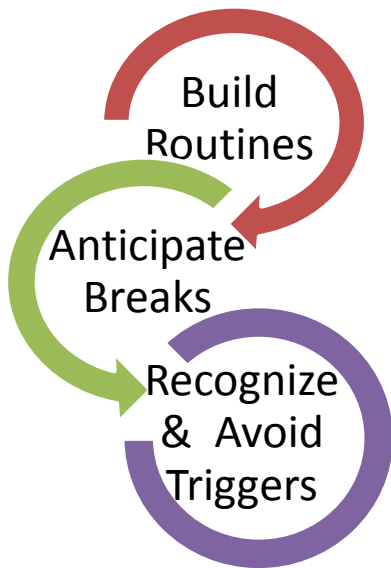




Create Safety and Routines

Creating a classroom that feels safe is essential for students who have experienced trauma. Routines are the easiest way to communicate safety. Routines offer the opportunity to know what will happen next, and to relax in the feeling of being safe now.

Key strategies in creating safe classrooms include building routines and recognizing triggers.



- Build safety through routines. Create predictable environments and responses. Use routines to assist students to know what will happen next. Predictability around key trouble-spots such as transitions and leave-takings help students with getting to calm.
- Establish regular activities within the day-to-day flow, with consistent greetings and good-byes, daily reviews, transition point markers, calming activities, etc.
- Choose important routine events to celebrate (e.g., birthdays, holidays, school festivals, etc.).
- Anticipate unexpected and predictable breaks in routines, and create a plan to deal with the breaks (e.g., field trips, assemblies, fire drills, lock downs, your absence, etc.)
- Recognize and avoid triggers.
- Find sample routines in “A Day in the Life of Two Classrooms” at the end of this document.

Teachers were asked what they found that works for:

- establishing effective daily routines?
- responding to breaks in routines, predicted and unanticipated? What works with assemblies? Fire drills? Lock downs? Teacher absences? Celebratory events?

Building Routines	Tips from Other Teachers
	I establish routines as a priority in the classroom.
	In any given day I have very few surprises for the students.
	I use the same type of activity at the beginning of each day
	Daily work is posted on my whiteboard.
	Allowing for choice of work blocks in my daily schedule helped students to feel control and safety.

	The daily work was always posted on the whiteboard. For some students, order mattered and for others, I needed to be flexible.”
	Daily work is reviewed each day at the beginning of class.
	I try to use visuals such as pictures, pictures and words, flow charts, maps. And then I use more pictures, flow charts, maps.
	During unstructured times (such as recess and lunch hour) we try to create as much structure as we can. During the first few weeks of school, we go outside with the students and explicitly demonstrate how and where to line up. During lunch hour we show them where to sit and where to put their lunches. We practice these routines for several weeks until they can do this independently.
	To help create a smooth flow to the day, I create a set of visual and auditory cues and then use them consistently.
	Changes to the classroom are agreed upon by my students. Students are in charge of their space.
	We always began the day with a “hands on” craft type activity while we talked. Students needed time to settle in each morning and I found that something like rug hooking or beading, seemed somewhat natural to them and many issues and questions were dealt with ...
	The classroom was the same every day and students took ownership of the place and changes were agreed upon and made by them for the most part. Students were encouraged to personalize their space. After the first month I would add small changes or items to spark curiosity. Students seemed to delight in this and had many questions about the poster or vocabulary words or mobiles etc.
	Every day starts with the children entering the classroom and I try to make sure to greet each student individually. This helps me to get a read on how they are feeling and what their general mood is.
	I work to be consistent in my responses to the students, especially when there is something challenging (e.g., like student conflict).
	Each day I greet each student personally (and get a sense of student’s feeling or mood). I ask each student about their evening or morning. Some students like hugs as a greeting, others do not.
	Before an activity changes I use a last call warning before an activity will change
	To help around changes, I take photos of transition places.
	Model routine.
	During the first few weeks of school I try not to deviate from the daily routines. I try to make sure not to rush through practicing the “basics”. Establishing routines and explicitly teaching them basic school skills like lining up, raising hands, personal space etc. is vital for success later. When routines like these have been established, anxiety is decreased greatly in the classroom.
	It helps to keep good order of things in the classroom to help the routines run smoothly.
	I create individual routines as needed. For a student who has difficulty with too much stimuli, have the student enter the classroom a few minutes earlier or later to avoid the commotion of other students in action.

	To help students know what to do, we teach expected behaviors. This helps to keep the routines in place. The behaviours include putting up hands for questions, lining up, personal space, etc.
	We take time to practice unpredictable things once routines are firmly in place.
	I monitor how each student is responding to the routine. Once routine is fully established, and the students are not anxious, I slowly integrate change into the schedule. For example, instead of doing math from 11:00 to 12:00, I will do it at 10:30. I feel that it is my job to assist the students to start adjusting to small manageable changes as well.
	I help the students understand the typical pace of the day. Dismissal bells, for example, go off at the same time every day.
	I found that it is best to minimize changes in courses and teachers.
	I work to be predictable in how I respond to certain behaviours.
	Early on I establish safety rules and follow them!
	Part of the routine piece for me is providing a consistent environment where it is comfortable and safe to take risks.
	Consistently I give more time for activities and more notice for any change in schedule and any transitions.
	I greet each student personally each day and ask about their evening or morning. Some students liked a hug.
	As part of our day we use a “Social Greeting” Routine: The social greetings are a set of sentence frames with general social conversation (e.g., “Good morning. How are you feeling today? I am feeling _____”, etc.). We use the same social greetings for the entire week which students practice in partners. The social greetings address problems students may be having during recess or lunch hour and gives them the vocabulary needed to successfully solve these problems.
	Especially at the beginning we practice routines for several weeks until the student can do the routine independently.
	We created a plan for recess. So when the students left the class for recess, they know if I am available for them and where I will be. (e.g., I will play with a soccer ball on the field).
	Although students could have lunch where they chose, most ate in the classroom for the first months, sometimes year of their arriving.
	We create a safe place within the classroom at the beginning of the year.
	I emphasize that “how we get along is important”.
	At the entrance to the classroom I establish a “warm, homey feel”.
	Once I see readiness, I slowly start integrating change into the schedule (e.g., instead of doing math from 11:00 to 12:00, I will do it at 10:30.) I think it is important that these students start adjusting to change as well.
	It was a fine line to know when students were ready for less predictability and able to deal with more change. If you wait too long and don’t introduce practice and small tests of independence, students can find transition very difficult and resist and then feel unsafe (and rejected) all over again.

	We spent a lot of time in discussion about feelings and this was crucial to building relationships and having a clear understanding of where each student was coming from and what direction I needed to go as their teacher and mentor.
Predictable Breaks in Routine	
Tips from Other Teachers	
Fire Drills	
	I know about the fire drills in advance and make the fire drill part the day's posted daily routine
	We practice what to do during a fire drill several times before the bell rings
	I inform the students that a loud bell will be ringing. I model covering my ears as one way to handle the intense sound (for students that are distressed by fire alarms or loud noises).
	I keep the most distressed student right beside me.
Lockdowns	
	I make sure the students understand this procedure. I use interpreters or other students to help explain it.
	We prepare and practice before the event.
	I have a "hands on" activity available during this event.
	I stay with the students to continue to be a calming and directing presence.
Teacher Absence	
	I notify the students the day before an anticipated absence. The students know the substitute coming into the classroom and daily routines are not changed.
	If I am away from school and I was not able to notify the students the day prior, I try my best to get a substitute that the children know and respond well to. I also do my best to make sure the sub plans follow our daily routine.
	On many occasions, I would call if I was away and talk to certain students to allay fears and clarify when I would be back. I would email a letter to the class and use the same substitute as much as possible.
	I keep the routines posted for the substitute if I am away unexpectedly. We try to have the same substitute. If we cannot one of our supportive administrators will come a see the classroom to help alleviate some anxiety. The students are informed about when I will be back. We work to assure the students that things will be fine.
Assemblies	
	Assemblies can be difficult. I make sure to notify students the day before if we have an assembly. In some cases, it is best that a student does not attend an assembly.
	Half an hour before an assembly, I try to plan activities that are quiet and calming (e.g., sketching with soft music, reading a story a loud etc.)
	Assemblies could be difficult, and some students did not attend them at first. Some students needed to take a break during longer assemblies and I would have a job for them to do or suggest they go get a drink (many strategies that we would also use for our attention challenged Canadian-born students)

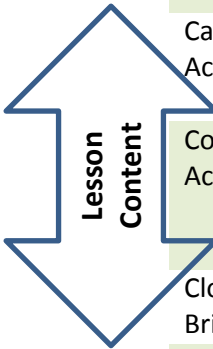
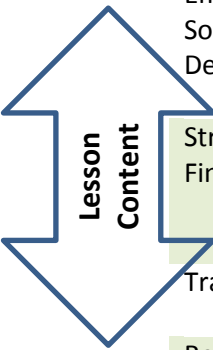
	I tell them what will happen in the assembly and what they need to do. We practice how to sit in an assembly and how to walk into the gym.
	I had a student who was very sensitive to sound and the Remembrance Day assembly would have loud bagpipes playing. In this case I decided it might be better if that student remained with the assistant until later in the year when he could better handle events of that nature. I use my own judgment to decide whether students are ready for this kind of event.
School Breaks (Holidays, Vacations, etc.)	
	I use a class calendar to help my students know what to expect from day to day or week to week. For long weekends or for PD days I will assist each student to understand “school” or “no school”. I will sometimes send craft projects home or some practice homework.
	We prepare students for missed school a couple of days in advance. We count the number of days before the student comes back to school. For one student we used a sheet with cut strips, so he could rip off the “no school” tag each morning until the tags were all gone. He needed concrete help to get a sense of present and future time.
Tips for Triggers	Tips from Other Providers
	Be aware of triggers that cause a student to feel threatened, and if possible, avoid the triggers. Triggers cause a cascade of responses that immediately limit a student’s ability to focus on classroom learning.
	A trigger can be something that is seen, heard, felt, smelled, tasted (external)
	A trigger can be a physical response, an emotion or way of thinking (internal)
	Triggers are highly personal, and knowing a student’s socio-emotional profile and unique history can be very helpful in knowing what to avoid.
	Understand how fear changes thinking and recognize the cues of increasing alarm. Review strategies to reengage at the student’s level of functioning.
	Have multiple interventions to assist students in “getting to calm.”
	Communicate consistent messages of safety and caring.

A Day in the Life of Two Classrooms: Putting Routines and Social Emotional Supports into Place

The following two samples demonstrate how to build routines that include social and emotional supports for students with refugee backgrounds. Academic, or lesson content, is mapped into the routine.

Full Day Classroom (Congregated Setting)

Activity	Sample Routines with Social Emotional Support Details
Teacher Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take this time to calm, to continue your routine of teacher self-care (e.g., cup of coffee, time set aside before students arrive) and reflect on any changes to the day's routine. Post any changes to standard daily schedule
Greeting and Emotional Read	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greet each student individually. Take a read of student's emotional and physical state (e.g., anxious, unsettled, discouraged, low energy, etc.). <i>Did you know that teachers are often the first to notice emerging mental health issues and make referrals for supports and treatment?</i>
Daily Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gather the group, review daily schedule and any unusual events.
Emotional and Social Skill Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional check in, expanding emotional and social vocabulary, choice of hands on activities. Have expressive activities throughout the day to assist in emotional skill development.
Strength-Finding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to offer a series of activities that builds on interests and finds student strengths (e.g., inventories, choice activities, multiple modalities, sharing from home culture, etc.). Build the student portfolio of found interests and strengths. Find ways to highlight successes for the student and the family.
Transitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cue upcoming changes with consistent visual and auditory cues (e.g., 3 minute warnings, options for continuing or moving on with class)
Recess and Lunch Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have structured activities planned for those who need it. Offer lunch in the classroom until students feel comfortable with eating with other students. Let students know where you will be if they need to find you.
Calming Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a calming activity after high energy or stressful activity. Consider expressive activities to help reduce emotional intensity (e.g., painting, clay, crafts, writing, drawing, drama, etc.)
Connecting Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use tasks that encourage cooperative and paired learning. Change off pairing throughout the year. Have first language English speakers paired with new English speakers (new connections). Involve other teachers and classrooms throughout the year.
Closure and Bridging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Say goodbye individually. Bridge to the next time "I will see you tomorrow" "I will see you on Monday"
Out of Class Contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Let students know where you will be if they need to find you at school. Consider leading an at-lunch or after school club in your classroom (academic or non-academic)
Wrap Around	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Touch base with the team that coordinates in-school and out-of-school services for this student. If there is no team, advocate for one or create one.



Academic Subject Classroom (Partial Day)

Activity	Sample Routines with Social Emotional Support Details
Teacher Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take this time to calm, to continue your routine of teacher self-care (e.g., cup of coffee, time students arrive) Reflect on any changes to the day's routine. Post any changes to standard daily schedule
Greeting and Emotional Read	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greet each student individually. Take a read of student's emotional and physical state (e.g., anxious, unsettled, discouraged, low energy, etc.). <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Did you know that teachers are often the first to notice emerging mental health issues and make referrals for supports and treatment?</i></p>
Daily Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gather the class, review daily schedule and any unusual events.
Emotional and Social Skill Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have in class and in-school calming activities (e.g., water at desk, getting a drink, going to library, bringing note to other teacher, clay, drawing, hands on projects) to assist in emotional skill development. Include emotional and social skill words and phrases in your teaching (e.g., feel about the work, conflict in group project, etc.).
Strength-Finding Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to offer a series of activities that builds on interests and finds student strengths (e.g., inventories, choice activities, multiple modalities, sharing from home culture, etc.). Build the student portfolio of found interests and strengths. Find ways to highlight successes for the student and the family.
Transitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cue upcoming changes with consistent visual and auditory cues (e.g., 3 minute warnings, options to continue later or in another place)
Calming Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a calming activity after high energy or stressful activity. Consider expressive activities to help reduce emotional intensity (e.g., painting, clay, crafts, writing, drawing, drama, etc.)
Connecting Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use tasks that encourage cooperative and paired learning. Change off pairing throughout the semester. Have first language English speakers paired with new English speakers (new connections). Involve other teachers and classrooms throughout the year.
Closure and Bridging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Say goodbye individually as much as possible. Create a bridge to the next time "I will see you tomorrow" "I will see you on Monday" as a way to build connection, predictability and lessen anxiety.
<i>Out of Class Contact</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Let students know where you will be if they need to find you at school. Consider leading an at-lunch or after school club in your classroom (academic or non-academic). Work to find a time when you are consistently present for informal student contact (e.g., for the first five minutes of lunch)
<i>Wrap Around</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Touch base with the student support team that coordinates in school and out of school services for this student. Share information on the student's developing interests and strengths as well as emerging needs. If there is no extended support team, advocate for one or create one.



Lesson Content



One teacher reflected:

“A world that provides a safe haven for the adventures of childhood is one that offers the most solid foundation for further development. In addition to security, place provides the opportunity for identity development, creative expression, exploration, and social affiliation” (Fullilov, 1996).

I always took this to heart in my understanding of how the classroom needed to look, how I developed plans for my students, and how I related to them on a daily basis. Routine is essential to provide the safety that refugee students need at first.