

TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE · ALL GRADES

Predictability

Cheap. Powerful. Often skipped.

Why predictability matters

For children whose home lives have been chaotic — addiction, mental illness, separation, violence, displacement, neglect, multiple house moves — school may be the first reliably PREDICTABLE place they've ever experienced. A classroom that works the same way every day is a small miracle for these children. Knowing what's coming next means their nervous system doesn't have to scan for threat. The cognitive resources freed up are then available for learning.

What predictability looks like in practice

<p>■ Routines run on time</p> <p>Lessons start on time. Break is at the same time every day. Lunch is at the same time. End of day is at the same time. Predictable rhythm.</p>	<p>■ Visible timetables</p> <p>Today's plan visible to all children. Tomorrow's plan flagged. Special days announced in advance — not on the morning.</p>
<p>■ Same seats, same places</p> <p>Same desk most weeks. Same coat peg. Same place at carpet. Same tray. Same place to put work. Reduces decisions, lowers stress.</p>	<p>■ Same language patterns</p> <p>Same instruction wording. Same routines for asking questions. Same ways of indicating attention. Verbal predictability matters too.</p>
<p>■ Same people, same roles</p> <p>Children know who'll teach which lesson. Who's in for lunch. Who covers if you're absent. Where to find the head.</p>	<p>■ Warning before changes</p> <p>5 minutes before transitions. A day before unusual events. A week before trips. As much advance notice as possible, calmly delivered.</p>

The unpredictable things that destabilise



<p>Last-minute schedule changes</p> <p>'Oh, no maths today, we're doing art instead!' For most children, fine. For traumatised children, jarring.</p>	<p>Adult mood swings</p> <p>Cheerful Monday, snappy Tuesday. The adult's emotional weather affects the child's nervous system.</p>
<p>Unexpected visitors</p> <p>A new face in the room without warning. For some children, deeply destabilising. Where possible, give warning.</p>	<p>Sudden discipline shifts</p> <p>Same behavior tolerated yesterday, sharply addressed today. Confusing. Often more about adult capacity than child action.</p>
<p>Surprise events</p> <p>Surprise assemblies. Surprise tests. Surprise visitors. The 'surprise' that delights confident children unsettles vulnerable ones.</p>	<p>Inconsistent enforcement</p> <p>Some children get away with what others get told off for. Children notice this within hours. It corrodes trust.</p>

Quick wins to build into next week

If you read this and want to do something concrete: 1. **DISPLAY THE TIMETABLE.** Where children can see it. Update it daily. Reference it. 2. **PROMISE A 5-MINUTE WARNING** for every transition. Hold to it. 3. **COMMIT TO A CONSISTENT START.** Same first activity every day for a fortnight. Watch what happens. 4. **FLAG CHANGES IN ADVANCE.** Trip next Tuesday? Mention it Friday. Special assembly Wednesday? Mention it Tuesday afternoon. 5. **STABILISE YOUR OWN MOOD.** As far as is humanly possible. The teacher's nervous system is the most important variable in the classroom.

When predictability has to break

Sometimes the unpredictable happens. A child is sick. The hall flooded. Snow day. You're called away. • **ACKNOWLEDGE THE CHANGE.** Don't pretend it isn't a change. • **EXPLAIN BRIEFLY.** What's happening. What's the new plan. • **REASSURE.** The next predictable thing is still coming. • **WATCH THE VULNERABLE CHILDREN.** They're the ones for whom this matters most. • **REPAIR THE PATTERN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.** The day after, return to normal.

