

# Trauma-Informed Pedagogical Strategies

As instructors, we have a passion for teaching and learning but may never understand what every student brings into the classroom and the challenges they face before learning can happen. Trauma manifests in many ways. Trauma-informed pedagogy is a way to approach teaching and learning that considers how trauma impacts learners and seeks to mitigate the effects of trauma on learning by creating safe, supportive, and empowering learning spaces that minimize re-traumatization and promote success and resilience.<sup>1</sup> Here are four main priority areas<sup>2</sup> and a selection of suggested strategies to help implement a trauma-informed approach.

## Predictability

Predictability involves arranging learning environments so that students clearly know what to foresee and expect, there are minimal surprises, and everyone is on the same page.

### Interactions/Relationships

Establish clear and consistent boundaries for yourself and the students.

### Academic/Pedagogical

Start and end each class in a similar way.

### Institution/Policy/Systems

Communicate institutional policies clearly and consistently.

## Connection

Connection involves cultivating healthy relationships with students, and fostering healthy relationships among students, and others.

### Interactions/Relationships

Listen actively to students and validate their concerns.

### Academic/Pedagogical

Allow the opportunity for students to discuss difficult material and their emotional reactions to it.

### Institution/Policy/Systems

Create environments that allow program staff to focus on and support student success

<sup>1</sup> VanderKaay, S., Begin, D., Jack, S., Lisogurski, R., Robb, C., Phoenix, M., & Vrkljan, B. (2025). Trauma-informed pedagogical practices in post-secondary education: An integrative review of the literature. The Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.5206/cjsotlrace.2025.1.17123>

<sup>2</sup> Shevrin Venet, A. (2021). Equity-centred trauma-informed education. W.W. Norton & Company.

## Did you know

There is a self-paced module to learn more about trauma-informed pedagogy and these priority areas? Visit:

[doitanyway.ca](https://doitanyway.ca)

## Flexibility

Being flexible involves identifying the most important aspect of the learning and being able to let go of what is less important if need be.

### Interactions/Relationships

Model flexibility when you are faced with an unexpected change.

### Academic/Pedagogical

Vary the intensity of material over the course and within classes.

### Institution/Policy/Systems

Provide physical retreat spaces through the institution.

## Empowerment

Empowerment involves providing opportunities for students to enact their own power and control over their learning when possible.

### Interactions/Relationships

Avoid power struggles with students, be respectful.

### Academic/Pedagogical

List campus resources in course syllabi.

### Institution/Policy/Systems

Hire ethnically and culturally diverse faculty.



Trauma-Informed Pedagogical Strategies © July 31, 2023  
McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario Canada. Authored by:  
Sandra VanderKaay, McMaster University is licensed under  
[CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Explore

50+  
strategies at  
[doitanyway.ca](https://doitanyway.ca)