

Healing at Home

An information & resource package for caregivers of children and youth accessing the Zebra Centre

Caelea McRae
Davison Harms
Micah Punsalan
Shagun Tungal
Sofia Rosichuk



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Objective

The aim of this project is to create a resource that is relevant, engaging, and easy for caregivers to navigate during times of need. We recognize that children accessing the Zebra Centre, in addition to their caregivers, come from diverse backgrounds and may have experienced a wide range of traumatic experiences. For this reason, we aim to provide culturally inclusive resources from a healing perspective to align with the Zebra Centre's vision to be **“innovative leaders in fostering an inclusive community where every child and youth is heard, respected, and safe from abuse.”**¹

We also recognize that many of those accessing the Zebra Centre's services may not be residents of the greater Edmonton area, and therefore have other resources on hand to accommodate. Please speak to a staff member or volunteer for more information.

¹ (Zebra Child Protection Centre, n.d.)

Zebra Child & Youth Advocacy Centre²

We get involved after a report of abuse occurs, and we are here to support you and your child throughout the whole process, which may include:


- Disclosure
- Police Investigation
- Court Proceedings
- Healing Journey


Zebra Centre Supports

As a multidisciplinary team, we recognize that every child's experience is unique, and we offer many forms of support along your child's journey:


 **VIP (Very Important Paws) Program** – Fletcher, Captain, and Cajun provide support within the Centre and at the courthouse


 Onsite, child-friendly Forensic **Interview Rooms**

 **Hope's Toy Closet** - Offers a new toy or quilt to celebrate the child's bravery

 **Backpack Program** - Ensures every child leaves with appropriate clothing, PJs & personal items

 **Care Calls** - Regular check-ins for file updates, referrals, and to offer emotional support

 **Trauma Referrals** - Connects children to counselling & trauma services in their community

 **Court Preparation & Accompaniment** - a key step in addressing myths or fears surrounding the court process

Founded in 2002, Zebra Centre supports children and youth who have suffered abuse.

A safe place where
KIDS CAN TELL!

²(Zebra Child Protection Centre, n.d.)

What is Trauma?³



Trauma is a “**response to a deeply distressing or disturbing event** that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope [and] causes feelings of helplessness.”



Trauma can damage a person's “sense of self and their ability to feel a full range of emotions and experiences.”



Trauma is **not straightforward** or the same for everyone. While some events cause trauma, others may not. Trauma responses are involuntary and unique to each person.

A common metaphor for trauma is that a band aid will not be enough to help a patient recover from a bullet wound. That is to say, rather than covering up the pain of these experiences, we must **create** strategies to process and heal the trauma.

³(“What Is Trauma? - Definition, Symptoms, Responses, Types & Therapy”, n.d.)

What Can Cause Trauma?⁴

There are **three factors** to consider the cause of

trauma:

1

Primary Factors

Your child may have experienced any of the following:

- Domestic Violence
- Physical Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Kidnapping
- Medical injury, illness, procedures
- Neglect
- Natural Disasters

2

Secondary Factors

- Trauma doesn't need to be experienced first-hand to occur!
- It can be through witnessing an event or hearing about it

3

Generational Factors

- It can feed off cycles of abuse or mistreatment within a family, because they don't have access to proper supports to care for themselves
- By understanding this now, **YOU** can play a part in reducing this cycle



⁴(“Trauma-Informed Care | Early Connections”, n.d.)

What Does Trauma Look Like?

Your child may go through any of the following:

Hyper-Arousal ⁴



Your child can be deeply distressed and anxious towards the trauma

They may react differently and may not know how to cope with these feelings.

Avoidance

Your child may attempt to avoid these unwanted traumatic thoughts or memories or feelings.

A way to help them is by **recognizing** their triggers!



The triggers could be:



⁵(“TIP 57 Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services”, n.d.)

They may also re-experience the trauma through
flashbacks⁶:



Re-experiencing

Your child may experience sudden and unwanted traumatic memories that interferes their daily tasks and **they are experiencing it NOT as a past event, but as a CURRENT one.**

I feel stressed out

Maybe I should just ignore it.

Left untreated, the effects of trauma can:



Can increase:

- **Feelings of Distress**
- **Negative Coping Skills**
- **Avoidance**
- **Dissociation**

⁶ ("TIP 57 Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services", n.d.)

There are **five general categories** that capture common reactions to trauma⁷:

Emotional Reactions

Your child may feel and experience:

- Numbness
- Detachment
- Anxiety/fear
- Anger
- Sadness
- Depersonalization
- Denial
- Mood swings
- Depression
- Shame
- Irritability



Physical Reactions

Your child may experience:

- Nausea
- Sweating
- Fainting
- Elevated heart beat, blood pressure
- Extreme fatigue
- Sleep disturbances (nightmares)
- Appetite changes
- Bed wetting



Cognitive Reactions

Your child may think and experience:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Day dream
- Twist time & space
- Memory problems
- Generalize triggers
- Magical thinking (if I do this... that won't happen again)
- Self-blame & Low self-esteem

Behavioural Reactions

Your child may behave:

- Easily startled
- Restless
- Apathy
- Difficulty expressing emotions
- Withdrawal
- Little enjoyment in activities



Intensive Reactions

Your child may perceive and begin to:

- Use of intense prayer/faith
- Question (why me?)
- Lose purpose or regained
- Change definition of meaning & importance of life
- Rework life's needs (ex. Taking self defence courses to feel safer)

⁷(Thompson-Kraft 2022)

Child Coping Approaches

This section outlines effective therapy models and offers suggestions on how you can proactively support your child throughout their healing.

Types of Therapies

The following approaches are commonly used in trauma therapy to help those who have suffered or witnessed abuse⁸:

Mindfulness and Acceptance Approaches

Uses **grounding** and **mindfulness** techniques to help combat negative feelings or thoughts linked to the traumatic event.

We all experience negative emotions! We just need to recognize them to cope effectively!

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) Therapy

Uses **exposure** to traumatic incidents by talking about them in detail and reinforce with tactile touch (i.e. sand boxes, toys, art).

Family Therapy

Focusing on **family functionality** and **cop**ing. Provides a holistic view of strengths and shortcomings. Done alone or in separate groupings **Sets family boundaries**

Group Therapy

Similar to Family Therapy, but with people who have experienced **similar** events (i.e. caregiver groups for kids with trauma, child groups for children with similar experiences).

Art Therapy

Helps to **express emotions** through a variety of art methods (i.e. dance, painting, sculpting, etc.)



⁸(“Therapy for Childhood Trauma Can Make a Huge Difference” 2021)

Positive Caregiver-Child Interactions

It is important for caregivers to **understand their children's trauma-related issues**, as well as their **own emotional reaction** to the child's trauma experience and how it **affects** caregiving and effectively responding to child trauma reactions⁹.

Encourage positive caregiver-child interactions and **reinforce** positive behaviours such as:

- Praise
- Compliment exchange
- Giving effective instructions
- Logical and appropriate consequences for misbehaviours

Instead of this:



Try this:



⁹(Triple P International, n.d.)

Relaxation Skills

Practicing **grounding skills** can **decrease** your child's fear and anxiety symptoms (e.g., increased heart rate, rapid, shallow breathing, muscle tension) and **promote** a sense of **empowerment and control** over their symptoms¹⁰.

When we **refocus** in the **present moment**, we remove ourselves **from distressing and traumatic thoughts**, making room to engage in pleasurable activities and self-soothing.

Examples of Relaxation Practices

- Listening to calming music
- Crafting calming words/mantras
- Prayer
- Yoga
- Physical exercise
- Dance
- Meditation
- Visualization
- Arts



¹⁰ (CTRI Crisis & Trauma Resource Institute Inc., n.d.)

Expressing and Regulating Emotions

Teaching your child the **basic skills** needed to accurately **identify, express, and control** positive and negative emotions helps enforce the use of **healthy instead of unhealthy or maladaptive forms** of emotional expression¹¹.

Examples may include

- Seeking social support
- Self-soothing
- Positive self-talk
- Distraction and thought stopping
- Positive imagery, problem-solving
- Interrupting inappropriate behaviour (e.g., hitting) as a way of expressing negative emotion (fear, irritability, frustration).

Comforting your child with the five senses



¹¹(CTRI Crisis & Trauma Resource Institute Inc., n.d.)

Cognitive Coping

Clinicians help children and caregivers **understand** the **connections** among **thoughts, feelings, and behaviours** and **provide techniques** for identifying and **changing** inaccurate or unwanted thoughts that are causing negative feelings and behaviours¹².



Children and caregivers learn to **analyze** their **own patterns of negative thinking**.

Clinicians help children and caregivers **recognize** that how one thinks about an event **influences how they feel and behave**.

Am I falling into a thinking trap?

Are my thoughts accurate?

Is it helpful, does it make me feel better?

¹²(Cohen et al. 2012)

Techniques used in therapy may include using the **cognitive triangle**¹³, **cartoons**, **thinking bubbles**¹⁴, **scenarios**, and **books illustrating examples of thinking styles**, **cued videos**, **acting out scenarios with puppets** and **dolls** that **generate** discussion about the feelings in different scenarios¹⁵.

DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES

Name: _____ Date: _____

PERSPECTIVE OF: _____ PERSPECTIVE OF: _____

THOUGHTS: _____ THOUGHTS: _____

FEELINGS: _____ FEELINGS: _____

ACTIONS: _____ ACTIONS: _____

LITERACY FOCUS

Thoughts Feelings Actions

What happened? _____

My Thoughts

My Actions

My Feelings



¹³(Therapist Aid, n.d.)

¹⁴(Khan 2020)

¹⁵(Cohen et al. 2006, 737-766)

Caregiver Self-Care



You, as a caregiver, may begin **to feel** the effects of trauma when interacting with your child.

You may be **unsure of how to act** as it can be a **vulnerable time** for you and your child.



It is **important** for **YOU** to take care of yourself, to help your own wellbeing and to stay busy doing things you enjoy!

Looking after yourself will **allow** you to care for your child.



Mental Health Resources for YOU¹⁶

In this section, we will cover some **mental health resources**¹⁷ that you can use and practice!

Mindfulness

Practicing **mindfulness** and **meditation** can help **improve self awareness** and **self esteem** by reducing stress and anxiety.

- Helps you accept your experiences that can be painful rather than avoiding them
- It is easily accessible at home (i.e. headspace app, youtube)



Headspace - An app that teaches how to practice meditation using breathing techniques

Nature

Spending time in nature can help **reduce stress** and **improve your mood**.

- Going for a walk in nature can help refresh your mind and boost your well-being.
- Most accessible mental health resource as it is just outside of your home.
- Examples: going out for walk, gardening, hiking



¹⁶ (Harvard Health, n.d.)

¹⁷(Headspace, n.d.)

¹⁸ (Walsh 2011)

Recreation and Enjoyable Activities

Recreation involves **play** and **playfulness**, which helps **lower stress** and **improve mood**.

- **Examples can include:**

- Exercise
- Relaxation
- Arts and Crafts
- Painting
- Journaling
- Etc.



Getting Enough Sleep²⁰

Z z z



Focus on Getting Enough Sleep

Tips for a good night's sleep:

- Put electronics and screens away as you wind down
- Drink herbal tea
- Build a bedtime routine

Without enough sleep “your mood, energy, productivity, and ability to handle stress will suffer.”

¹⁹(Walsh 2011.)

²⁰(Smith, n.d.)

Build a Support System²¹



You can search for counseling in Edmonton (and beyond) using **Psychology Today**

It is an online database that helps connect you with therapists and counselors who match **YOUR** needs.



Seeking a Support System & Psychological Help

Another **important** thing is to make sure **YOU** can **connect with others**, and plan for coping by having support systems around you.

Seek psychological help for yourself. Therapists can help **improve** your **mental health** by providing **coping strategies** during difficult times.

Practice saying **YES** when someone offers you support & **prioritize** spending time with your friends and loved ones. **“Don’t let friendships get lost in the shuffle of caregiving.”**²²

²¹(Psychology Today, n.d.)

²²(Smith, n.d.)

Home Support²³

The healing process after trauma **differs** for every child as they **may still experience** emotions, thoughts and feelings from the past.

It is important to:

- **create** and maintain **emotional boundaries** regarding relationships with your child and family
- **create** and model **physical boundaries** regarding physical contact with your child



Home support caregivers can **encourage**:

- **practicing consent** for **affection** and **contact**
- **listening** to what your child or youth needs, **what makes them feel safe?**

²³(Ackerman 2022)

Expressing Emotions at Home²⁴

A **feelings chart** can help children label and communicate their emotions in a healthy way²⁵



As a caregiver, it is important to **express** your **love and empathy** to help your child feel valued and supported.

This can help your child to learn to **trust** again and to

improve their **self-esteem**.

Be **patient** as every child reacts **differently** to trauma²⁶.

²⁴(Major 2021)

²⁵(Motivation Without Borders, n.d.)

²⁶(Branson and Branson, n.d.)

Alberta Resources²⁷

- **24/7 Helpline** (1-866) 332-2322
- **Adult Community Urgent Services** (780) 342-7777
- **Canada's National Tip Line** (For Reporting Online Sexual Exploitation of Children): 1-866-658-9022, or Online - <https://cybertip.ca/en/>
- **Canadian Mental Health Association** Edmonton Distress Line (780) 482-4357(HELP)
- **Child Abuse Hotline:** 1-800-387-5437
- **Crime Stoppers:** 1-800-222-8477
- **Edmonton Police Service:** (780) 423-4567
- **Family Violence Helpline:** 780-310-1818
- **First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line** (1-855) 242-3310 (Or online chat <https://www.hopeforwellness.ca>)
- **Kids Help Phone:** 1-800-668-6868
- **Northgate Health Centre** (walk-in mental health clinic) (780) 342-2700
 - **Address:** 499 137 Ave NW #2074, Edmonton, AB T5E 5R8
- **Royal Alexandra Hospital** (Access to 24/7 Mental Health Support) Walk-In Clinic
 - **Address:** 10240 Kingsway NW, Edmonton, AB T5H 3V9
- **Zebra Centre:** General Line - (780) 421-2385, Family Support Line: (780) 421-2359, or by Email: info@zebracentre.ca

²⁷("Additional Resources — Zebra Centre", n.d.)

Caregiver Specific Resources

Caregivers Alberta²⁸: (780)-453-5088, <https://www.caregiversalberta.ca/> a resource dedicated to “caring for caregivers,” providing:

- Caregiver coaches, caregiver support community, COMPASS for caregivers, Educational workshops & more!
- Printable resources relating to resilience, self-care, stress management: [Caregivers Alberta - Printable Resources](#)
- They provide links on different strategies and resources for caregivers: [Caregivers Alberta - Helpful Links](#)

The Family Centre²⁹: Offers many classes/courses to assist families and caregivers:

- Child care raising classes, couples workshops, anger management courses, self improvement learning, workplace workshops; <https://www.familycentre.org/guiding-principles>
- Counseling and group therapy

Care for the Caregiver: Tips for Families and Caregivers: a mental health resource for caregivers and teachers (also comes in a printable): <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-safety-and-crisis/mental-health-resources/care-for-caregivers-tips-for-families-and-educators>

Trauma-Informed Classroom: Creating a Trauma-Sensitive Classroom: this is specifically for teachers to be informed about children who experienced trauma and to create a safe environment for them: <https://insightstobehavior.com/blog/trauma-informed-classroom-creating-trauma-sensitive-classroom/>

²⁸(Caregivers Alberta, n.d.)

²⁹(The Family Centre, n.d.)

Suggested Reading

Zebra Centre Caregivers Guide: [Zebra Centre Caregivers Guide.pdf](#)³⁰

Protect Children: [Child Sexual Abuse - It's Your Business.pdf](#)³¹

The Government of Alberta³²:

- Provides information for victims of crime relating to available assistance and restitution:
<https://www.alberta.ca/help-for-victims-of-crime.aspx>
- Provides information for families and caregivers relating to financial aid and supports:
<https://www.alberta.ca/family-social-caregiver-supports.aspx>

Victim Services Alberta: Provides information on programs, services and additional information on Justice programs, national & international resources, nonprofits, and supports for Indigenous victims or caregivers:
<https://www.victimservicesalberta.com/>

³⁰ (Zebra Child Protection Centre, n.d.)

³¹ (*Child Abuse - It Is Your Business*, 2014)

³² (Government of Alberta, n.d.)



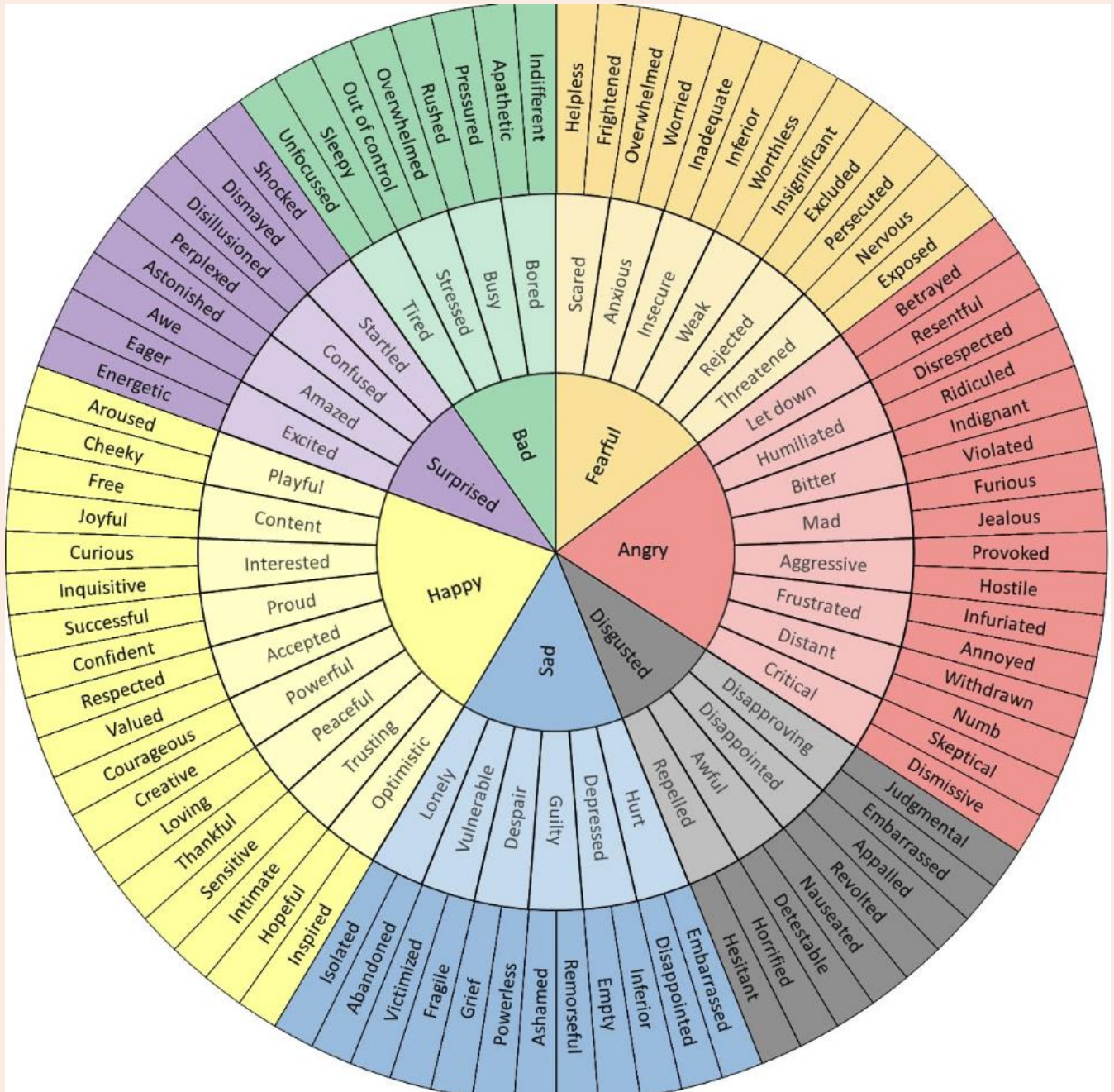
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Feelings Wheel³³



Mindful Little Feelings Chart³⁴

HOW ARE YOU FEELING TODAY?



HAPPY



SAD



ANGRY



HUNGRY



EMBARRASSED



SLEEPY



UNSURE



SICK



PROUD



LONELY



JEALOUS



SURPRISED



ANNOYED



SHY



SCARED



BORED



NERVOUS



EXCITED



GUILTY



SILLY

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