

Trauma Walk-Through

An Exercise for Educators

This exercise will help teachers, at various schools, ‘walk through’ their space to assess the extent to which the social and physical environment is likely to feel welcoming, culturally and emotionally safe, and reduce potential harm for everyone, but especially for those who are most likely to feel unwelcome and unsafe.

1

Approaching and entering the school and classroom

Think about visiting the school where you work. As you approach and enter, imagine the following, as though it’s your first visit:

- In getting there, what is their frame of mind likely to be? Was it a journey that was predictable, safe, and supported?
 - If they are coming on a school bus, is the student experiencing bullying during the ride? Do they have a support, a friendly face?
 - If they are arriving on foot, what was the walk like? Long? Short? Many strangers? Danger?
- Is there good supervision in the playground? Is there bullying or aggressive behaviour?
- What is the entrance like? Crowded? Noisy? Organized?
- Who is present? Are there teachers or other trusted adults standing at the door, welcoming students into the school, into the classroom?
- Who is communicating with who? How are people communicating? What is their tone of voice?
 - What are the sounds present as student enter? Is there calm music? Students who are dysregulated and disruptive?
- Are people making eye contact? And if so, who is making eye contact with whom?

Think about it

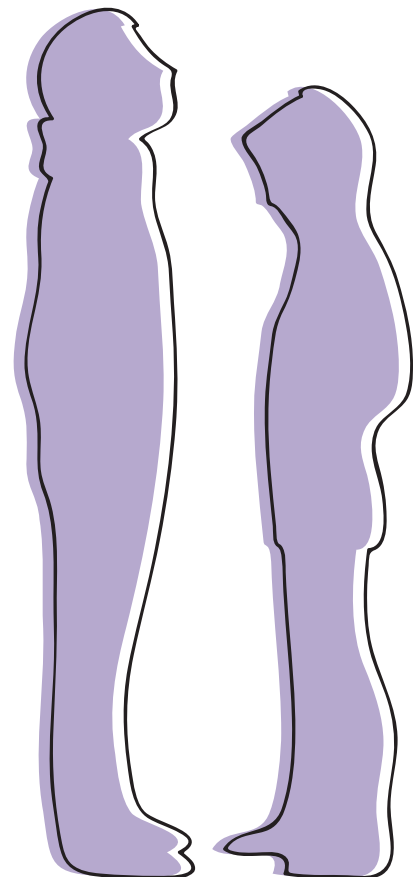
- What is welcoming or unwelcoming as you enter?
- What tone does the signage, décor, announcements, convey? Who do you imagine decides about these features? What influences those decisions?
- Who would feel welcome or unwelcome here? Do you feel welcome here? Why or why not?
- What things or people in the space might deter people from engaging with teaching staff? What might be encouraging or supportive to get them to move forward to talk to staff?

Now imagine approaching the office area/staff.

- Where is it located? How do people (students or parents/guardians) know where it is and how they are supposed to get there?
- How are people greeted and by whom?
- How many people are usually in the reception area? Who are they?
- How private are conversations? What if someone has a sensitive topic to talk about?
- What is allowed? Are children allowed to come in?
- How do students and parents/guardians and other people know what staff roles are? How can you recognize a teacher? A caretaker? A Principal?
- What do staff convey? Consider usual facial expressions, tone of voice, body language, words.
- What stands out about this space?
- What makes you feel comfortable or uncomfortable here? Who would feel most comfortable? Are different people treated differently and if so in what ways and by whom? Based on what?
- What questions are asked? Review the late/attendance policies. What does it draw attention to? From what does it detract attention?

Think about it

- When staff engage with students and families do you think that they consider what is affecting people's well-being? For example, do you think staff account for how hard it might be to even get to school?
- How do staff engage with people who do not speak English as a first language? Does anything about their communication change?
- Do the staff take into consideration student age or physical ability? For example, how do they speak with children with exceptionalities? Are students able to sit in the office, or are they standing in the hall?
- How do staff engage with people who seem to have trouble focusing on questions being asked?



3

Hallways

What is it like to walk through the halls?

- If you had to describe the halls of your school(s) to someone in two words, what would you say?
- What is the strongest feeling you have as you walk the hallways?
- What does it look like? How does it sound? How does it feel (crowded)? What are students doing there?
- Are water and washrooms available, accessible, and easy to locate? Are they clean? How do they smell?
- Are the halls clean?
- Are they safe and well-supervised?
- Are there spaces available for students to sit (e.g., benches, chairs)? Do they seem comfortable?
- What do you notice about the students walking through here? Do they seem comfortable to you, nervous, excited? Are they talking to one another?
- Notice who is helping people in the halls. Who is talking to students? Who is helping if someone appears distressed or uncomfortable? Do some people seem uncomfortable? Why?
- What kinds of things are happening to students here? Are they getting disciplined, or encouraged?
- What do you see that is relevant to people's privacy, their identity and/or their learning needs and/or well-being?

Think about it

- Who would feel comfortable in this space? Who wouldn't? Why?
- How is privacy and confidentiality protected in this space?

4

Classrooms

What are the classrooms like?

- What is the layout of the room? Would you describe the space? Warm, cold, cozy, sterile?
- Who is in the room?
- What do students hear as they enter the classroom? Are they greeted? What do their first interactions with their teacher look like?
- Are there different areas and materials to accommodate for different learning styles?
- Is a teacher available in the classroom outside of class time to talk to students? Is this made known to students?
- How are decisions made in the classroom? Is this done collaboratively with students? How are student suggestions and ideas received?
- What do you notice about when and how teachers talk with students? How does the encounter begin? End?
- What happens prior to and during instructional time and assessments? What are staff doing and saying? What actions do staff take to ensure students feel comfortable taking learning risks?
- Would you feel comfortable in this space? What might make you feel uncomfortable or unsafe?

Think about it

- Are the classrooms set-up to best serve students, or teachers?
- Who would feel respected in this space? Who would not? Why?
- What small thing could be changed to make it a more welcoming space?

5

Leaving school

What is the end of the day like?

- What happens when students leave school to go home? Are assignments considered/discussed in the context of resources and experiences at home and in their community?
- Do teachers and staff say goodbye to them at the end of the day
- Is there any understanding that students behaviour at the end of the day might be a reflection of their experiences at home (e.g., acting out before a long-weekend and not wanting to go home)
- What does the end of the day routine look like? What is it like in the halls? How does it sound? How does it feel?
- What do you think student's trips homes might be like? How might this influence their mood and behaviour at the end of the day?

