

# Creating Trauma-Informed Spaces

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# Trauma & the Central Nervous System

- Our central nervous systems (CNS) are designed to help protect us in life-threatening situations. When we experience a traumatic event, our CNS responds with “fight, flight, fawn, or freeze” responses intended to help us survive.
- In cases of severe or repeated trauma, the CNS can become dysregulated, leading to chronic activation of the CNS, activating these survival responses even in non-threatening situations
- This can result in hypervigilance, anxiety, panic attacks, difficulty sleeping, and emotional reactivity
- Calming down the CNS is crucial for those who have experienced trauma.

# Creating Trauma-Informed Spaces: A Focus on the Five Senses



# Sight



- Soft & calming colors for walls & decorations
- Natural elements like plants, water features, nature-inspired art; green spaces/trees visible from windows; sky visible from sky lights, open outdoor areas, etc.
- Dimmable lighting; avoiding & replacing flickering lights; is there adequate darkness for sleep? Are youth given sleep masks?
- Look around: What are young people seeing? How are rules worded?

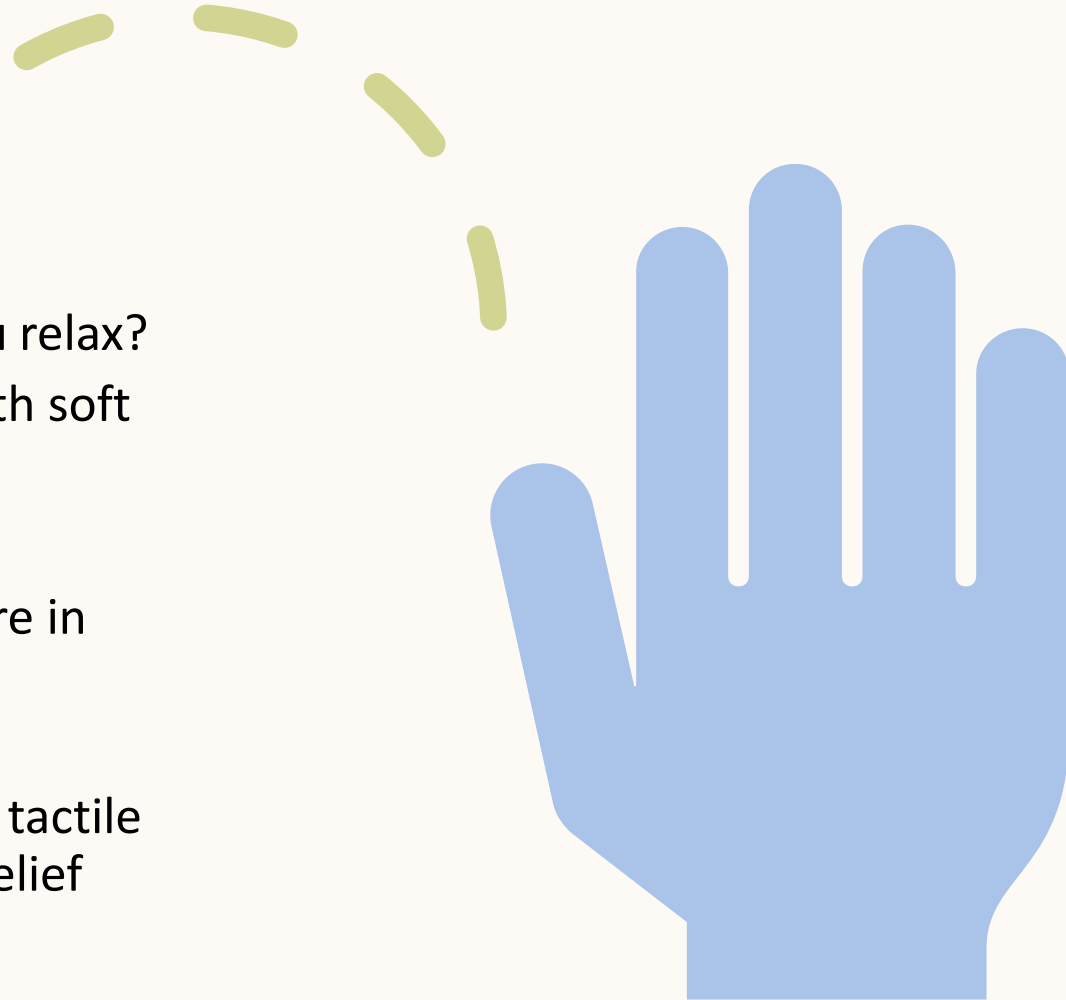
# Hearing

- Quiet zones where individuals can retreat to reduce overstimulation & find a sense of calm
- Noise reduction – use acoustic materials & design elements to minimize noise & echoes; rugs to help soften echoes, etc.
- Gentle sounds – quieter doors; if background music or sounds are used, ensure they are calming and non-intrusive



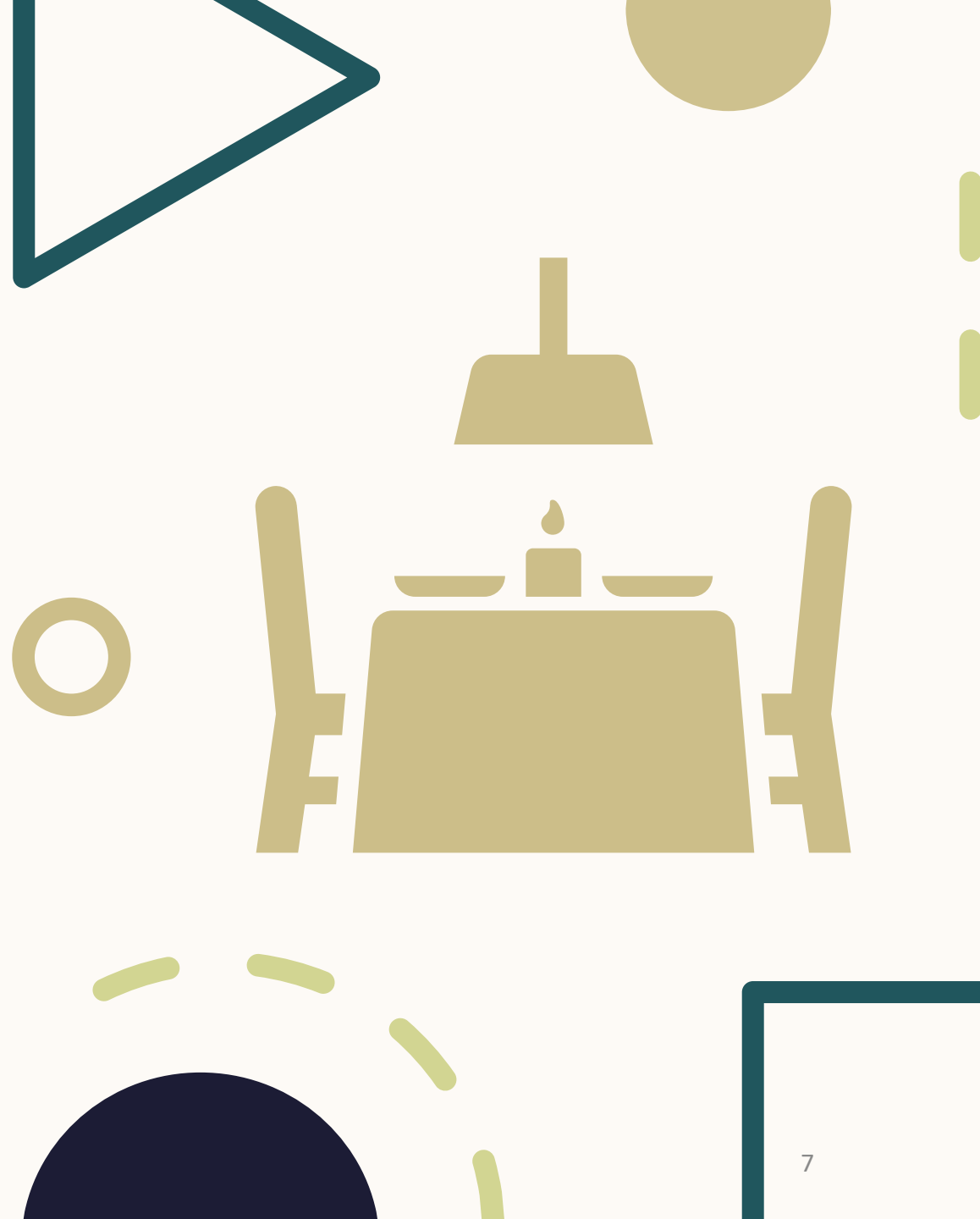
# Touch

- Comfortable seating – where would you relax?
  - Furniture that is cozy & inviting, with soft cushions
- Temperature control
  - Maintain a comfortable temperature in the unit & in other spaces such as classrooms, libraries, etc.
- Texture variety – a range of textures for tactile comfort like soft blankets, rugs, stress relief items like stress balls & fidget toys
- Is everything hard and cold?
- Comfortable clothing



# Taste

- Comfort foods – simple & familiar foods that evoke a sense of home, comfort, and safety
  - Remember to seek input from youth – things like food preferences are not universal
- Quality of every day foods



# Smell



- How to mitigate harsh chemical smells from cleaners, etc.
- Aromatherapy – lavender or chamomile have been shown to lower blood pressure
- Fresh air





# Suggestions for Space Consideration

- Kitchens can be healing!
  - In our own homes, kitchens are often the hub for gathering, sharing food, conversation
- Turn a spare room into a “cool-down” space where youth can go to self-regulate
  - Quiet, lower light, aromatherapy, variety of textures, sound machine, etc.
  - Individual rooms may not be able to be customized to this degree, but a spare room in a unit might be able to be converted
  - Several schools in California have adopted these, with great improvements in student behavior

# Suggested Readings

- Bremner, J. D. (2006). Traumatic stress: effects on the brain. *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience*, 8(4), 445-461.
- van der Kolk, B. A. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Viking. (Dani's note: This book does not have any trigger warnings, and discusses trauma and traumatic events/experiences of various kinds in detail.)
- Perry, B. D., & Pollard, R. A. (1998). Homeostasis, stress, trauma, and adaptation: A neurodevelopmental view of childhood trauma. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 7(1), 33-51.
- “Eating Behind Bars: Ending the Hidden Punishment of Food in Prison.” *Impact Justice*, [impactjustice.org/innovation/food-in-prison/#report](https://impactjustice.org/innovation/food-in-prison/#report). Accessed 26 July 2023.
- “Empathy in Architecture: Using Trauma-Informed Design to Promote Healing.” *E4H*, 8 Sept. 2020, [e4harchitecture.com/empathy-in-architecture-using-trauma-informed-design-to-promote-healing/#:~:text=The%20goal%20of%20trauma%2Dinformed,%2C%20art%2C%20and%20biophilic%20design.](https://e4harchitecture.com/empathy-in-architecture-using-trauma-informed-design-to-promote-healing/#:~:text=The%20goal%20of%20trauma%2Dinformed,%2C%20art%2C%20and%20biophilic%20design.)
- Mortice, Zach. “How Trauma-Informed Design Can Create Healing Architecture.” *Bloomberg.Com*, 10 Apr. 2023, [www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2023-04-10/how-trauma-informed-design-can-create-healing-architecture](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2023-04-10/how-trauma-informed-design-can-create-healing-architecture).