



## Professional Development with Anna Reyner, MA

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# Positive Solutions to Challenging Behaviors Using Trauma-Informed Art to Build Community & Calm in the ECE Classroom

By Anna Reyner, MA, LMFT

## Challenging Behaviors: We're All Seeing Them

Many of us are seeing more challenging behaviors than ever before. Young children today are still feeling the mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns. They often express stress and big emotions through behaviors that can feel overwhelming for teachers, coaches, and ECE program leaders – especially for those without mental health training.

## So, How Can We Help?

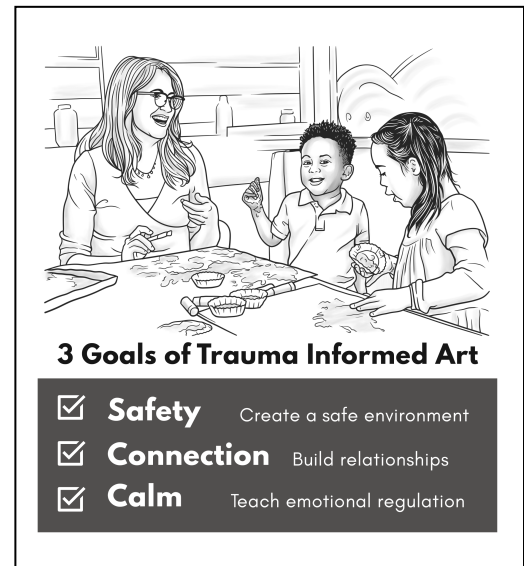
One powerful way is through **Trauma-Informed Art**. This approach helps children safely process stress and emotions while building a sense of calm and community in your classroom.

## What Is Trauma-Informed Art?

**TRAUMA-INFORMED ART = OPEN ENDED ART EXPERIENCES  
DELIVERED BY TEACHERS WHOSE FOCUS IS ON  
SAFETY, CONNECTION AND CALM.**

**When you deliver Trauma-Informed Art:** Art is open-ended, child-led, and activates the whole body. Children feel seen and their visual language is valued. Children express their feelings, channel their energy and make their own discoveries with art experiences. Teachers are intentionally present, calm and view children's art as an expression of their individuality. This personal acknowledgement and freedom of expression creates trust and builds attachment between children and teachers.

**Why This Matters:** When a child's brain is shaped by stress, they can get "stuck" in *fight, flight, or freeze* mode. Process Art helps "re-wire" the brain for safety, calm, and connection – making your classroom a more peaceful place for everyone.



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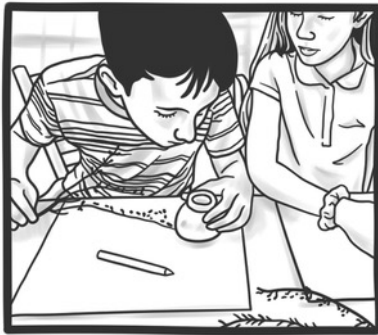


## Learning to Self-Regulate with ART



### Art for Calm - Solutions for Low Energy

Children with very low energy levels may struggle to feel safe and avoid engagement. CALMING ART provides quiet & soothing sensory-motor experience with inward focus



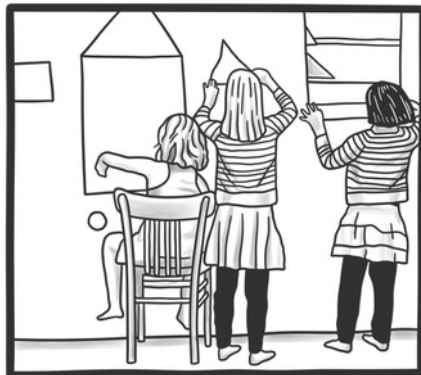
Observational Drawing with Magnifiers



Handmade Accordion Books

### Art for Release - Solutions for High Energy

Children with high energy levels may struggle to control their bodies and focus. RELEASING ART provides active, & expressive sensory-motor experience with outward focus.



Collaborative Mural with Colored Tape



Double Doodling / Bilateral Scribbling

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# Handy Backpack Phrases for Trauma-Informed Educators

Delivering Trauma-Informed Art  
by: Anna Reyner, MA / CreativePlayLA.com



When children are immersed in making art, it's often best not to converse with them at all. Teachers and parents honor the creative process by letting children work quietly, without words to interrupt them. Other times art making brings up feelings, as children engage in sensory play that activates their central nervous system. If this happens, they may verbalize fears or insecurities. How you respond is important. Children who have experienced pandemic stress and other traumas, look to caregivers to answer their unspoken questions: "Do you see me? Am I safe here? Do I matter to you?" Your words and intentions answer these questions.

When caregivers memorize and use these "backpack phrases," they help children feel safe, connected and calm...the 3 Pillars of Trauma-Informed Care.

## Safety

I'm here for you.  
You are safe.  
I like helping you.  
What do you need from me?  
Thank you for trusting me.



## Connection

We'll get through this together.  
We make a great team.  
I get scared too, and it's no fun.  
I know this is hard.  
I am proud of you for trying.



## Calm

What's your favorite breathing exercise?  
Let's both open and shut our hands a few times.  
Feelings come and go, this one will pass too.  
Let's feel our heartbeat by placing our fingers on our pulse.  
We can calm down by taking 3 deep breaths together, follow me!

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