Reflective Practice Prompts for Trauma-Informed Early Childhood Educators

Understanding the Child's Experience

- What might this child be communicating through their behavior, even if they cannot express it with words?
- What strengths, interests, and sources of joy do I see in this child?
- Am I viewing the child's behavior as a form of communication rather than simply as a problem to be managed?
- What might I be assuming about this child's experiences, family, or needs?
- How can I remain curious without making assumptions about trauma or adversity?

Safety and Regulation

- What have I done today to help children experience the classroom as physically and emotionally safe?
- Which parts of our routines might feel predictable and reassuring, and which might feel unpredictable or stressful?
- How do I respond when a child becomes dysregulated?
- Do my responses help the child return to a sense of safety, or could they unintentionally increase stress?
- What opportunities do children have to move, pause, seek connection, or use calming strategies?

Relationships and Connection

- How have I communicated, through my words and actions, that each child is valued and accepted?
- Which children may need more intentional connection from me right now?

- How do I respond when a child rejects, avoids, or tests connection?
- Do I give children genuine opportunities to express preferences and make choices?
- How might I repair a relationship after a difficult interaction?

Behavior and Adult Responses

- What happens within me when a child's behavior triggers frustration, fear, or a desire for control?
- Am I responding to the child's underlying need or primarily trying to stop the behavior?
- What expectations am I holding, and are they developmentally appropriate and trauma-informed?
- Could my response unintentionally communicate shame, rejection, or loss of control?
- What might I do differently if I approached this behavior with curiosity rather than judgment?

Power, Choice, and Autonomy

- Where do children have meaningful choices during the day?
- Are there situations in which I could offer more choice without compromising safety?
- How do I respond when a child says "no"?
- Am I distinguishing between behavior that requires a firm safety boundary and behavior that simply differs from my preference?
- How can I give children appropriate control over their bodies, belongings, activities, and participation?

Equity and Cultural Responsiveness

- How might culture, language, family practices, disability, or community context shape how a child experiences our classroom?

- Are my expectations based on one particular cultural model of behavior or development?
- Whose ways of communicating, playing, and participating are represented and valued in the environment?
- How might implicit bias influence my interpretation of a child's behavior?
- Am I partnering with families as experts on their children rather than making assumptions about what families need?

Environment and Routines

- What features of the physical environment might support regulation and a sense of belonging?
- Are there spaces where children can retreat, rest, or regulate without being shamed or isolated?
- Which transitions tend to be difficult, and what might make them more predictable?
- Are sensory experiences such as noise, lighting, crowding, or touch potentially overwhelming for some children?
- How could I adjust the environment before expecting a child to change their behavior?

Family Partnerships

- How do I communicate with families in ways that build trust and preserve dignity?
- Am I sharing strengths and successes, rather than contacting families primarily when something goes wrong?
- How can I invite families to share what helps their child feel safe, connected, and regulated?
- Do my communications avoid making assumptions about family circumstances?
- How can I collaborate with families while respecting their knowledge, choices, privacy, and boundaries?

Educator Self-Reflection and Well-Being

- What feelings am I carrying into my interactions with children today?
- How might my own experiences influence the way I respond to certain behaviors?
- What signs tell me that I am becoming dysregulated or overwhelmed?
- What support do I need from colleagues, supervisors, or my professional community?
- Am I practicing the same compassion and patience with myself that I hope to model for children?

After a Challenging Interaction

- What happened immediately before, during, and after the interaction?
- What might the child have needed at that moment?
- What did I need at that moment?
- What worked, even partially?
- What could I try differently next time?
- Is there an opportunity for repair with the child, family, or colleague?
- What did this experience teach me about the child, the environment, or my own practice?

Ongoing Growth

- What is one trauma-informed practice I am already doing well?
- What is one area where I want to become more intentional?
- What assumptions about behavior or discipline am I currently reconsidering?
- What feedback from children, families, or colleagues could help me grow?
- How can I turn today's reflection into one small, observable change in my practice?

(Admin Note: This page was developed through collaboration with ChatGPT software)