



# Re-Engaging Learners: Function-Based Strategies for Fostering Engagement



## What do we mean by "engagement?"

When we refer to "re-engaging learners" we are talking about the sense of belonging and connectedness that students have to the school environment. This often includes "the amount of attention, interest, curiosity, and positive emotional connections that students have when they are learning, whether in the classroom or on their own" (Sousa, 2016). We are asking, "What do we need to do to help our students become available to learn so that optimal learning can occur?"

## How can we help support students' re-engagement to the learning environment?

- 1. Identify the **purpose**. First, identify whether or not this is a skill deficit. Ask yourself, "Does the student have the underlying academic skills? What was their academic experience like last year?" If this is not due to a skill deficit, identify alternative explanations. Ask yourself these questions to help guide intervention decision-making for re-engagement.

**Is the student trying to escape/avoid/or get out of the task?**

**Is the student obtaining attention?**

**Is the student accessing an alternative activity or tangible item?**

**Why?** Difficulty focusing, feelings of nervousness and worries, perceptions of "success," racing thoughts, or lack of enjoyment

**Why?** Concerns about teacher-student relationship, difficulty accessing attention from peers, caregivers, and/or family members

**Why?** Difficulty attending to the current learning environment or associating positive emotions/enjoyment or achieve distraction from racing thoughts/worries by accessing the alternative activity or tangible

- 2. Identify an **intervention or strategy**. Align the identified purpose above with an intervention or strategy using the following guidelines.

**Consider** using escape as a reinforcer contingent on a brief engagement in the learning environment or academic task

- Example: [Class Pass](#)
- Example: Hi-Probability Sequence
  - [Hi-P to increase compliance with demands](#)
  - [Hi-P Request Sequence](#)

**Consider** providing positive social attention for brief periods of engagement in the learning environment and enhancing the teacher-student relationship

- Example: [8 Essential Features](#)
- Example: Review the updated [Check and Connect](#) online mentoring guide  
Example: [Responsive Classrooms](#)

**Consider** providing access to enjoyable activities or tangible items for brief engagement in the learning environment

- Example: Create a schedule that includes access to enjoyable activities or items
- Example: [Behavioral Activation in Classroom Environment](#)
- Example: [Mystery Motivator](#)

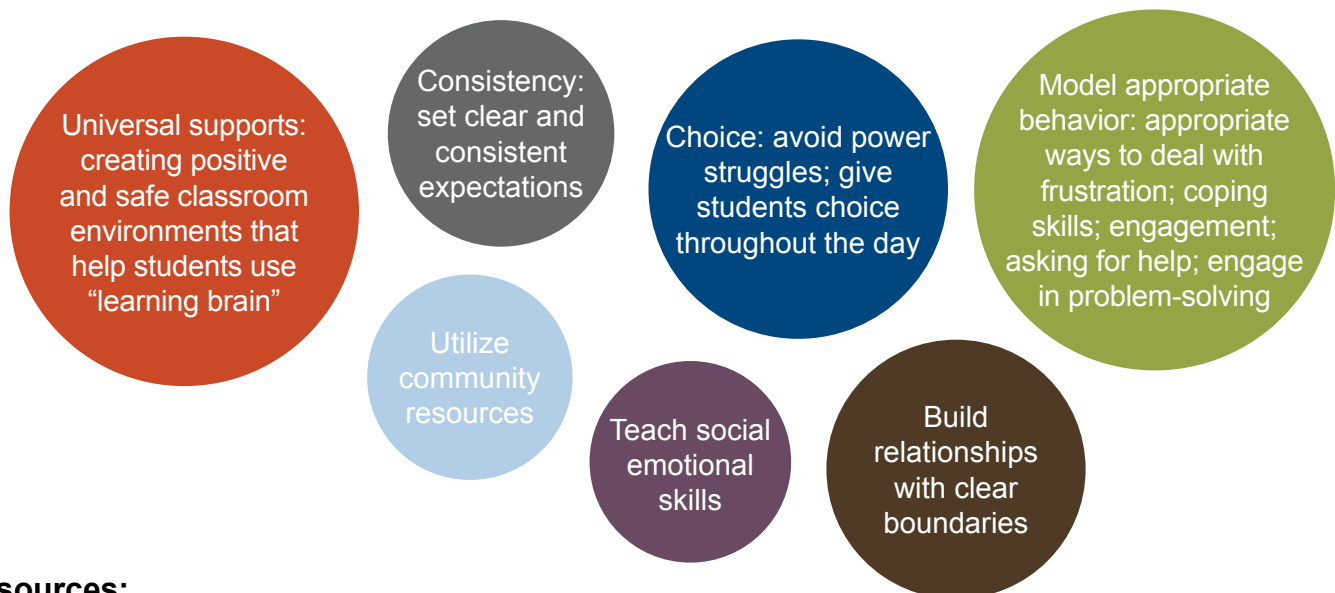
## What do we mean by "trauma-informed approaches?"

Traumatic stress can arise from a variety of adverse experiences: bullying, natural disasters/other weather events, medical procedures and/or chronic illness, homelessness, abuse or neglect, violence, divorce, grief, and oppression faced by minoritized students and families. Both students and school staff can be impacted by the stress associated with traumatic experiences. A multi-tiered trauma-informed approach aims to provide students with a safe and supportive learning environment in which adults are prepared to recognize and respond to those who have been impacted by traumatic stress.

## How can we help support students using a trauma-informed approach to our strategy or intervention?

1. Use therapeutic approach versus punitive approach
  - "How can I acknowledge and validate the student's feelings in this moment?"
  - "Is my approach positive and holding the boundary?"
2. Understand student behavior as symptom of trauma
  - "How is this student currently feeling?"
  - "What do I know about this student's stressors at school or in their environment?"
3. Provide support to change behavior rather than punishment
  - "How can I support the student to increase positive behavior?"
  - "How can I engage the student in problem-solving?"
4. Support your own mood
  - "How is my mood impacting my own behaviors?"
  - "What strategies can I use to enhance my current mood?"

## Seven Trauma-Informed Strategies for Increased Engagement:



## Resources:

- [Promoting Positive Teacher-Student Relationships](#)
- [Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A System Framework](#)
- [Trauma Informed Classrooms](#)
- [Trauma Resources for Educators](#)

## Authors & Contributors

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