

**Fostering Resilient Learners:
Strategies for Creating a Trauma-Sensitive Classroom
Online Study Guide Questions**

Welcome to the online study guide! There was a great deal of thought put into how best to design the opportunity for reflection when writing this book. Both Pete and I wanted to provide opportunity for personal, private reflection **and** support for whole group, even district wide discussion. With the guidance from Miriam, we opted to provide the personal reflection opportunities in the book itself and then created this online discussion to allow for broader discussion and exploration of adaptation and application into whole group practices. We hope this was helpful for you the reader and provided you with the opportunity to do both.

Reflection in this day and age is a luxury. We are often so busy with timelines, schedules, expectations and, often, unrealistic demands. The opportunity to take time and truly work collaboratively on what best practice could look like is rare. We also know that true shift in practice stems from opportunities to explore, reflect and evaluate our own ways of being. Thus it is critical that we give ourselves time to participate in such practices. As we talked about in the book, change is hard and change takes time. Thank you for encouraging your group to read this book and to use it as a tool for allowing for reflection of practice! We hope this online study guide begins to provide you with a path for doing so.

These questions are designed to promote whole group thinking about what incorporation and sustainment of trauma informed practice can truly look like in your setting. Whether you are a new teacher completing your degree in a classroom whose professor saw value in this book or a seasoned educational professional looking for a new way of practicing, this guide is designed to lead you in discussion about what implementation at a larger group level can look like. We tried to make it as easy as possible for you by designing questions for you and in alignment with the philosophy of the book!

We ask that you are trauma informed in how you lead and participate in this discussion. Take into account the 6 steps to communication we discussed. Also, remember our emphasis on strength based! It is easy to admire problems and it takes great courage to truly reflect on how best to address and solve them in trauma informed ways. Some of these questions are more challenging than others. We encourage you to answer them all! Be patient and kind with one another and support one another in the exploration of what it truly means to be trauma informed, not just trauma aware. Thank you for your time and commitment to this and we are so grateful for the dedication and grace you bring to your students, families, and to each other!

Part I: Trauma

Chapter 1: Understanding Trauma and the Prevalence of the Not-OK

1. Write down your definition of trauma. Compare it with the authors' definition on page 15. How are they alike? How are they different? Discuss your findings with colleagues to note themes about your understanding, your predispositions, and your questions about the term.
2. When thinking about your school and community culture, how aware is your team of the concept of trauma? Do you believe that trauma is an issue that impacts your school environment? Why or why not? In what manner? To what degree?
3. What is the difference between emphasizing the details of a traumatic *event* and acknowledging its *impact* on an individual? How might this affect the way we view children who have experienced (and/or are currently experiencing) trauma?
4. Does your team discuss trauma and the concept of ACEs? If yes, is it addressed in a positive context or more of a deficit one?
5. When strategizing supports for students who are struggling, does your team take into account what their ACE score may be and how that may be impacting their current situation? How might this become part of the conversation? How important is it to include a known trauma history when planning to support individual students?
6. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being resistant and 5 being actively and supportively ready) how committed is your school environment to becoming a setting that practices in a trauma informed way?

Chapter 2: The Manifestation of ACEs in the Classroom

1. In your school, when students are not in the *learning mode*, what behaviors do they exhibit? How does your team address those behaviors, typically?
2. What positive practices school wide are currently in place that help students get to a learning ready state? Are they universally used or varied depending on the teacher and their own individual teaching philosophy?
3. Does your school or community currently use a universal language such as "learning mode," "upstairs/downstairs brain," and "intensity" to address a student's readiness to learn?
 - a. If yes, how consistent is the environment in reinforcing these concepts? Is everyone in your environment (ALL staff) aware of this language, its purpose, and the motive for using it? Are your students and families aware of this language and the motive for using it?
 - b. If no, what steps might you take to adopt a universal language practice?
4. How can you align these universal language practices with your current curriculum, staff evaluation practices, and current social-emotional learning strategies in place?
5. Towards the end of this chapter, the authors presented their thesis: In order to effectively take care of our vulnerable students, we must first take care of ourselves. What is your initial response to this idea? How has your school environment addressed staff wellness and emotional health? To what degree is this a priority for your school community?

Part II: Self-Awareness

Chapter 3: Cement Shoes: Staying True to Who You Are

1. How would you describe your school environment's philosophy on self-care? How is that philosophy manifested on a daily basis?
2. Does your school culture lean more toward *availability* or *accountability*? To what extent has your staff engaged in this conversation? How can you – together – discover the “sweet spot” between the two?
3. If your staff were to describe the school's mission statement via a trauma sensitive lens, as it relates to supporting kids and families, what would that look like? Does your current mission statement support that same value set?
4. Discuss what your *school's* true “cement shoes” might be. Based on current practices, priorities, and responses to student and adult needs, what is the real-life mission statement of your school? Do your current actions match your beliefs and intentions?
5. Consider the exchange between Ms. London and Kelly, her 4th period student. Putting yourself in Ms. London's shoes, how might you have handled the situation differently, if you were in tune with your emotions and were able to remain “cemented” to your core values?

Chapter 4: Stay Out of Oz: Remaining Grounded Amid Chaos

1. The authors discuss the connection between upstairs/downstairs brains, triggers, and tornadoes. How might you launch a conversation about these terms with your students? Brainstorm some ideas together and create a plan to include these terms in your discourse.
2. What opportunities do you have within your school teams to problem-solve needs of students ahead of time? Does your planning process include proactive measures to avoid tornadoes or are they centered on reactionary methods for handling things post-tornado?
3. We've probably all been whisked away to Oz before. How might you remind yourself to be “the good witch” and remain calm in the midst of a student's tornado? What strategies can you collect from colleagues to add to your repertoire?
4. Can you identify at least three regulation strategies you currently use in your practice that will help students stay “upstairs” and out of Oz? Can you collect a half-dozen more strategies from your colleagues?
5. Take a moment to reflect on this: Are you able to connect with your own emotional responses to student outbursts in the moment? Are there times you can? Are there times you cannot? What is the difference? How might you replicate your successes so that you keep yourself out of Oz and help bring your students back with you?
6. Can you as a team identify students (current “tough nuggets”) with whom you can put into place positive measures aimed at helping to prevent the tornado? What could those look like? How can you hold yourselves accountable to ensure they are being enacted consistently and positively?

Chapter 5: When in Doubt, Shut Your Mouth and Take a Breath

1. What practices do you currently have in place to support student regulation? Are they used universally throughout your setting or are they unique to your practice?
2. Does your school have positive supports in place that encourage student regulation and staying in their “upstairs brain?” Are staff members provided time to learn and apply these practices? Do staff members have time to process and share how effective various practices are in the school setting?
3. Do you utilize breathing activities with your students? How are those taught? Do you involve students in understanding the science behind why such practices are important?
4. If you were to establish “regulation stations” in your setting, what could those look like? What resources would you need to have in place prior to utilizing these? How can you ensure they would be used for positive redirection and not as a disciplinary practice? How will you know this is the intention? How can you reinforce this with your staff and students?
5. Transitions are often a huge trigger for students. How can you begin to design a way to transition without trauma? What predictable and consistent practices can you put into place that will help students transition without being triggered to their downstairs brains?
6. Teachers are often expected to remain emotionally cool during times of heightened emotion, crisis, or stress. The authors advocate for pressing “pause” and for taking a self-directed time-out if necessary. How might that look in your classroom, assignment, or school? What structures would have to be put into place in order for those time outs to achieve their intended purpose?

Chapter 6: It’s Not About You

1. What empowering strategies does your environment have in place that encourage students to be successful? Do you have widely accepted language, activities, and/or structures that reinforce this belief?
2. How do you ensure that you aren’t “doing for” but, rather, encouraging students to “do for themselves?” Share an example of each with a colleague. What lessons can you learn from the outcomes of each?
3. What positive reinforcement structures do you have in place that motivate students to want to be at school? To want to learn?
4. What does repair (step 5) look like in your environment? How do you model repair with your students? How do you help your students go beyond just saying the words, “I’m sorry”? Is this a consistent practice of yours? Is this done consistently throughout the school?
5. The authors present a six-step communication process that is useful in times of stress, emotion, and/or crisis. How might you adopt such a process to guide your conflict-resolution efforts? How would this help your interactions with students, parents, peers, and colleagues?
6. What practices do you have in place that reassure you of your effectiveness as a professional? How are those reinforced in your environment? What additional ideas do you have to make those even better?

Part III: Relationship

Chapter 7: No One Said Relationship Is Easy

1. To what extent do the professionals in your school value interpersonal relationships? How is this value (or lack of value) demonstrated? How might you start a conversation with colleagues about relationship and its impact on the school environment, the individuals in the school, and student learning?
2. Many of us, in our educational training, were taught to “not even smile at our students until at least December.” How does this mindset differ from that which is being suggested by the authors? With which philosophy do you agree? Why?
3. What does the concept of relationship-building mean to you in your setting? How is it reinforced?
4. If you were to include additional relationship-building practices into your environment, what could those look like?
5. How, as an environment, is your school “safe enough, healthy enough” for students? For families? For each other as professional colleagues?
6. The authors discuss being “available” to students every day. Is this a tall order for you? Is this something you do naturally? Are you able to clarify and describe how you are able to do this? Can you identify times that you are unable to be available to your students? What precipitates this? How can you close that gap?

Chapter 8: The Power of Relationship

1. As a school, review the Whole Child Initiative’s list – and the authors’ list – of ways to provide a safe environment for your students. How many of them do you employ? Which ones could you implement? What might you add to those lists of practices?
2. Balancing availability and accountability is one of the greatest challenges in today’s schools. Toward which side of that balance do you lean? Engage in an honest conversation with a trusted colleague, exchanging notes and reflections about your tendencies. What is revealed? How might you intentionally strive to create a better balance between the two?
3. As a school, do you tend to focus more on availability or accountability? What evidence supports your claim? Do others in your school community agree? What do your students think? What do their parents think? Is there a way you can elicit that information to guide your next-steps?
4. What does greeting look like in your environment? Are there consistent and universal practices in place that encourage welcoming behavior with students and families? Are there more practices you could be using?
5. Do your school wide expectations focus on the promotion of learning in a safe environment?
 - a. If yes, how so?
 - b. If not, what could that begin to look like? Do students understand the importance of these expectations? How can you reinforce their learning in these areas?

6. Are the routines of the school similar from day to day? Classroom to classroom? Grade to grade? Content to content? How can you ensure this is happening consistently? How can you reinforce this?
7. What are some ways that staff members are acknowledged positively? Who leads these celebrations (whether they are private or public)? What are some ways that staff members can reinforce each other's highlights, accomplishments, support, and good news? How can you do more of this as a team?

Chapter 9: Names, Labels, and the Need for Control

1. What roles do labels currently play in your setting? Are you aware of times that you (and/or your colleagues) have crossed the line between adjectives and labels?
2. Consider the authors' assertion that some labels (ADHD, ODD, etc.) define students by what they are missing. What is your understanding of the difference between deficit-based and strength-based approaches when working with challenging students? What is your dominant mindset?
3. When you enter a faculty room or work room, have you overheard another staff talking about a student in a negative way? What was this like for you to hear? Does the current culture of your school support that way of thinking? What would it look like if the culture were different? If the culture does not allow that sort of negative talk, how was that environment established? How is it reinforced?
4. What would it look like if you began to staff (plan various supportive strategies for) your "tough nuggets" from a strength-based perspective?
5. How can you work within your system structures (that often require some type of label) and still maintain focus of strength on the student?
6. Consider the element of control. What do you attempt to control in your classroom? What does your school attempt to control throughout the school day, all across campus? Are these ambitions realistic? Whose needs do they meet? How might some of your (and your school-wide) practices change if you shifted your focus from *controlling* others to *influencing* others?
7. Do your current interventions reflect trauma informed practices? Can you give examples of ones that do? Can you identify ones that don't? How can you adapt those to be more in line with this way of thinking?

Chapter 10: Doors and Windows: Remembering to Explore All Options

1. How open are you to finding windows, especially in difficult situations? Do you have the leeway to seek out windows in your professional environment? Share an example of how you have been encouraged (or discouraged) from seeking an alternative solution?
2. How well does your staff adjust to change? To what might you attribute that strength (or challenge)? What support processes are in place to help staff adjust to changes? What works? What can you do better as a team?
3. Can you think of a time when you found a window, it worked, and you were successful with a student? Share this achievement with a colleague, exchanging stories and notes. What might you learn from each other's experiences?

4. Is your team open to creativity? Are you open to exploring new and exciting ways for engaging students in learning? Do you embrace the notion that sometimes, a student needs something different, even if that same support might be denied to other students? What does this look like? How might you reconcile that disequilibrium as a staff?
5. When you staff your “tough nuggets,” is part of the staffing intentionally focused on finding those windows, exploring alternative options, looking at possible barriers, and problem solving ways to overcome them?
6. When working with those “tough nuggets,” what structures are in place to collect the students’ perspective? How is each student’s voice solicited, heard, and valued? How might the student be interpreting the situation? What might the student express as a need? Do your intervention options include deliberately addressing the student’s input?

Part IV: Belief

Chapter 11: Forever Changed, Not Forever Damaged

1. What is your first thought when you learn that a student has experienced (or is currently experiencing) trauma? Does that change your view of the student? Can you distinguish between trauma as an event and trauma as a definition? The next time you are in a team meeting discussing a student, take notice of the conversation's tone when trauma enters the picture.
2. When you start to look at student need, do you take into account the whole student – the whole child – or just focus on the areas of concern? What would it look like if you began to view students via a whole child lens – not just the parts that need help (attendance, behavior, and/or coursework – the ABCs)?
3. What do you do to celebrate home runs (yours, your students, and/or anyone else's)? What does your school environment have in place to celebrate home runs? For staff? For students? For families?
4. What social emotional practices do you currently have in place that help support students seeing themselves as positive and capable? How are those reinforced? Are they used consistently? What are some examples you can identify? How might these practices be strengthened throughout the school community? How are these approaches communicated home to families?
5. Go through your student roster and self-check the expectations you have for each student's performance, learning, and overall success. Do you have unwavering high expectations for every student? Are there some for whom you have altered your expectation for some reason? What is that reason? How do you communicate those expectations, in words and in deeds? Take note, also, of how students respond to your expectations – especially if you make a conscious effort to raise them for any given student.

Chapter 12: It's OK to Be Not-OK

1. The authors discuss how acknowledging the not-OK in our own lives often puts us in a place of vulnerability. After completing the activity on page 151, consider your own vulnerability at work. Is it safe to be not-OK in your working environment? Why or why not? What changes need to take place to ensure that it is a safe place to be?
2. When something not-OK is occurring with a colleague, what structures and/or practices does your school environment have in place to support them/you? Are they effective? Why or why not? What could make them even better?
3. How do you as a team balance the work expectation with the reality that life is sometimes messy?
4. Does your staff feel safe: physically, emotionally, and professionally? Are staff members "allowed" to have emotional responses to emotional events? To what extent do you and your colleagues get "real" with one another? What structures and/or practices are in place to support the emotional weight we carry as educators every day? What additional supports might help achieve this goal?

5. Do your students feel safe in your class, your school, and/or your community? How do you know? What practices do you have in place to ensure student safety (both physical and emotional)?
6. Do your families feel safe accessing you for support? How do you know? What does that currently look like? How can it be improved?

Chapter 13: Don't Let Fear Drive the Bus

1. How often do you (individually or as a staff) allow a student to do something that really isn't allowed (for instance, eating a crayon) because that behavior is preferable to the anticipated meltdown that might follow if you attempt to dissuade the student from the original behavior? What message does that send the student, either overtly or subconsciously?
2. Schools are hierarchical by nature. Administrators typically hold positional rank and evaluative power over teachers. That said, do staff in your school feel as though they can speak up about an issue without fear of retaliation? What makes you think so (or not)? What measures do you have in place to support this?
3. Do students feel as though they can speak up about an issue without fear of retaliation? What makes you think so (or not)? Does this vary by class to class, teacher to teacher, staff member to staff member, situation to situation? What measures do you have in place to support this?
4. How often does fear drive the decisions being made in your environment? What would it look like if you operated from a practice of "careful, but not afraid" in your decision making processes?
5. With your colleagues, share examples of how you acted proactively to address a (likely) tornado before it occurred, and your strategy worked – the tornado never touched down! Share examples of how it didn't work. How did you survive the situation? What lessons can you learn from each other's experiences?

Part V: Live, Laugh, Love

Chapter 14: Grace

1. How did your team respond to this chapter? Launch an open, frank, honest, heartfelt conversation about the big ideas: grace, second chances, forgiveness, strengths, patience, giving someone a break...and gauge your collective openness to this idea.
2. What does the word grace mean to you as a school? How often do you see others giving grace? Are these acts acknowledged? Are they reinforced? Are they celebrated?
3. What could it look like if this became a philosophy that was adapted throughout your environment? What practices would stay the same? What practices would change? How might your school climate change?
4. What if you started incorporating the idea of grace into your staffing procedures? Your disciplinary responses?
5. What is the difference between *grace* and a school-wide *free-for-all*? How might you embrace the concepts of grace, availability, and accountability simultaneously?
6. How might you incorporate grace into your outreach to your parents and families? How might that be different than the parent outreach and communication strategies you currently employ? How might this affect the students you serve?

Chapter 15: The Cookie Jar: The Art of Giving Praise (and Self-Praise)

1. Do you have a reinforcement system in place in your classroom/setting? What does it look like? Have you clarified the purpose of this practice? Do students understand its purpose? Do families? Do you implement it consistently?
2. What does the reinforcement system look like in your school community? Do all staff members participate and support the efforts? To what extent would you say the practices are applied evenly by all staff members across all settings? How effective is this system? How do you measure its impact?
3. Does your reinforcement system align with your social emotional practices? How so?
4. Do the rewards in place encourage safe behavior? Do they place encourage learning and being in a learning ready state? Do they reinforce a growth mindset? If you take a step back and consider what behaviors, attitudes, and interactions are supported you are encouraging, what would you notice? How might you change the reinforcement system, if necessary, to match your mission statement?
5. What staff reinforcement measures are in place? How are those supported? Are they working? To what degree? What is missing? What could be added to strengthen the approaches?
6. Is self acknowledgement encouraged in your setting? How? How do you reinforce this with each other? With your students? With your families?

Chapter 16: The Self-Care Challenge

1. Does your school or community have supports in place for staff who may be struggling with regulation based on their own history of ACEs or current stress? Can staff identify those supports? Are there additional supports that would be beneficial?
2. How does your staff value self-care?

3. Do you teach self-care and its importance to your students? How? Is it working? What could make it better?
4. Do you have structures in place that support a healthy work/life balance? What do those look like?
5. What would help your professional working atmosphere improve? What ideas do you have to encourage grace? Health? Love? Competence? Gratitude? Self Care? How can you reinforce these in a consistent and productive way?

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