# TRAUMA-INFORMED PRINCIPLES FOR ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING SPACES

SAFETY · TRUSTWORTHINESS · CHOICE AND CONTROL · COLLABORATION · EMPOWERMENT · CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS

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# TRAUMA-INFORMED PRINCIPLES

Throughout this resource, each truama-informed practice will be tagged with one or more of the principles below. This page can be used to reference the ideas behind each principle.

**SAFETY**

Creating spaces where people feel culturally, emotionally, and physically safe

**TRUSTWORTHINESS**

Providing full and accurate information about what's happening and what's likely to happen next

**CHOICE AND CONTROL**

Individuals are treated with dignity and have choice & control over how they participate

**COLLABORATION**

Sharing power with learners & helping learners build relationships with each other

**EMPOWERMENT**

Building on learners' strengths

**CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS**

Recognize differences in how specific social and cultural groups may experience, react to and recover from trauma; Connect learners to support and resources that meet their unique social and cultural needs

In response to the 6 principles above, the collaborative authors responded to questions about how to apply these principles for adult participants in online workspaces and virtual program facilitation, including classrooms, therapy groups, and more. On the following pages, you will find their collective ideas.

This is a growing and changing collaborative document; the authors would like to welcome additional ideas!  If you would like to share other ideas, please click here.

# WHAT HELPS PEOPLE FEEL CULTURALLY, EMOTIONALLY, AND PHYSICALLY SAFE ONLINE?

Respect the time frame. Communicate if you are going to go over time.

**SAFETY** **TRUSTWORTHINESS**

Talk at the beginning about what safety means (not just physical safety). "What does it look like for you to feel safe/ not feel safe?"

**SAFETY** **TRUSTWORTHINESS** **COLLABORATION** **CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS**

Put emergency phone numbers and resources in the chat as a regular practice, naming that people may not be safe at home. Tell participants: "If you need to leave the call immediately, please do."

**SAFETY** **TRUSTWORTHINESS** **CHOICE AND CONTROL** **CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS**

Use preferred pronouns. Invite learners to add their pronouns along with their names while video conferencing.

**SAFETY** **TRUSTWORTHINESS** **CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS**

Explicitly state that everyone is welcome in the frame - partners, children, housemates, family, pets. The group should agree upon best practices for participating in video conferencing such as refraining from communal spaces (if possible) when there is private information being shared.

> *A note of confidentiality:* Depending on the content, consider inviting people to find a private space, while acknowledging that this may not be possible.
>
> *Ask: What do you (or the group) want to do if privacy is not possible or confidentiality is broken (by, for example, someone walking into the room and overhearing the session)?*
>
> Consider asking participants to use headphones to increase privacy. Consider asking or inviting participants to just listen if someone comes into their space to ensure their privacy and the privacy of others.

**SAFETY** **TRUSTWORTHINESS** **CHOICE AND CONTROL** **CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS**

Acknowledge different technology: participants may have fast or slow internet, be using computers or phones. Be aware of levels of participation due to this; if someone's internet connection is lagging, they may not hear your question until a few moments after everyone else has. Name that it is okay for people to have varying levels of technology familiarity and to participate in various ways.

**SAFETY** **TRUSTWORTHINESS** **CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS**

Consider people's level of comfort with technology, and recognize that having to use unfamiliar technology can cause stress.  Offer alternative options for participation such as sharing verbally, putting responses in the chat box, etc.

SAFETY   TRUSTWORTHINESS   CHOICE AND CONTROL   CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS

Provide a check-in at the beginning of a call to help people recognize how present (or not) they are, what their mood is, etc. Have participants reflect back what they notice about the group's feelings after everyone has shared; validate the group's feelings. For example, "It looks like a lot of folks are not feeling present right now. That makes sense considering all that's going on."

SAFETY   TRUSTWORTHINESS   CHOICE AND CONTROL   COLLABORATION

Name emotions that might be present at the beginning and throughout the session. Consider naming explicitly current events that may be impacting participants.

SAFETY   TRUSTWORTHINESS   CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS

Use preferred pronouns. Invite learners to add their pronouns along with their names while video conferencing.

SAFETY   TRUSTWORTHINESS   CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS

Before facilitating break out rooms, consider what's needed to maintain safety. Consider having a facilitator in each break out room.

SAFETY   TRUSTWORTHINESS

Try to prevent abrupt transitions.  Give people a warning and check-in about if people are needing more time before ending an activity or closing a break out room.

SAFETY   TRUSTWORTHINESS   CHOICE AND CONTROL

Remember physical needs during online learning: provide breaks, lead stretching, etc.

SAFETY   CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS

Provide tools to help learners recognize when they are "spaced out" and tools for coming back to the present.

SAFETY   TRUSTWORTHINESS   CHOICE AND CONTROL

If possible, plan for a supporting facilitator who can take over when the main facilitator needs to step away from the session.

SAFETY

# HOW CAN WE BUILD TRUST WITH LEARNERS ONLINE?



As facilitators and educators, we must be sure to have our own tools for calming ourselves and coming back to the present moment when frustrated, triggered, etc.

**SAFETY**  **TRUSTWORTHINESS**

Share the agenda at the beginning of each session/class.

**SAFETY**  **TRUSTWORTHINESS**  **CHOICE AND CONTROL**

Review the technology logistics. Walk people through how to do things like change their name.  Acknowledge when giving directions it might show up differently on their screen depending on their technology and what device they are using.

**SAFETY**  **TRUSTWORTHINESS**  **CHOICE AND CONTROL**  **CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS**

Explain what is going to happen next before shifting gears.

**SAFETY**  **TRUSTWORTHINESS**

Use a Stack. Stack is a method where people are allowed to talk about a certain topic in the order that they ask the facilitator to speak. You can use the Zoom electronic hand and take down as people talk or use the chat to maintain the Stack list.  Be sure to tell people how much time they have to speak.

**TRUSTWORTHINESS**  **CHOICE AND CONTROL**  **COLLABORATION**  **EMPOWERMENT**

Let people know when everyone is expected to contribute to a discussion, versus when they can opt in to share.

**SAFETY**  **TRUSTWORTHINESS**  **CHOICE AND CONTROL**  **COLLABORATION**  **EMPOWERMENT**  **CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS**

Use polls to provide participants an anonymous way to contribute.

**SAFETY**  **TRUSTWORTHINESS**  **CHOICE AND CONTROL**  **COLLABORATION**  **CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS**

Share something personal to begin to flatten the hierarchy between you and the participants.

**SAFETY**  **TRUSTWORTHINESS**  **CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS**

# HOW CAN WE OFFER LEARNERS CHOICE AND CONTROL ONLINE?

Consider other ways to assess engagement besides facial expressions and verbal engagement.  Offer multiple ways for people to engage-the chat, a poll, speaking, etc.
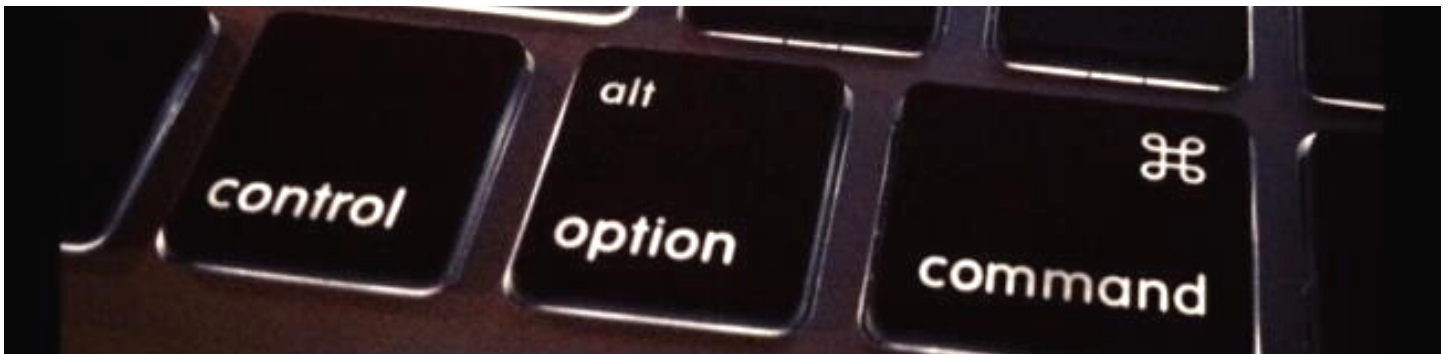
SAFETY    TRUSTWORTHINESS    CHOICE AND CONTROL    COLLABORATION    EMPOWERMENT    CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS

Invite people to turn their video on at the beginning of a session, but offer the option to keep it off if they're not comfortable.

SAFETY    TRUSTWORTHINESS    CHOICE AND CONTROL    CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS

Reach out to people who regularly have their video off to check in. Invite everyone in the group to turn their video on, if possible.  If the video is off, we know who is there if a person's name is on their "square".  Pay attention to who is responding - if the person is not responding at all, check in.

SAFETY    TRUSTWORTHINESS    CHOICE AND CONTROL    CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS



Make the use of video optional, but also consider your content and the impact of having some of the group with video off and some with video on. Again, you should invite everyone to turn their video on, if possible.  If someone is taking an emotional risk, it may be hard to take a risk and not know about the response.  Could be helpful to have a picture when the video is off.  Consider making sure all screens are named; as the facilitator, you can rename participants' "squares".  Might need to rename to give privacy re: phone number for those calling in.

SAFETY    TRUSTWORTHINESS    CHOICE AND CONTROL    COLLABORATION    CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS

Offer the choice of opting out of an activity, when possible.

SAFETY    TRUSTWORTHINESS    CHOICE AND CONTROL    CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS

If you have more time to get people comfortable with technology, give people options in which they can type directly into a document when doing group brainstorming. This allows participants to have more control.

CHOICE AND CONTROL    COLLABORATION    EMPOWERMENT    CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS

# HOW CAN WE SHARE POWER WITH LEARNERS AND HELP LEARNERS BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH EACH OTHER ONLINE?

At the beginning and ongoing, do assessments and surveys to find out what learners want and need in terms of content and process.

SAFETY  TRUSTWORTHINESS  CHOICE AND CONTROL  COLLABORATION

Facilitate community-building activities such as icebreakers and games.

SAFETY  TRUSTWORTHINESS  CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS

For a group that meets recurrently, hold some one or more Zoom practice sessions before the meetings begin so that people can help each other learn the features.

SAFETY  TRUSTWORTHINESS  CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS

Open the Zoom room before the meeting formally begins so that participants have a social space to connect with one another.

SAFETY  TRUSTWORTHINESS

Encourage participants to have separate meetings for specific topics that come up. This can be done with or without the original group's leader.

SAFETY  TRUSTWORTHINESS  CHOICE AND CONTROL

Host an open "Zoom Room" informal meeting space to encourage folks to spend time together without an agenda.

SAFETY  CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS

Connect students with one another with their permission. Sharing contact information can help them maintain their relationships outside of the designated online space.

SAFETY  TRUSTWORTHINESS  CHOICE AND CONTROL

## FOR GROUP COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES IN BREAKOUT ROOMS:

When using breakout groups, include the same people in each breakout group for the whole day of training so they can get to know each other and build trust. If there are multiple days of training, switch to new groups on each day to expand those social connections.

SAFETY  TRUSTWORTHINESS  CHOICE AND CONTROL  COLLABORATION

If you are going to do a small group brainstorm session, make a separate document for each small group. This way the group can collaborate and record their thoughts in the document during their session. Send the link for the Google Doc (or Google slides) in the Zoom chat that has the activity labeled for each group (i.e. Group 1, Group 2, Group 3). Groups will be able to access the chat inside their breakout room, discuss the activity as a group and report back to the larger group.

SAFETY  TRUSTWORTHINESS  CHOICE AND CONTROL  COLLABORATION  EMPOWERMENT  CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS

Once the breakout group sessions end, it is likely that the smaller groups will share their findings with the larger group. Options for presenting to larger group could be:
1) Choose a presenter and spotlight that person
2) Screenshare the group's document/slides to the larger group
3) Have groups pre-record their presentation in zoom and share.

SAFETY  TRUSTWORTHINESS  CHOICE AND CONTROL  COLLABORATION  EMPOWERMENT  CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS

# HOW CAN WE BUILD ON LEARNERS' STRENGTHS ONLINE?

Be intentional about getting to know the learners strengths.

EMPOWERMENT    CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS

Pair up veteran and new students. Ask veteran students to model culture to new students.

COLLABORATION    EMPOWERMENT

Invite participants to give each other structured feedback that affirms strengths (ie., "What did you see her do particularly well?")

SAFETY    TRUSTWORTHINESS    EMPOWERMENT

Ask students what they know before beginning a presentation or lesson. Offer open-ended questions to help learners see what they already know and how it's connected. Ask how they would define or understand a topic before offering your own perspective.

CHOICE AND CONTROL    COLLABORATION    EMPOWERMENT

CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS

Take a roundtable approach to the session when possible. Name the facilitator's role. Name the wisdom and strengths in the room as specifically as possible. (i.e. "I already know you're an expert at x, y, and z.")
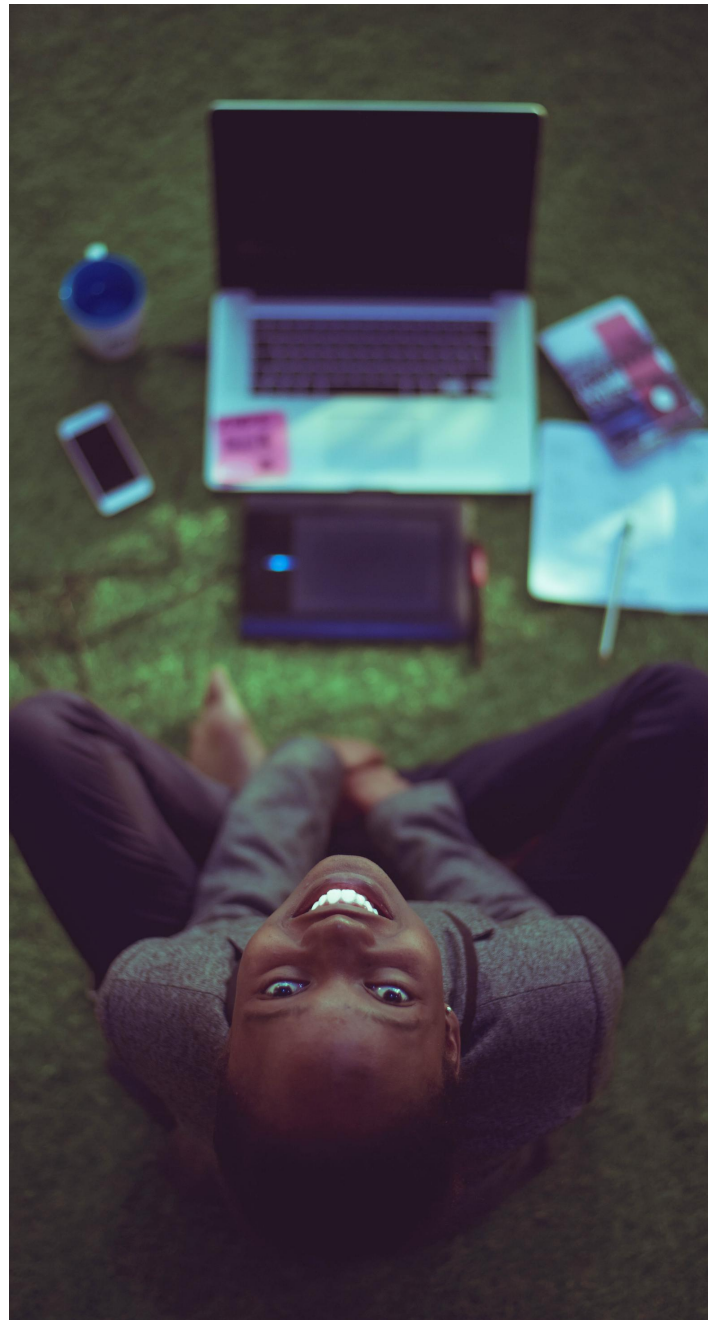
TRUSTWORTHINESS    CHOICE AND CONTROL    COLLABORATION

EMPOWERMENT    CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS

It's important to have a shared language when talking about a topic, especially one that is new to some or all in the group. Try to help participants engage by explaining, "We are putting a name to things you already are doing" when applicable.

SAFETY    TRUSTWORTHINESS    CHOICE AND CONTROL    COLLABORATION    EMPOWERMENT    CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS

# HOW CAN WE BE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE ONLINE?

Do our work by reading books that can help increase cultural competence and responsiveness.

**SAFETY**   **CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS**

Ask, never assume.  Take a curious stance. Invite others to speak to your blindspots.However, in your curiosity, also ask yourself, "Would I feel comfortable being asked this question / being asked in this environment?"

**SAFETY**   **TRUSTWORTHINESS**   **COLLABORATION**   **EMPOWERMENT**   **CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS**

Ensure that all students have access to online learning regardless of language, income, or other factors. If they do not, prepare alternative forms of connection through texts, calls, or mail.

**SAFETY**   **CHOICE AND CONTROL**   **EMPOWERMENT**   **CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS**

Identify where your research, content, frameworks come from by naming the group or organization or source.

**SAFETY**   **TRUSTWORTHINESS**   **CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS**

Explore cultural and social differences and affirm racial and cultural identities.

**SAFETY**   **EMPOWERMENT**   **CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS**

Examine your curriculum for bias. Does the curriculum include issues and topics related to the learners' background and culture?

**SAFETY**   **EMPOWERMENT**   **CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS**

Name and challenge unhealthy power dynamics that you notice.

**SAFETY**   **TRUSTWORTHINESS**   **COLLABORATION**   **EMPOWERMENT**   **CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS**

Provide learners with culturally and linguistically competent services to access for support (i.e. counseling in their native language).

**SAFETY**   **CHOICE AND CONTROL**   **EMPOWERMENT**   **CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS**

As a facilitator/educator, be aware of and critically analyze your own cultural identities and how these impact your worldview (and your blindspots).

**SAFETY**   **CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS**

# WHAT DO WE DO IF THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH WE ARE WORKING IS NOT TRAUMA-INFORMED?



Be honest in your assessment of the space and organization. There may be disagreement about whether your space can be trauma-informed. Be wary of the lingo being used within a structure that is not trauma-informed. Challenge policies that are not trauma-informed.

Find allies, co-conspirators, and accomplices in your environment. For a deeper look into what it means to be an accomplice, check out this article from this [Zendesk Relate blog post](#).

Identify the things you are able to control and assess what you are willing to risk. Remember that risk taking can be different for everyone. Those who have less risk (more privilege) should take more risks.

Focus on promoting resilience without the expectation that your participants will "bounce back" immediately.

Work to transform the environment through modeling, education, and training. Trauma-informed principles are best practices and there is something for everyone.

A safe environment/way of being can be established in a space that is not trauma-informed. Remember, the world isn't trauma-informed.

Practice self-care as you advocate for change.