids to count to 10 while taking deep breaths or to distract themselves by reading or writing until they've calmed down.

### **#4 Create a connection**

Quality relationships are key to creating resilience. In addition to the emotional benefits, the best way to learn how to deal with minor stresses is to have it modeled by peers.

## **#5 Build competence**

Every student is good at something. Find the student's strengths and create ways to share your observations with the student. Help them determine ways to use their strengths in other areas.

## **#6 Give them options**

Choices give kids power and self-determination, plus it lets them make choices and live with the consequences.

## **#7 Connect with characters**


Books are a great jumping-off point for talking about resiliency. For example, you could ask the students, "What other choices could the character have made and how would it have changed the outcome?"

## **#8 Encourage constant progress**

Setting and achieving goals builds the practice of self-monitoring and helps students see the results of their hard work.

Research has been conducted to determine best practices for working with students who have experienced ACES. Some strategies that have been proven to work with traumatized students include:

### **A Safe Space**

Acknowledge the negative reactions by giving students a safe place for a few minutes, allowing the brain and body to calm down. Some schools have dedicated a space or room in the building (e.g., wellness room) to create a safe and comfortable area which is welcoming and restful to help reduce stress for students and staff. To learn more about how to effectively implement a wellness room in schools, refer to the San Francisco United School District's [Wellness Center Manual](#) .

### **Two by Ten**

Focus on the most at-risk student. For two minutes each day, ten days in a row, have a personal conversation with that student about their personal interests to foster rapport and connection to school.

### **Use Volume, Tone, and Posture - Soft, yet Firm**

Use a shift in volume, tone, and posture to firmly, but softly, communicate what is expected in order to de-escalate possible tension. Understand that it is important to the student to look good in front of their peers. Be careful not to publicly humiliate the student when addressing behaviors.

### **Break Things Into Steps**

Break down the behaviors you want to see into simple steps so that students clearly understand what we expect of them. Students often need complex math problems broken down into small, digestible lessons, they may also need small, manageable steps when it comes to learning behavior and classroom procedures.

### **Use Behavior Rubrics**

Rubrics work great for content and equally great for establishing expectations for procedures and classroom behaviors. Implement rubrics for procedures and classroom behaviors such as lining up, setting up to learn, and getting ready for dismissal.

### **Use Visuals**

Use a diagram, drawing, or photograph of the desired outcome to clarify exactly what is expected. For example, if the student is having difficulty getting their textbooks and homework on their desk when the bell rings at the beginning of class, use visuals to clarify exactly what is expected.

*-Strategies for Helping Children with ACES*

Share this video with leadership and principals

[https://youtu.be/\\_kNdwsAgIK8](https://youtu.be/_kNdwsAgIK8)

