

TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE · ALL GRADES

Repair After Incidents

Trauma-sensitive version

Why standard restorative scripts sometimes fail with traumatised children

Standard restorative practice — the 6-question script — works beautifully for many children. For some children with trauma backgrounds, parts of it can backfire: • 'WHO HAS BEEN AFFECTED?' — Children with shame-based responses experience this as accusation, not inquiry. They shut down. • 'WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?' — Children whose cortex was offline genuinely don't know. Pushing for an answer feels like a trap. • 'WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN NOW?' — Cognitive demand they may not yet have the resources for. The goal of restoration — accountability, repair, learning — is still right. The script may need adapting.

Adaptations for traumatised children

<p>Wait longer before talking</p> <p>For most children, 30 minutes from peak. For traumatised children, often hours. Sometimes the next day. Don't push to discuss while still partly dysregulated.</p>	<p>Repair the relationship FIRST</p> <p>Before any conversation about what happened, signal the relationship is intact. 'Hey. We're OK.' Sit with them. Maybe just be near them. Re-establish safety.</p>
<p>Smaller questions</p> <p>Instead of 'what happened,' try 'do you remember what we did?' Instead of 'who was affected,' try 'how is Sofia now, do you think?' Smaller cognitive load.</p>	<p>Allow 'I don't know'</p> <p>If they say they don't know why they did it, accept it. They may genuinely not. Pushing for an answer they don't have produces lying or shut-down.</p>



<p>Lead the wondering</p> <p>'I wondered if you were feeling overwhelmed when this happened. Does that fit?' Children with weak self-knowledge may not be able to GENERATE explanations. Offering hypotheses can help.</p>	<p>Repair, don't punish</p> <p>What CAN they do to make it better? Often something simple. A drawing. A small task. A genuine apology. Doesn't have to be elaborate to count.</p>
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A trauma-sensitive script

OPENING (signal safety): • 'I wanted to come back to what happened earlier.' • 'You're not in trouble right now. We're talking, that's all.' • 'I want to understand. Then we'll work out what helps.' GENTLE INQUIRY: • 'Do you remember what happened?' • 'What was it like for you when it was happening?' • 'I wondered if you were feeling [your hypothesis]. Does that fit?' • 'Was anything else going on?' IMPACT (gently): • 'I think Sofia was a bit scared when that happened.' • 'How do you feel about that?' • 'What might help her feel better?' REPAIR: • 'What could you do to help fix it?' • 'Would that feel OK to do?' • 'When would you like to do it?' FUTURE: • 'Next time you start to feel like that, what could we do?' • 'Where could you go? Who could you tell?' • 'What would I notice that would tell me you needed help?' CLOSING: • 'Thanks for talking about this with me.' • 'We're OK. Tomorrow's a fresh day.'

When the child can't do the conversation

Sometimes a child can't manage even the gentlest conversation. They shut down. They get aggressive again. They cry. They flee. This is OK. The relationship matters more than the script.

- Acknowledge: 'It's hard to talk about this right now. That's OK.'
- Stay present: 'I'm just going to sit here with you for a minute.'
- Lower expectations: 'When you're ready, we can talk. Not now.'
- Maintain the relationship: 'Whatever happens, we're OK.' For some children, the SAFETY of unconditional relationship — even after misbehaviour — is the medicine. The reflective conversation can come later, in pieces, over weeks. The relationship is what changes them.

What about consequences?

Trauma-informed practice doesn't abandon consequences. But the consequences are calibrated to:

- ACTUALLY MATCH the behavior (not random)
- REPAIR rather than punish (clean up, apologise, make right)
- PRESERVE the relationship (consequence happens; relationship continues)
- TEACH something usable (what to do differently, not just 'don't')
- NOT BE SHAMING (no public chart-moving, no humiliation)

A consequence that PUNISHES traumatised children typically reinforces their belief that adult relationships are unsafe. A consequence that REPAIRS teaches that mistakes can be fixed and relationships continue. The difference is enormous. This is harder than it sounds. The instinct, especially when behavior has been hard, is to 'show them.' Resist. The work is patient, slow, and rarely produces fireworks.

