

Dear Jewish Educator,

“To defend a country you need an army, but to defend a civilization you need education.”

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, zt”l, Dec 11, 2004.

How true his words are 19 years later. Since the Hamas terror attacks on Oct 7, 2023, Simchat Torah/Shabbat, I wondered what I could do to provide helpful and useful support to Jewish Day schools. Together with the BL coaches and team, the BL SEL Care Package and Resiliency Toolkit was born; for you, your teachers and your students. We hope you find it helpful.

May we share no more sorrow.
May we be healed from our pain.
May we share *besorot tovot* בשורות טובות



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BetterLesson SEL Care Package and Resilience Toolkit for Jewish Day Schools

How to use this toolkit:

- ✓ Review and implement the enclosed strategies and the associated items with your students and teachers.

Please note STUDENT TOOLKIT on cards 5 and 6.

This BetterLesson Care Package and Resiliency Toolkit contains some or all of the following to support you to:



- ✓ **Implement Coping skills:** Strategies and coping mechanisms for SEL (social-emotional learning) and trauma informed practice.



- ✓ **Learn and apply Jewish texts:** Apply Jewish texts and Jewish sources that contain instances of SEL and Trauma Informed Practice that motivate and inspire.

- ✓ Use the enclosed SEL items to support coping and promote resiliency in the classroom.



- Stress balls to use in a פינת שלווה / Calm Corner or for guided activities.
- Scented candles / sachets to use in a פינת שלווה / Calm Corner
- Timers to use in a פינת שלווה / Calm Corner or for guided activities.
- Feelings Scale and Coping Mechanism chart
- Question Stems and ideas for a Gratitude Journal
- Inspirational quotes and stickers

What Is Trauma ?

Trauma

A disturbing situation or event that an individual does not have the ability to respond to in a healthy way, leaving them in an extreme state of fear.

We have several natural reactions to a traumatic experience, some of which are described as:



How many students exhibit each of the following symptoms?



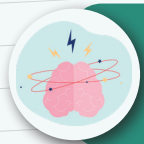
Click or scan to review a super helpful blog on dealing with trauma in the classroom.



Healthy classrooms are enhanced by teacher-student relationships.

The Brain and Trauma

How does trauma impact the brain? Research shows that trauma affects the brain in the following ways:



Physical Brain Changes

Smaller brain structure, fewer brain cells, broken connections between brain cells



Lowers Emotional Control

The brain can't process emotions which leads to mood disorders and behavioral issues.



Lowers Learning Ability

Causes trouble concentrating, learning, paying attention, and lowers creativity.



Lowers Behavioral Control

Brain changes make it hard to control impulses and form relationships.

Symptoms

Because of trauma, students may exhibit:



Fear, anxiety, worry



Feelings of guilt, shame, and self-blame



Angry outbursts, aggression, and withdrawal



Difficulty in social settings or withdrawal from peers and activities



Changes in school performance or poor school performance



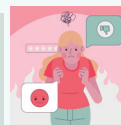
Headaches and stomach aches



Nightmares and disrupted sleep



Difficulty concentrating



Over or under reactions to situations in the environment (e.g. sudden movements, loud noises, physical contact)

Strategies for teachers dealing with trauma in the classroom



Creating Safe Spaces

Outcome: I cultivate emotional safety in my classroom.



De-escalation Tactics and Mindsets

Outcome: I utilize de-escalation tactics and mindsets.



Positive Behavior Systems

Outcome: I create a classroom community that allows all students to experience success.



Resilience and Wellbeing Strategies for Teachers

Outcome: I use resilience and wellbeing strategies to build and maintain my own wellness.



Trauma-Informed Strategies for Leaders

Outcome: I create systems that enable teachers to use trauma-informed practices to support student learning.

1. Reflect and connect regularly with students.
Don't wait for a traumatic event to occur. Once students are accustomed to regular reflection and connection, dealing with trauma will be easier to process as a class.



2. Build rapport and trust with the students, letting them know that the teacher is a safe adult, and that the classroom is a safe environment.



3. Prevention: 3 Keys to Building a Strong Classroom Culture:

- a.** Set and Continuously Improve Clear Expectations
- b.** Build Relationships Every Day in Varied Ways
- c.** Focus on the Positive More Than You Think is Necessary



BetterLesson strategies on dealing with trauma in the classroom

Resources:



Article from Rabbi Sacks, zt"l: "To defend civilization, you need education"



Rabbi Sacks zt"l TED Talk on "Morality in Modern Times"

THREE R'S:

A trauma-informed educator, classroom, or school engages in the following 3 R's.
What can you start doing intentionally and proactively to support students coping with trauma?

Realize

Realize the impact of trauma and understand that the causes of behaviors may be connected to the past or current traumatic experience.

- Acknowledge trauma
- Check-in regularly: ask questions



Recognize

Recognize the signs and symptoms of traumatic stress in student behaviors and responses.

- Identify triggers
- Empower students to use their learning brain.
- Facilitate effective and healing responses.



Respond

Respond by integrating knowledge about trauma into practices using the "connect then redirect" approach: first calm the brain-body reaction, then engage the student in problem solving.

- Help students to feel, be seen and heard.
- Provide strategies to support.
- Create opportunities for student choice and expression.



Tools for students:

I'm feeling



Scared



Sad



Angry



Stressed



Happy

because....

To feel better, I will:

Squeeze a stress ball
for 10
seconds



Sit in the peace
corner
"פינת שלווה" for
3 minutes
and....



Drink some tea slowly



Take 3 deep
breaths,
concentrate
on inhaling &
exhaling



Count to 10
three times



Do a yoga pose



List 3 things I am
grateful for in my
gratitude
journal.

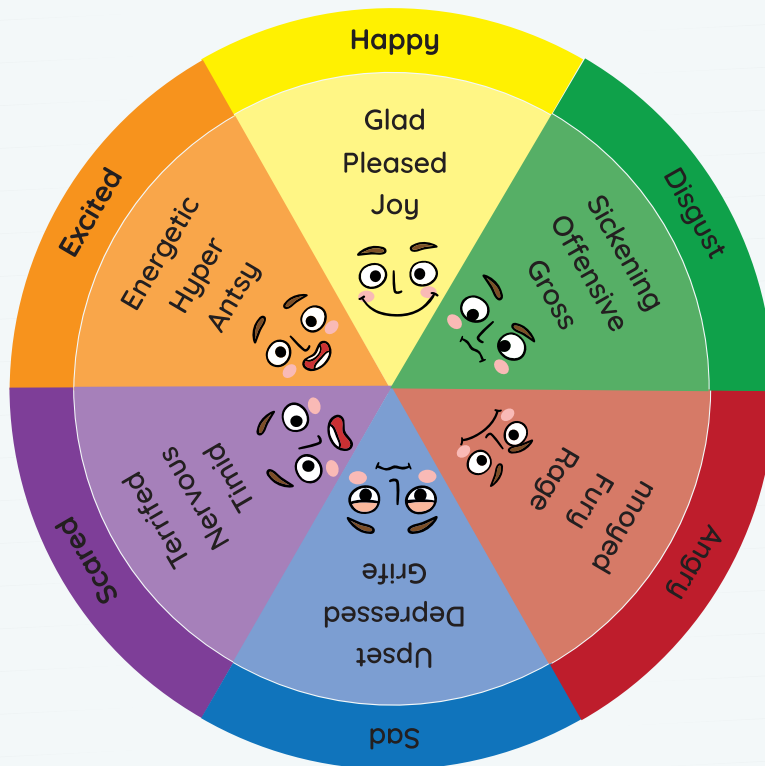


Smell some scented
soaps



Tools for students:

Identify where I feel on the Emotional Wheel and why I feel that way.



Torah Context

Torah Perspective on Coping with Trauma

Review the following four methods of trauma and process the discussion questions on the next page with your students.

Yaakov and Esav: The story of Yaakov and Esav actually involves a good deal of trauma. It is instructive to look at the various methods that Yaakov employed to deal with his trauma.

As a young man, Yaakov finds himself in a traumatic situation that involves parental conflict, sibling rivalry, and a clear concern for his physical safety. Caught between the conflicting perspectives of his parents, Yaakov is encouraged to deceive his father in order to receive the blessing intended for his brother, Esav. When this unfolds, his brother becomes enraged at Yaakov and vows to kill him. Let's look at four different responses adopted by Yaakov to cope with this trauma:



Flight

At the urging of his mother, Yaakov flees to safety from the rage of his brother Esav:

"Now, my son, listen to me. flee at once to Haran, to my brother Laban. Stay with him a while, until your brother's fury subsides— until your brother's anger against you subsides—and he forgets what you have done to him." (Breishit 27:43-45)

Over the course of his many years facing the challenges and hardships of life in Charan, Yaakov discovered deeper parts to himself, a new set of resources that would equip him to finally confront his brother. When he returns to Canaan, he sends messengers to inform Esav. They report that Esav is on the way to meet him accompanied by 400 men. The Torah tells us that he was still traumatized by the threat posed by his brother's rage: *"And Yaakov was very frightened and anxious."* (Breishit 32:8)

The Midrash identifies 3 tactics that Yaakov adopted on his return to Canaan to help him confront and cope with his traumatic relationship with Esav:



Fight

Yaakov prepares for war:

He divided the people with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two camps, thinking: "If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, the other camp may yet escape." (Breishit 32:8-9)



**Faith**

Yaakov prays to G-d to help him:

And Yaacov said: 'Oh G-d of my father Abraham, and G-d of my father Isaac, Oh L-rd, who said to me: Return to your native land and I will deal bountifully with you; 11 I am not worthy of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which you have shown to your servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I have become two camps. 12 Deliver me, I pray to you, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav; for I fear him, lest he come and smite me, the mother with the children. (Breishit 32:10-12)

**Renewal**

Yet, Yaakov also made a plan to rebuild the relationship with his brother, to initiate a new start and to lay the foundation for a better future. We might call this reaction diplomacy or reconciliation.

He selected from what was at hand these presents for his brother Esav: 200 she-goats and 20 he-goats; 200 ewes and 20 rams; 30 milch camels with their colts; 40 cows and 10 bulls; 20 she-asses and 10 he-asses. These he put in charge of his servants and ... instructed the one in front as follows, "When my brother Esav meets you and asks you, "Who's your master? Where are you going? And whose [animals] are these ahead of you?"; you shall answer, "Your servant Yaakov's; they are a gift sent to my lord Esav; and [Yaakov] himself is right behind us." (Breishit 32: 14-19)

Apparently, Yaakov's diplomatic approach worked and his relationship with Esav was put on a more positive track.

He [Yaakov] himself went on ahead and bowed low to the ground seven times until he was near his brother. Esav ran to greet him. He embraced him and, falling on his neck, he kissed him; and they wept. (Breishit 33: 3-4)

Processing – Discussion Questions:

1. What did Yaakov accomplish by fleeing to the house of Lavan, and what did he give up? Do you think that this could have been a long term solution? Why did Rivka stress that his flight to Padan Aram would be temporary?
2. Why was it important for Yaakov to prepare for war? Was it really unnecessary in the end, or did it have value nonetheless?
3. How is tfilla helpful in dealing with trauma?
4. Why, in your opinion, was Yaakov successful in his "rebuilding" approach? Was his reconciliation with Esav genuine? How had each changed, and why?
5. In the Kibbutz Be'eri story [see p. 9], the kibbutz member Rachel deals with tremendous trauma and vows to rebuild. How is the kibbutz member Rachel's approach to dealing with trauma similar to Yaakov's?
6. Have you used, or could you use, any of the methods that we have discussed when you are facing difficulties in life?

A Modern Day Example: Trauma and Renewal at Kibbutz Be'eri :

The Shul In Kibbutz Beerli Comes To Life

November 5, 2023 | By Yehuda Dov

JERUSALEM (VINnews) — Kibbutz Beerli, which suffered the brunt of the vicious Hamas attacks, has not yet returned to normal. Some of the houses, many of which unfortunately have lost their owners, are now occupied by soldiers operating near the front line.

One of the soldiers described how the shul in the kibbutz was under lock and key. "It's a shame," one of the soldiers said. "We could have tefillot here and learning sessions."

Another soldier suggested calling the telephone of the Gabbait, a lady named Rachel, whose number was on the door. However he wasn't sure if....she was still alive.

A quick confirmation with the kibbutz's security guard revealed that Rachel was alive, although not physically in the kibbutz. The soldiers called Rachel and she was absolutely overjoyed to hear that the shul would be active, not just on Shabbat but even during the week, three times a day for shiurim, Tefillot and Divrei Torah.

The shul's code strangely prohibited saying Divrei Torah there, but Rachel was just waiting for such Divrei Torah. Her home was burnt to a cinder but her heart is full of yearning for holiness. She came back to Beerli to see what had happened to her husband's Tefillin (which remained undamaged!) and her future son-in-law's Talis. She also wanted to see what was happening in the shul.

Eilon, one of the soldiers said that "We received her with singing and dancing.

Rachel also brought with her a Sofer who began writing a Sefer Torah this week, in order to inaugurate it on the eve of Simchat Torah 5785."

The soldiers asked Rachel how she had succeeded in establishing the shul (in 2015) in such a secular kibbutz. She explained that a shul can't be built through disputes, only with true love. Showing tremendous empathy and joy, she managed to persuade the kibbutz to erect the shul. (One old-timer said that he hadn't prayed for 60 years...)

It is the spiritual power of Rachel - from Beerli, as well as Rachel from Ofakim and all the other holy women, who will enable the shattered remnants of these kibbutzim and towns to rebuild their future even after such horrific events have transpired.



Rachel, the gabbait of the synagogue at Kibbutz Beerli, writes the first letter of a new Torah Scroll that will be used on Simchat Torah 5785. See a moving video at:
<https://www.tiktok.com/@israel supportersi/video/7298026939825130754>



Teacher's Guide:

When Yaakov returned to Eretz Canaan, he added two components to his trauma coping toolbox beyond the two that we have already seen.



Flight

Yaakov's flight response, removal from the source of the trauma, was always seen as a temporary response. In order to fulfill his destiny, he would have to return to Canaan and confront Esav.



Fight

He now prepares himself with the fight response, the readiness to try to overcome his perceived or real threat. Even if the battle never takes place, the readiness to fight represents progress in coping with trauma by taking control of one's situation.

But as we have seen, Yaakov adds two tools to his resiliency toolkit - **faith and renewal**.



Faith

Faith manifested itself for Yaakov in prayer, giving him the sense that he was not alone, that Hashem was there to help him. In the Jewish tradition, faith also provides the sense that you are part of a larger story that began long ago and will culminate in a promising future. Being part of this continuum and this destiny gives meaning to the challenges that one faces.



Renewal

Yet, perhaps the most powerful tool in Yaakov's toolkit is renewal. Renewal in Jewish tradition includes two components - taking responsibility and implementing change:

A common phrase in Jewish prayer is "because of our sins, we were exiled". The idea that we must take responsibility for our role in the events that engulf us precludes wallowing in victimhood and hatred of others. It also paves the way for meaningful change and growth. The basic premise of the Jewish concept of teshuvah is that every person and nation is capable of change and starting anew.

The Jewish people have a unique and impressive history of resilience. Perhaps this can be attributed to the resilience toolkit inherited from Yaakov.

