

# Playing to Heal:

## Designing a Trauma-Sensitive Sport Program

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## Introduction

The news is regularly filled with stories of communities devastated by natural disasters and regions and even entire countries, enveloped in violent conflict. Even in areas of the world that are not currently affected by conflict or natural disaster, the number of children and adolescents who have witnessed or been directly involved in some kind of violent and traumatic experience are staggering.

The tragic reality today is that no matter where you may be coaching, city or suburb, developed or developing country, and no matter who you may be coaching, children or adolescents, high socio-economic or low socio-economic status, there are going to be some or many of your players who have experienced mild to profound trauma in their young lives.

One of your primary tasks as a coach is to get to know your players. You will typically do this through close observation, play, and conversation. As you get to know your players over the course of a sport season, you may start to notice certain behaviors that can cause you to wonder and speculate that something significant must be going on with this kind of player. Some of those behaviors include:

- She seems angry all the time, almost looking for any kind of fight.
- His emotions and behaviors seem to escalate at the slightest threat or provocation.
- She is withdrawn and avoidant of most social interactions.
- He doesn't seem to make friends with anyone on the team.

This paper is intended to offer frontline youth sport programs a practical framework for creating a trauma-sensitive intervention and to increase their capacity to support young people in their own healing process.

We have spent the last 10 years observing what trauma does to young people, exploring the most effective clinical approaches and speaking with programs that have evolved successful trauma-sensitive interventions. We have helped to train staff and implement trauma-sensitive programs in post-Tsunami Thailand, Gaza, Ethiopia, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa and the USA. We have looked closely at the world of youth sport, in particular the evolving field of sports-based youth development (SBYD), which focuses specifically on the positive development outcomes that can accompany a well-run and intentional youth sports program.

We are drawing on perspectives and experiences from programs that are working with a broad range of participants, including young people living in active war zones and long-term conflict areas, child soldiers, physical and sexual abuse survivors, survivors of natural disasters and young people living in high-violence and under-served communities. These differing traumatic experiences can result in varying symptoms and can require different treatment modalities.

Though this paper is specifically directed towards youth sport programs, all of the principles and skills described in these pages can be adapted to other types of programs that are serving young people that are affected by trauma. Furthermore, though specifically designed for young people affected by trauma, this approach actually can provide benefit for all the young people in your program. You will see that these principles, techniques, and skills essentially form the basis of a safe, supportive and healing environment that all young people can benefit from.

It is our belief that a frontline youth sports program can play an important role in the trauma healing process. There is something compelling about the competitive sports milieu for working with young people affected by trauma. There is a sense of “real-life stakes” when a player is competing. This experience does create a level of stress; however, with the right kind of trauma-sensitive coaching and design to the experience, this stress can actually create an experience that gives players meaningful opportunities to practice coping skills that can help them in their lives, as well.

From the outset we want to be clear in our intention: This paper should not be taken as a methodology for formally treating young people affected by trauma in your program. These young people should be referred for clinical care whenever possible. However, the reality for many programs is that you are confronted daily with young people suffering from the effects of traumatic experiences, and you want to do the best you can to help.

We hope that this overview will help you evolve, rethink your approach, and commit yourself and your youth sport program to integrating a trauma-sensitive framework to your design. We have intentionally written this paper to reveal the scope and depth of research conducted, and to make the case for the evidence base underlying this proposed framework. However, we have also tried to use accessible language and descriptions to make the principles, practices, techniques and skills as accessible as possible to front line coaches and program staff.

There are three distinct audiences this paper is intended to serve: coaches, program staff and program leadership. For program leadership, we hope that the entire paper is a call to action to think about how to embed trauma-sensitive design into your interventions. For staff, we hope that the program practices can guide you in how you help structure your practices and competitions, and that you look more closely at the way you can train your coaches in trauma-sensitive techniques. Finally, for coaches, we hope that you can internalize these coaching techniques, and begin to work more intentionally with your players on skills that can help them both in sport and in their lives.

### **A Brief Overview of Key Clinical Terms**

**Trauma** is proposed in this paper, as defined by the US National Institute of Mental Health, as “an experience that is emotionally painful, distressful, or shocking, and which often have lasting mental and physical effects. It involves the creation of emotional memories about the distressful events that are stored in structures deep within the brain. It is believed that the more direct the exposure to the traumatic event, the higher the risk for emotional harm.”<sup>1</sup>

Childhood trauma is often classified by three types:

1. **Acute:** Single episode exposure to a traumatic experience.
2. **Chronic:** Multi-episode, repetitive exposure to one or more sources of trauma.
3. **Complex:** Exposure to prolonged traumatic events, typically involving the occurrence of some type of maltreatment, and is often perpetrated by someone in the primary

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<sup>1</sup> [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

caregiving system. This maltreatment could include neglect, physical and/or sexual abuse, war, psychological abuse or domestic/community violence.

Historically, the symptoms and reactions to trauma have been categorized under one label: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In recent years there have been initiatives in the medical and clinical communities to expand how trauma symptoms and reactions are categorized. These classifications include: Complex PTSD, Disorders of Extreme Stress Not Otherwise Specified (DESNOS), Post-Traumatic Stress Response and Acute Stress Reaction.

Most recently, Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, a world-renowned expert in child and adolescent trauma, has become the leading proponent of classifying a type of trauma that describes the cluster of symptoms that manifest in children and adolescents who have been victims of complex trauma, Developmental Trauma Disorder (DTD). The case for DTD as its own classification is that children suffering from complex and interpersonal trauma consistently present with a coherent group of symptoms that should be considered as part of the trauma, instead of simultaneous, yet independent, disorders.<sup>2</sup>

There are many symptoms of trauma which can be classified in clusters depending on the type of trauma that the young person has been exposed to. Some common symptoms in young people could include:

- Emotional dys-regulation
- Avoidance-attachment challenges
- depression
- anxiety
- Hyper-vigilance
- Reduced stress tolerance
- Physiological symptoms: bed wetting, trouble sleeping, self-injury

These symptoms could surface in your sport program as:

- Benign fouls or small incidents escalating to full-blown arguments and even physical violence
- Lack of self-awareness about feelings and how they are acting
- A player quitting a competition or even the team for a seemingly minor situation
- Inability to make friends or form pro-social relationships with teammates or coaches
- Struggle to play by the rules when things don't go the player's way
- Inability to handle the pressure of a high-stakes competition or handling a loss
- Lack of focus or concentration

It is important to acknowledge that defining the healing process is equally complex. For the sake of this paper, we will call work that someone does on themselves in response to trauma a **healing process**. Therefore, for this paper, when we talk about the potential positive outcomes that can come from a well-designed trauma-sensitive sport intervention, we will refer to it as "healing" or

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<sup>2</sup>Van Der Kolk, Bessel A., Robert S. Pynoos, Dante Cicchetti, Marylene Cloitre, Wendy D'Andrea, Julian D. Ford, Alicia F. Lieberman, Frank W. Putnam, Glenn Saxe, Joseph Spinazzola, Bradley C. Stolbach, and Martin Teicher. *Proposal To Include A Developmental Trauma Disorder Diagnosis For Children and Adolescents in DSM-V*. Rep. 2009. Print.

the “healing process.” We will not be referring to it as “recovery.” Additionally, we are not making the claim that sport will heal trauma, rather that a trauma-sensitive sport program can contribute to this healing process.

### **Designing Our Sport Program to Support Healing**

There is a large body of research around the impact that trauma has on the body, emotions, and most notably in the past 20 years, on the brain. Because the brains of children and adolescents are still developing, they are particularly vulnerable to the neurological effects of trauma.<sup>3</sup> For children affected by trauma, this can often lead to the internalization of a “flight, fight, or freeze” response.<sup>4</sup> In more clinical terms, young people affected by trauma may exhibit severe withdrawal, emotional dys-regulation, aggression and violent behaviors, learning difficulties, or a reduced ability to form positive peer and adult relationships. To unwire or decouple these responses, the brain needs to cut new pathways.

Though we won’t be covering the effects of trauma in detail in this paper, we strongly encourage you to explore this field of study to strengthen your knowledge and understanding.

This framework is designed to help you embed inside your existing sport program a set of principles, practices, coaching skills and player skills that you can use to foster healing.

### **Essential Principles in Trauma-Sensitive Design**

As we explored a wide range of clinical approaches to treating severe trauma, including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT), ARC (Attachment, Self-Regulation, Competency), Parent-Child Interactive Therapy (PCIT), Narrative Therapy and other modalities, and studied programs working successfully with young people affected by trauma, we began to notice a set of common principles that seem to guide practitioners, irrespective of specific technique or approach.

These are what we call ***trauma-sensitive design principles***. Principles in your program should serve as the foundation upon which you design and deliver your activities, and train your coaches. Principles manifest in program rules, traditions, coach training and how you treat your participants, day in and day out.

It is vital to understand these principles, and then to push your leadership team to discuss the degree to which your program manifests these principles in every practice and competition.

The 11 design principles are clustered into three affinity categories:

1. **Green:** The five most fundamental principles that all aspiring trauma-sensitive sport programs should embed inside the DNA of how they operate.

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<sup>3</sup>Perry, Bruce D., Ronnie A. Pollard, Toi L. Blakley, and Domenico Vigilante. "Childhood Trauma, the Neurobiology of Adaptation, and "Use-dependent" Development of the Brain: How "States" Become "Traits"" *Infant Mental Health Journal* 1995; 16.4: 275-276.

2. **Orange:** Three principles that guide you where to focus your curriculum and coaching approach.
3. **Purple:** Three principles that involve groups and people outside of the participant population. These two principles are very important; however, the reality in some programs is that you will not be able to engage primary caregivers nor will you have any way to refer participants to definitive treatment or care.

Design Principle	Description
<p><b>Safe Space</b></p>	<p>Young people who are affected by trauma, in a very primal way, do not feel safe, emotionally and/or physically. Indeed, physical spaces that should be safe, such as the home, neighborhood, or school, may instead be stressful and dangerous, or even the sources of their trauma. This lack of safety can manifest in a hyper-sensitivity to safety threats. Designing for safety, especially emotional safety, is imperative in a trauma-sensitive sport program. It can be particularly beneficial for players to identify what a safe space means for them.<sup>5</sup></p>
<p><b>Long-Term Engagement</b></p>	<p>Healing from trauma is a long process. Programs that seek to aid in this process must be aware of the need for a long-term, continuous investment, but also the limits of the healing they can hope to facilitate. Even with good design and strong activities, short-term programs can actually have a negative effect, re-activating the trauma when the intervention ends.</p> <p>It is unlikely for a program, staff member, or participant to stay indefinitely, raising the question of “How much is enough?” For trauma healing, the only answer that can be given with some level of certainty is: it’s enough when the young person is observed to be doing better, not just in the program, but in their day-to-day life; and that their improved state is not temporary but remains intact for a long period of time.</p>
<p><b>Attachment-Focus</b></p>	<p>Attachment is defined as the meaningful relationships that someone forms with others, and is a crucial component of child development. Attachment has been described as “the foundation on which all other developmental competencies are built.”<sup>6</sup> This kind of attachment is central to any meaningful healing. In other words, “the healing environment is a safe, <b>relationally-enriched</b> environment.”<sup>7</sup> (Emphasis added.) Traditionally, this attachment system is based on caring adult relationships, primarily parents, but also can include other caregivers such as other family members, mentors, teachers, and, hopefully, coaches.</p>

<sup>5</sup> *Women Win*. “Tips for Creating Safe Spaces.” *The International Guide for Designing Sports Programmes For Girls: Recommendations from the Field*. 2011:30-34.

<sup>6</sup> Arvidson, Joshua, Kristine Kinniburgh, and Kristin Howard, et al. “Treatment of Complex Trauma in Young Children: Developmental and Cultural Considerations in Application of the ARC Intervention Model.” *Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma* 2011; 4.1: 1.

<sup>7</sup> Perry, Bruce D., and Erin Hambrick. “Introduction to The Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT): A Neurodevelopmentally-informed Approach To Clinical Work With Maltreated Children.” *Reclaiming Children and Youth: The Journal Of Strengths-based Interventions* Aug. 2008: 4.

	<p>Research has shown that “children with relational stability and multiple positive, healthy adults invested in their lives”<sup>8</sup> make progress that those without these benefits do not. Recent research has also found that meaningful peer relationships are of vital importance for young people affected by trauma, helping them deal with stressful situations and raising self-esteem.<sup>9</sup> Their consistent presence is a vital component of the healing process.<sup>10</sup></p>
<b>Supportive Structure</b>	<p>“The re-establishment of daily patterns of living that supply structure and support such as participation in work, school and community activities,” can help facilitate healing in young people affected by trauma.<sup>11</sup> These structural factors create an important level of security and safety, while also making sure that pro-social behavior expectations are understood by all participants. Trauma can profoundly upend a young person’s sense of what is predictable, and a supportive program structure can be instrumental in helping participants begin to regain part of their sense of security, safety and even a layer of control. [S]port can provide a predictably structured environment where even communities with long histories of conflict will come together to play.”<sup>12</sup></p>
<b>Integration with Local Cultural Practices</b>	<p>“All psychosocial interventions should be respectful and grounded in the culture” in which they take place.<sup>13</sup> This is for two primary reasons:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Different cultures have various ways of dealing with trauma and grief.</li> <li>b. Adding local elements to your program design can help increase feelings of familiarity and normalcy.</li> </ol> <p>Integration of local practices can also contribute to this vital sense of normalcy and familiarity by re-introducing elements of culture, and what life was like from before the trauma. Participation in group cultural activities can “rebuild a sense of solidarity and community, while also enabling pro-social behaviors such as cooperation, communication, and skills in settling conflict non-violently.”<sup>14</sup></p> <p>Taking into account local cultural practices associated with grief and trauma is especially important when coming from a Western background, and working in a non-Western setting.</p>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid: 4.

<sup>9</sup> Duncan and Arntson 2004: 17.

<sup>10</sup> Bragin, Martha. “To Play, Learn, and Think: Understanding and Mitigating the Effects of Exposure to Violent Events on the Cognitive Capacity of Children and Adolescents.” *Journal of Infant, Child, and Adolescent Psychology* 2005; 4.3: 296-309.

<sup>11</sup> Lawrence, Sue, Mary De Silva, and Robert Henley. "Sports and Games for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)." Review. *The Cochrane Collaboration* 2010: 2.

<sup>12</sup> Henley, Robert. “Helping Children Overcome Disaster Trauma Through Post-Emergency Psychosocial Sports Programs.” Working Paper. Swiss Academy for Development 2005: 25.

<sup>13</sup> Colliard 2005: 20.

<sup>14</sup> Duncan and Arntson 2004: 24.



<p><b>Play/Activity-Based</b></p>	<p>Play can serve as a natural and powerful promoter of learning and growth “that provides manipulation and facilitates mastery, self-worth, and the development of basic competencies – including social competencies.”<sup>15</sup> Play is especially important for young people affected by trauma, and indeed may be “necessary for assisting children to master emotional traumas and disturbances.”<sup>16</sup></p> <p>Research shows that adding play to therapeutic work can lead to the development of competency, executive functioning, and a positive sense of self.<sup>17</sup> Regaining the ability and space to play can signify and encourage a return to normalcy. “[P]lay is thus an extraordinary way of healing scars left by a disaster. It not only lessens anxiety and depression, but restores hope and creativity. It brings back pleasure and desire, which are the foundations of psychosocial life.”<sup>18</sup></p>
<p><b>Skills-Based</b></p>	<p>One of the central features of any positive youth development experience is its emphasis on building skills and competency. It is also central to several treatment approaches, including CBT, DBT, and ARC. Young people need at least one “island of competence”—an area that has been or has the potential to be a source of pride and accomplishment.<sup>19</sup> This concept of islands of competence, championed by Dr. Robert Brooks (not specifically related to trauma), emphasizes identifying and strengthening these areas so that they can balance out the feelings of inadequacy.</p> <p>Recreation and pure play-based interventions typically do not emphasize skill building in their design. Developing skills is inherent in sport and positions the sport experience with a unique opportunity to align with a key component of trauma healing.</p>
<p><b>Strengths-Based</b></p>	<p>A <b>strength</b> is something that a young person is good at and enjoys doing. For a young person affected by trauma, they can be so overwhelmed by the traumatic experience, internalizing and generalizing feelings of guilt, blame, fear, anxiety, etc., that they lose sight of what they have that is still strong and positive.</p> <p>Both in a clinical setting and in a trauma-sensitive sport program, “assessments of children need to include competence, assets, strengths, and protective factors, not just symptoms, problems, risks, deficiencies, and vulnerabilities.”<sup>20</sup> Focusing on strengths can help young people develop self-</p>

<sup>15</sup> Mann, Dale. “Serious Play.” *Teachers College Record* 1996; 97: 446-467.

<sup>16</sup> Henley 2005, 12-13.

<sup>17</sup> Arvidson, Joshua, Kristine Kinniburgh, and Kristin Howard, et al. 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Colliard, Claire. “A Psychosocial Programme of Recreational Centres in Bam (Iran).” *Center for Humanitarian Psychology and Terre des Hommes*. March 2005: 39.

<sup>19</sup> Brooks, Robert. “The Search for Islands of Competence: A Metaphor of Hope and Strength.”

<http://www.drrobertbrooks.com/writings/articles/0506.html>. Published June 2005.

<sup>20</sup> Henley 2005: 27.

	<p>efficacy and self-esteem, which is one factor that has been linked to building resilience in children.<sup>21</sup></p>
<p><b>Robust Referral System</b></p>	<p>There will be many times when the work that we are doing with the young person is not enough, and their needs are greater than what we can offer. In these instances it is critical that we can help them reach the services they need. One way to ensure that you are aware of their needs is early screening, followed up by a regular review of these findings.</p> <p>Take the time to identify potential partners in your community who could supplement the services that your trauma-sensitive sport framework already provides. This way, when you encounter a participant that needs further assistance, you can connect them quickly to a competent partner.</p> <p>This robust referral system also includes how young people are referred into your program. It is critical to have a clear understanding of the kinds of young people that your program can realistically accommodate, and how you can position your program with other organizations to receive referred young people who could most benefit from your services.</p>
<p><b>Support and Ongoing Training for Coaches</b></p>	<p>It is important to remember that coaches in your program will need support, and a space to deal with their feelings. Working with this kind of population can bring with it higher stress, more burnout and generally, more challenge. In many cases, the pool of coaches you will draw from will be coming from the local area. Depending on the type of trauma, you may be facing a situation in which many or all of your coaches have suffered the same trauma as the young people you are serving. If these coaches are helped in their process, they will be able to be more present and effective in their work helping the children.<sup>22</sup></p> <p>Young people affected by trauma can present with a wide range of behaviors and symptoms that may challenge frontline coaches beyond their current capabilities. Attention should be paid to emerging training needs of coaches; provide them with additional knowledge and skill building opportunities.</p>
<p><b>Support for/Activation of Primary Caregivers</b></p>	<p>In our efforts to leverage the power of attachment, it is critical that we try to engage the primary caregivers in our work. They can have a profound and positive influence on the child. There are two important ways we can think about reaching out and including caregivers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <i>Direct Support</i>: If we have the resources, we can offer direct support to the caregivers in the form of skill-building sessions, emotional support and providing necessary referrals.</li> <li>b. <i>Integration in the Program</i>: Where appropriate, we can creatively include the caregiver in your program, as a trained fan, team manager assistant coach, etc.</li> </ol>

<sup>21</sup> Cook 2005: 396.

<sup>22</sup> Henley 2005: 27.

You will read in the pages that follow how we propose translating these design principles into practical techniques and skills for coaches and players.

### **Skills Players Can Work on in Sport to Help Promote Their Own Healing**

Player skills are, in many ways, the last piece in the puzzle of creating a successful trauma-sensitive sport program. However, to understand the coaching skills and program practices that we describe in this paper, it is first essential to understand the types of skills that players need to work on to foster their healing.

These player skills are all drawn directly from the clinical literature on specific aspects of trauma healing that are most common among young people affected by trauma. You will notice that the skills connect in various ways to several core areas of trauma healing, most notably:

- Self-awareness
- Self-regulation
- Regaining a sense of control of their lives
- Communication skills and self-expression
- Relationship building

For many of these player skills, there are much more technical and clinical analog terms in the literature. However, a key element in designing a trauma-sensitive sport program is embedding the trauma work as deeply inside the sport as you can. In this way, the player is focused on their development as an athlete, the language is accessible and sport-friendly, and you have a safe and neutral way to talk about skills that you know are a benefit to the player in their trauma healing without turning the sport into an outwardly “therapeutic” experience, which can turn players away from participation.

We have conducted our own extensive research on key attributes that correlate with young people who are able to make risk reduction and health seeking choices, and found that many of these attributes align with the types of skills that are described above in the clinical literature.

These eight attributes are:

- Self-awareness
- Positive individual and group identity
- Situational awareness
- Plan B thinking
- Future focus
- Discipline
- Social confidence
- Pro-social connections <sup>23</sup>

There is an emerging skillset to trauma healing. It is distinct for each individual; however, generally, there are key skills that players can work on in their own development and healing

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<sup>23</sup> Bergholz, Lou, Kinderknecht, Lauren, and Munir, Eren. *The Anatomy of a Health Seeking Choice: Uncovering a Special Set of Attributes That Promote Health Seeking Choices among Young People*. 18 July 2012.

process. Do not assume that every child will benefit from working on all of these skills. We need to take an individual approach, matching one or more of these player skills to each individual player. We have seen that the most positive benefit comes from working one skill at a time. Get to know the individual player, talk with them openly about what kinds of skills can most benefit them and then make a plan to help them develop this skill. This section will introduce the player skills and the two sections that follow will provide tools and techniques for how to create the sport experience to promote these specific player skills.

The 12 trauma-sensitive player skills are:

Player Skill	Description
<p><b>Mindfulness (and Reflection)</b></p>	<p>Too often, a trauma victim suffers a level of dissociation or emotional numbing. One of the most critical skills that a young person affected by trauma needs to develop is their ability to connect to their feelings and thoughts, to pay attention to what kind of mood they are in, and to what type of reactions they are having to stressors and the like in their environment. This skill is often called <i>mindfulness</i>. Mindfulness can take on many forms for a player, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying and using specific words to name feelings</li> <li>• Recognizing stressors</li> <li>• Recognizing sources that sooth and comfort</li> </ul> <p>There is another skill that complements mindfulness very closely. It is the player’s ability to stop the action of their life, and make time (even a few seconds) to review and learn. This is called <i>reflection</i>. When someone reflects, they are taking control of their thoughts and even actions, and committing to thinking before taking action.</p>
<p><b>Coming to Play</b></p>	<p>For some of the young people we work with, showing up may represent a significant commitment. They may struggle with their behavior in our program; however, we need to always recognize that they still chose to attend. They are here. We can work with them when they are here. Coming to play can also be mental. Young people affected by trauma can be triggered or distracted by many different things in their environment, and a common struggle is with focus and blocking out these mental and emotional interruptions. This is a skill that your players need to develop, and sport can be an excellent medium to help them do this.</p> <p>Finally, getting ready is another component of the coming to play process. This includes putting on the proper gear, stretching, warming up, and doing anything else that helps a player to be mentally present. Getting ready can also include the transition from sport back to the players’ regular life. The “cool down” period can be equally important in terms helping the player to prepare for what can be a harsh transition back to their reality.</p>

<p><b>Checking Yourself</b></p>	<p>Self-regulation is the “child’s ability to identify, modulate, and express his or her internal experience.”<sup>24</sup> While people are generally able to control their emotions and body, young people affected by trauma may not be able to, which can lead to seemingly disproportionate responses to stress. Anything that keeps the brain, body, and emotions in check can be a method of self-regulation, a cornerstone of trauma recovery. In order to begin the process of self-regulation, a young person affected by trauma must first correctly identify their emotional state, and then how to react in ways that are not destructive to themselves or others.</p>
<p><b>Recognizing and Making Choices</b></p>	<p>Trauma causes a person to make primal choices: fight, flight or freeze. They are not necessarily born from thoughtful decision making. Sport offers the young person affected by trauma a setting in which they can make hundreds of decisions and, with close supervision and support, learn from each of these choices. Each time you see a player making a choice that is good for them, or a choice that reduces or stops damage they could have done to someone else, celebrate with your player. Help them become aware of the good choices they are making, and in general, to recognize the opportunity they have in sport to practice making choices.</p>
<p><b>Speaking Your Truth</b></p>	<p>In addition to being unable to self-regulate their internal emotional states, young people affected by trauma must also be able to acknowledge and accurately identify their feelings. Dissociation from thoughts and feelings is one of the most common symptoms of trauma, and developing participants’ abilities to connect to the present in both their internal and external worlds is crucial.</p>
<p><b>Taking Breaks from Bad Stress</b></p> <p><b>AND</b></p> <p><b>Staying in the Game with Good Stress</b></p>	<p>Trauma often results in a hyper-sensitive stress response. Stressors that you would expect to be managed well by the young person escalate quickly into blowouts or meltdowns. There is a re-wiring that needs to happen to their stress response that we can help foster using the sport experience. To do that we have to create a dialogue with our player about stress and the difference between good and bad stress.</p> <p>Below is a helpful continuum to support your players’ ability to distinguish between good and bad stress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Comfort zone</u>: Times in your life when you are relaxed, feel at ease and peaceful (no stress).</li> <li>• <u>Stretch zone</u>: Times in your life when you feel anxious or nervous, but the outcome that could come from staying in this stressful experience feels worth the stress (good stress).</li> <li>• <u>Panic Zone</u>: Times in your life when the stress you feel is so much that you feel a sense of fear, flooded emotions and are unable to see any benefits to staying in the situation (bad stress).</li> </ul> <p>By recognizing that a situation is not one that they are able to deal with and</p>

<sup>24</sup> Arvidson, Joshua, Kristine Kinniburgh, and Kristin Howard, et al. 2008: 36.

	removing themselves from it, participants are able to both control their participation and lessen their exposure to stress that may aggravate their trauma. As an example, it might be helpful to allow kids to sub themselves out whenever they feel the need, or take a minute to put their hand over their heart and re-connect with their bodies and feelings. <sup>25</sup>
<b>Playing to Strengths</b>	While we have discussed that the program design should be focused on developing and celebrating participants' strengths, it must also take into account that players are often not skilled at identifying and using their own strengths. "Traumatic experiences are inherently invalidating," <sup>26</sup> which can leave the young person feeling useless. Many young people affected by trauma will gather evidence against themselves, and "interpret any lack of success as further evidence of their inherent failure." <sup>27</sup> We can help a player identify a specific skill/attribute and turn it into a strength.
<b>Reframing</b>	For some young people affected by trauma their default reaction to a situation may be to see the negative, not just in the situation, but in themselves. This player needs to develop the ability to see a situation or an aspect of who they are from a new, more positive angle. This skill is called <b>reframing</b> . When a player can take a mistake, or a negative self-view and describe it differently, this is a major step in the healing process and is a cornerstone of resilience. It is up to the coach to work with this player, first by showing them other views, and then by helping them to do the reframing themselves.
<b>Self-Coaching</b>	Self-coaching is literally the act of having a supportive, forgiving coaching conversation with yourself. Self-coaching may be a quiet, internal voice or it could be an actual out-loud voice that someone may use. Self-coaching can have the effect of being both self-comforting and focusing. While you, as a coach, can be helpful in assisting the player in processing their feelings and learning from them, it is even more valuable if they are able to do it themselves.
<b>Being a Friend</b>	Young people affected by trauma often have more difficulty forming positive, healthy relationships, with adults and peers. Developing pro-social relationships is critical, allowing them to lean on others for support and not remain isolated. Relationship building is at the heart of developing empathy-relating to someone else, seeing the world through their eyes, feeling what it means to care for someone else. Many sport experiences have a significant social and interpersonal component to them. With support and coaching, your player can see each practice/competition as an opportunity to develop key socializing and relationship building skills.
<b>Making Community Contributions</b>	Community Contributions are actions that a player takes that help to better the team/community/experience. As discussed earlier, many young people affected by trauma feel disconnected from their communities and even society. Some have had such terrible things done to them or have themselves

<sup>25</sup> Ogden, Pat. "Wisdom of the Body – Lost and Found." Presented at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Trauma Conference, June 9, 2012.

<sup>26</sup> Black Becker, Carolyn, and Claudia Zayfert. "Integrating DBT-Based Techniques and Concepts to Facilitate Exposure Treatment for PTSD." *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice* 2001; 8: 112.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid 112.

	committed such terrible acts and may have lost a sense of what it means to do something positive in the world. Being a part of something that is good for the broader community has been linked to greater resilience. For players, this experience can serve as a powerful catalyst for self-esteem, self-efficacy and connectivity.
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### Day-to-Day Program Practices that Help to Create a Sport Program that Promotes Healing

The interaction between coach and player are the centerpiece of any sport experience. There is also a structure that exists in the sport experience. This structure is comprised of the practice and competition schedule, the rules of the sport and team and the overall culture that is created within the experience. We have come to learn that this structure plays a vital role in promoting healing for young people on your team affected by trauma.

We call the elements of this trauma-sensitive structure **program practices**. These practices represent specific things you can do to organize your sport experience to become a climate that supports and even helps to facilitate the healing work that we hope our players can do in their sport experience.

Program Practice	Description
<p><b>Coach in Pairs</b></p>	<p>A young person affected by trauma is more likely to have individual needs during a practice or competition. Too often we are coaching solo, and when a player starts to struggle behaviorally we are unable to tend to their needs because we have an obligation to the team. We need to be available for this player without losing basic supervision and support of the overall team. Ideally, two coaches would be able to run the practice together, so if one was occupied with the needs of a participant, the practice would continue with minimal disruption to the other players.</p> <p>Research shows that the likelihood of a child reaching out is directly correlated to their perception of how this attempt to connect will be received.<sup>28</sup> By setting the precedent of being available for a young person to reach out any time during the practice, participants will be more likely to take advantage of these resources and to trust us; these moments are the most vital coaching opportunities for us. These are the moments when we could talk a player down from an escalation, help a player gain perspective on a situation, and promote self-awareness and deep skill building.</p> <p>Though there is no guarantee that two coaches will be more attentive to their players; with proper awareness and training on why they are working in pairs, the potential that they will react appropriately should increase.</p>

<sup>28</sup> Ogden, Pat. "Wisdom of the Body – Lost and Found." Presented at the 23<sup>rd</sup> International Trauma Conference, June 9, 2012.

<p><b>Commit to a Consistent Practice Plan</b></p>	<p>Trauma, by definition, is a disruption, and can cause a huge ripple effect in a young person’s life long after the original trauma. Predictability, consistency and security are important requirements for a young person affected by trauma to be able to have the most success possible in your program. Knowing what to expect at each practice can be comforting to participants, allowing them to get the most out of each session.</p> <p>A critical part of a supportive practice structure is having a consistent and meaningful warm-up and cool-down routine. The warm-up is the transition from the real world to the sport milieu. Your players may bring with them a level of stress from their lives that, if they don’t learn to put aside or mitigate, could explode in a competitive sports context. This routine should have a level of repetition to it, involve both physical and mental preparation, and if possible, include focused and intentional breathing exercises. The cool-down equally serves to help players transition from the safety and security of their sport experience back out to their reality, which could be radically different.</p> <p>While sport can offer many potential opportunities for trauma healing, its benefits can be increased by intentionally drawing from the best practices of clinical interventions that focus on simple, repetitive exercises that strengthen the mind-body connection. Three of the most valuable exercises are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <i>Integrate rhythmic movement wherever possible:</i> Rhythmic movement’s effects on the nervous system can enhance “one’s capacity to feel safe and grounded.”<sup>29</sup> These movements help to carve new neural pathways inside the player’s brain, promote skill building and help a player to focus on the fundamentals of their sport.</li> <li>b. <i>Teach mindful breathing:</i> The role of deep, intentional and focused breathing in calming the stress-response system in humans has been well documented and various types of breathing exercises are integral to many treatment protocols for young people affected by trauma, including the evolving field of trauma-sensitive yoga. Mindful breathing helps to connect the body with its current emotional state. Though we want our players to practice good breathing throughout their sport experience, the warm-up is a particularly important time to practice this, as it sets the tone for how they can approach the whole practice.</li> <li>c. <i>Teach simple meditation/visualization:</i> At the heart of meditation is the act of calming the body and mind. Players often suffer from self-regulation and self-awareness challenges. Meditation and visualization are keys to helping them regain a sense of control and understanding of themselves and the world around them.</li> </ul>
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<sup>29</sup> Spinazzola, Joseph, Alison M. Rhodes, David Emerson, Ellen Earle, and Kathryn Monroe. "Application of Yoga in Residential Treatment of Traumatized Youth." *Journal of the American Psychiatric Nurses Association* 2011: 431-444



	<p>Simple meditation/visualization exercises, conducted during a warm-up can go a long way towards helping a player “stay in the game” and make positive choices under pressure.</p>
<p><b>Create a Clear Behavior Code</b></p>	<p>A behavior code is a simple set of rules for the entire team (and coaches!) to abide by. Every sport already has an existing code of conduct, and very precise rules that govern competition. However, the team behavior code should also address three specific aspects of interpersonal behavior:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. How to treat each other and the opposing team(s)</li> <li>b. How to handle escalating situations/feelings</li> <li>c. Expectations around participation</li> </ol> <p>Whenever possible the players themselves should be involved in creating the behavior code. Contributing their own ideas will give them more ownership of the code and often leads to greater buy-in. In some cases, player contracts will have a similar effect.</p>
<p><b>Practice Positive Traditions</b></p>	<p>Practicing positive traditions can help to manifest in your program the design elements of respecting local cultural practices, and having a consistent structure. Traditions could include team songs/cheers, special warm up routines, team circle ups, team gear, special events, etc.</p> <p>Traditions can also include integrating local games and other activities into the practice structure. These activities create a sense of familiarity for players. However, “during times of conflict, activities that promote cultural identity may play into political tensions,”<sup>30</sup> so make sure that you are using appropriate activities relative to the current context.</p>
<p><b>Create Contribution Opportunities</b></p>	<p>There is research that shows that children need the opportunity to do “good” because they have experienced so many bad things, and in some cases, may have committed bad acts as well, for example, in the case of child soldiers or gang members.<sup>31</sup> By learning that they can make a positive contribution to the team, they are gaining a sense of efficacy and relevance in the world that they often desperately need.</p> <p>Contribution opportunities could include: setting up equipment for practice, carrying equipment, leading warm ups, taking attendance, creating team cheers/songs, leading team meetings, teaching a teammate a skill, etc.</p>
<p><b>Plan for Intentional Connectivity</b></p>	<p>Many young people affected by trauma experience significant social deficits and their symptomatic behaviors, whether it is extreme isolation, constant seeking of attention or aggression, tend to have a negative impact on their peer relationships.</p> <p>While many sports are inherently social, that does not always guarantee that participants will form positive peer and coach connections. In designing</p>

<sup>30</sup> Duncan 2004: 24.

<sup>31</sup> Bragin 2005.

	<p>practices, think ahead and plan for how you can help players connect to each other, and you. Be intentional about forming social connections, whether through team-building games, practice activities that encourage close teamwork and communication, or outside-of-sport activities that allow participants to get to know each other in a safe space.</p>
<p><b>Make Regular Time to Reflect</b></p>	<p>Reflection is the act of looking back on a past event, attempting to make sense of it and then applying these insights, and learnings to future behavior and choices. Mindfulness and reflection are vital skills that our players need to develop. They tend to be more reactive in action and thought, especially under stress. They need more experience and practice learning from their experiences.</p> <p>You can design your practice and competition structure to include regular opportunities for reflection. These usually take the form of some kind of team circle up or individual player check in. They often happen pre- and post-practice/competition.</p>
<p><b>Focus on Skill Development</b></p>	<p>Some research points to limitations of talk therapy with some young people. Their ability to verbally process their traumatic experiences is limited or even stunted by the trauma. However, they do often have a level of capacity to develop coping skills outlined in the previous section that have the power to mitigate symptoms related to the trauma.</p> <p>This takes time, effort and consistent use. Repetition, practice and high use will eventually help. This is why skill building is so important for the young person affected by trauma. The principles of skill building, (breaking down the skill into its fundamental parts, repetition, practice and long-term training) all combine to help create the new kinds of neural pathways that lead towards different stress responses and pro-social behaviors.</p>
<p><b>Change the Game</b></p>	<p>If the practice or competition is not working (i.e. the player is experiencing too much stress or being somehow re-traumatized) the best option may be to change the game.</p> <p>There are so many aspects of the sport itself that you can adapt and change, including the playing area, equipment, structure, rules and roles. These changes can make the game more effective and aligned with the trauma-sensitive principles. Changing the game is one of the most powerful ways to change the outcomes you are aspiring to achieve for your players.</p> <p>Two examples of changing the game are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Time Outs: Allow unlimited time outs or introduce timeouts to a sport that traditionally doesn't have them, such as soccer.</li> <li>2) Referees Join Circle Ups: Mandate that referees join circle ups during time outs and other breaks in the competition. Encourage your players to share any concerns they have about the level of safety in the competition.</li> </ol>

## The Trauma-Sensitive Coach: A Special Set of Coaching Techniques That Promote Healing

The final component of this trauma-sensitive approach is the techniques and tools that a coach can use to promote healing and positive growth. This set of techniques is born from the study of what frontline practitioners do when working with young people affected by trauma. It also draws from the field of positive youth development and sports-based youth development.

It can seem daunting at first, as a coach, to adopt a trauma-sensitive approach, and commit to changing your behaviors to align with what is needed to promote a level of healing through sport. However, we have found that coaches are genuinely excited to learn about, and integrate, this framework into their coaching practice. It does not necessarily mean more work; in fact, they see early on that this way of coaching is good for building a great team, and encouraging player development, regardless of whether the players are affected by trauma. These techniques often provide coaches with a level of confidence and validation that the way they want to work with these players is reinforced in the research and has precedent.

Furthermore, the vast majority of youth coaches are coming from the same communities as their players. This means that there is a real chance that they have been exposed to similar sources of trauma and are likely in need of their own healing process. This trauma-sensitive approach creates an environment within which both coaches and players can co-create sport experience that provides healing benefits for everyone involved.

As you read through these techniques you will find that they have a certain alignment, and even redundancy, with some of the key player skills and program practices. In an ideal environment, a coach has built the sport experience using the program practices, is working with individual players on one or more of the key trauma-sensitive player skills and has made these coaching techniques a natural and regular part of his or her coaching. However, even if you can't implement most of the program practices, and don't have the opportunity to work with players on specific skills, you can still use these techniques day-to-day, and potentially, have a positive impact on the healing process of your players.

Program Practice	Description
<p><b>Lead with C.I.E.A.R. Communication</b></p>	<p>For young people affected by trauma, how their coach talks with them will play a major role in whether they feel safe with you and in the program. Use the acronym below to make your communication as trauma-sensitive and positive as possible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <b><i>Calming Voice and Tone</i></b>: You want to be consistent and predictable in your tone, soothing, not escalating. Avoid shouting if possible.</li> <li>b) <b><i>Listen First</i></b>: Take the time to understand the state of mind of your players first, assess their stress level and then respond accordingly.</li> <li>c) <b><i>Expand Your Emotional Vocabulary</i></b>: Use words that express how you feel; define those words, and help your players understand what these words mean. It is up to us to help participants move past “good” and “bad” as the only words in their emotional vocabulary.</li> <li>d) <b><i>Ask Questions</i></b>: Try to lead with questions, inviting feedback from participants. Thinking and feeling questions are especially valuable,</li> </ul>

	<p>to encourage players to get in touch with their emotions. Ask: “What is it like out there?” “How are you feeling about the competition so far?”</p> <p>e) <b><i>Review the Plan (More than once)</i></b>: Tell them what is coming in the practice/competition and any potential changes.</p>
<b>Zero in on ONE Skill at a Time</b>	<p>As discussed in the trauma-sensitive program practices, a focus on skill development is an important part of any trauma-sensitive sport program. However, this does not mean that coaches should attempt to develop all of the skills a player needs to work on simultaneously.</p> <p>As players become more used to, and then more proficient at, one skill or set of movements, their sense of competency will grow. Whenever possible, try to help players focus on one specific skill, and show them how to measure their progress in mastering that skill and celebrating growth.</p>
<b>Encourage Expression</b>	<p>These players need practice identifying and talking about their emotions and thoughts. It is your responsibility as a coach to regularly encourage and praise players who express themselves openly and honestly. Expression does not have to be verbal. A nonverbal cue such as a thumbs up or thumbs down can allow a participant to share his or her feelings in an unthreatening way.</p>
<b>Offer Opt Outs and Opt Ins</b>	<p>As described in the player skills section, one of the most important skills we need players to develop is the ability to know when to remove themselves from bad stress, and how to stay in the game with good stress. In order to do this effectively, “opt out” and “opt in” opportunities must be built in to practice/competition, so that players know that they have the power to take control of their own experience and get in or out of situations accordingly.</p> <p>“Choice” or “invitation” language is particularly helpful in setting the stage for participant decisions on whether to opt out or not. As its name implies, this type of language is phrased so that the player has a choice in their level of participation. It is focused on effort, not outcome, so it does not continuously push for more.</p> <p>An example of choice language is “If this is uncomfortable, you can take a break and then try again.” Trauma-informed yoga uses language like this frequently. For many people affected by trauma, the level of disconnection between body and brain is extensive enough that they are quite literally disconnected and uncomfortable in their own body. Encouraging them to choose a level of movement based on how they feel in a specific situation helps reactivate this body/mind connection (i.e. listening and responding to their own needs). By doing this, they move towards the powerful step of being able to say “No, I will not be in pain. My opinion about what is happening to me matters, and I can take control.”<sup>32</sup></p>

<sup>32</sup> Emerson, David, E. Ryt, Ritu Sharma, Serena Chaundhry, and Jenn Turner. "Trauma-Sensitive Yoga: Principles, Practice, and Research." *International Journal of Yoga Therapy: Yoga Therapy in Practice* 2009; 19: 125.

<p><b>Ask Review and “Looking Back” Questions</b></p>	<p>Make it part of your regular coaching practice to check in with participants about things that have just happened in order to help players work on their mindfulness and reflection. By asking questions such as, “What were you thinking or feeling in that situation?” you encourage participants to think back to their emotional state, look at how they responded, and think of other possible responses.</p> <p>These kinds of “thinking questions” help young people affected by trauma to engage with higher level functions in the brain, and mitigate escalating feelings and behaviors. Review and “looking back” questions help put “participants into situations that they can then link to theoretical aspects,”<sup>33</sup> which can help them to move beyond a reactive response.</p>
<p><b>Focus on Progress not Performance</b></p>	<p>In a performance-focused program, the emphasis is on winning, while in a progress-focused program, the emphasis shifts to growth and celebrating improvement. In a trauma-sensitive program, the focus should be on the developmental and rehabilitative aspects of a player’s experience in the sport. In many cases, it may be a long time before a player gets to the point of actually playing competitive sport. You need to meet them where they are in their recovery, and there may be a point where practice is all that they can handle.<sup>34</sup></p>
<p><b>Coach the Bench, Praise the Play</b></p>	<p>As a coach, it’s natural to direct most of your attention and active coaching towards the players currently in the competition. This is detrimental to young people affected by trauma for two reasons: First, they are already experiencing a level of pressure in the competition, and in order to develop their own competency in managing stress and making decisions, they need practice making these decisions on their own. Second, in the midst of a loud competitive setting, a coach shouting instructions to a player often sounds just like someone shouting angrily which can have its own detrimental effect.</p> <p>Try directing praise towards the players in the competition; or even silence. While the players in the competition rarely benefit from minute-to-minute coaching, those who are sitting on the bench are in the perfect situation to learn from your coaching points. Calmer, less fatigued, and better able to hear you, players on the bench are able to see what is happening on the court, hear your coaching points, and absorb it. Then, when they step into the competition, let them play.</p>
<p><b>Connect Within 60 Seconds of a Substitution</b></p>	<p>The moment of substitution is one of the most crucial in sport for young people affected by trauma. In that moment, they could be quick to assume that they have made a major mistake, or are somehow underperforming, to merit a substitution. You may very well be taking them out of the competition because of their performance, but there could also be a host of other reasons for the substitution. This first minute on the bench is a golden</p>

<sup>33</sup> International Platform on Sport and Development. “Thematic Profile: Sport and Disaster Response.” [www.sportanddev.org](http://www.sportanddev.org). June 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Henley 2005, 23.

	<p>opportunity to help reframe player experiences and assumptions about the event, get valuable information about the player’s state of mind and promote the kind of coach-player attachment that this player needs.</p>
<p><b>Design an Individual Competition Schedule</b></p>	<p>Some players cannot handle the rigors and pressure of a full practice or competition. In situations where we can’t change the game to meet the player at a level of competition and play they can handle, we also have the opportunity to change the individual schedule for that player to help set them up for success.</p> <p>Sit with the player and make a plan for how and when they will be playing. Help them understand how the competition will flow. Then, during the competition, keep them informed about their schedule. For this player, knowing that they have 30 seconds left in their shift before they get a break can help them to focus on self-regulating emotions and behavior.</p>
<p><b>Seize on Situations that Merit Re-Framing</b></p>	<p>Reframing is a special conversation with a player in which you share your specific view on a recent situation. The player is telling themselves a story that is overly negative and self-critical. However, you offer an alternative, more positive view on the same situation. You are not changing the reality of the situation. However, you are showing them a way to look at their situation that is more hopeful, reveals a hidden strength or positive outcome and is also truthful.</p>
<p><b>Be Available for Informal Time</b></p>	<p>While you should practice intentional connectivity and look to interact with your players throughout practice/competition time, sometimes the most valuable opportunity for building relationship is the time before and after practices/competitions. Make it a habit to stop preparing for practice 15 minutes ahead of time, and stick around after practice is over.</p> <p>Sometimes, this is when your players are most real and may want to open up. By creating the routine of being available before and after practices/competitions, you allow kids to come to you in a low-pressure environment when they want to talk, instead of scheduling a formal meeting that may be nerve-wracking and feel too much like treatment or an intervention.</p>
<p><b>Support Good Stress, Stop Bad Stress</b></p>	<p>Good stress is stress that motivates the player, helps him/her to focus, and is at a level of intensity that they can handle. Bad stress is overwhelming, triggers players towards negative responses, and causes poor performance. One of the most important skills that your players need to work on is differentiating between good and bad stress, and being able to develop their overall ability to handle stress.</p> <p>Talking about good and bad stress should be part of an ongoing and open conversation with our players. We support good stress by reminding them about how they are positively handling the stress, encouraging them to stay in the game, and to pay attention to how they feel when the stress is good. We can help them mitigate bad stress by making them aware of their negative reactions, helping them articulate their feelings under pressure, encouraging</p>

	them to take a break (opt outs), or even substituting them out of competition.
<b>Invite Their Input on How to Make the Experience Better</b>	You are not an expert on trauma, and there is no way to design the perfect sport experience for a young person affected by trauma. They are your partner in creating this trauma-sensitive sport program; therefore, it is vital that you invite their feedback and ideas on a regular basis. Ask them how things are going and encourage their input on a regular basis. They may be able to share with you something that you have missed to help them have an even more positive experience. By seeking their input you are helping them take more control of their experience, which, as we have been exploring throughout this guide, is a central component of making sport an experience that contributes to a player’s healing.

### **Limitations of this Approach**

Though we have seen the measurable benefit of a well-designed trauma-sensitive sport program, it is important to acknowledge that the competitive sport experiences could actually create a kind of stress and pressure that might trigger players and potentially exacerbate the existing trauma. Competitive sport is not necessarily a positive experience for all participants and there are real limitations to when and where competitive sports can have efficacy in trauma work. Recreational games and body-based movement activities, in particular, yoga and dance, may prove more effective.

We acknowledge that to generalize a trauma-sensitive sport approach for the many different kinds of populations you may work with and the different types of trauma they can experience can present limitations. However, we have seen for frontline programs, there is value in attempting to create a general framework. When you are designing your own specific intervention, you should take the time to learn about the needs of the population you are serving and adapt your approach to you specific context.

Adopting a trauma-sensitive approach does not replace the need that many young people have for more formal clinical care. This special approach is intended to support the existing design of your sport intervention. Specific populations require specific adaptations of this approach. Whenever possible, a qualified trauma specialist should be engaged in the design, monitoring and evaluation of your program.

### **From Research to Practice: Designing Your Path Toward Trauma-Sensitive Sport Programming**

Healing from trauma is a complicated and non-linear path. For each person, the journey will be different, and for some young people, the path will be very painful. When built on a foundation of research and designed with sensitivity, the potential exists to create a sport experience that could contribute to a positive path for young people affected by trauma.

Take the design principles to heart. This is not a light undertaking.

Trauma-sensitive sport programs are built with the long-term nature of the work in mind. They invest heavily in their staff development, preparing them for the challenges they will face. They

choose safety, support and growth over win-loss records. They understand and believe that sport, when done just right, could potentially serve as a medium for healing.

If, after reading this paper, you hear a call to action and are committed to bringing some of this framework to your program, consider the following steps:

1. **Understand the Design Principles:** Study each of these 10 principles closely and then ask your program leadership: “Do we do this?” Make time to talk openly and deeply about the populations you serve, and what your program would look like if these trauma-sensitive design principles were the true foundation of your intervention.
2. **Institute the Program Practices:** Many of these practices do not require radical changes to your existing program structure to be instituted. Make a plan for how to embed these into the way you run your program. Prepare coaches, players and fans for the changes and then give these practices time to become part of the new DNA of your sport experience.
3. **Train Coaches in the Coaching Techniques:** Schedule a training and teach your coaches what these techniques are and how and when to use them.
4. **Introduce Coaches to the Player Skills:** Once you have trained your coaches in the trauma-sensitive coaching techniques, create a workshop that introduces them to the player skills. Work with them to develop plans for specific players or prioritize key skills that all of your players need to work on.

## **We Support Your Work**

At Edgework, we are passionately dedicated to helping organizations create truly trauma-sensitive experiences for the young people and staff they serve. It is our firm belief that great programs that get powerful outcomes are built on the pillars of research, passion, care, and practice.

If you are reading this, then we applaud you for the passion and care that is likely running through your veins. We hope that this paper has helped you straddle the sometimes complicated line between research and practice.

This paper is a work-in-progress. There are many more articles we plan to read, people we want to speak with and programs we want to observe in action. We are also working on a field guide for both program staff and coaches, as well as a series of trainings and workshops that will help you to turn this framework into action.

Your input, critique and feedback are welcome. We invite you to include us in the work you are doing in the field of trauma and sport. Please share with us your techniques and approaches so that we can include them in future iterations of this paper, and promote and disseminate your great work.

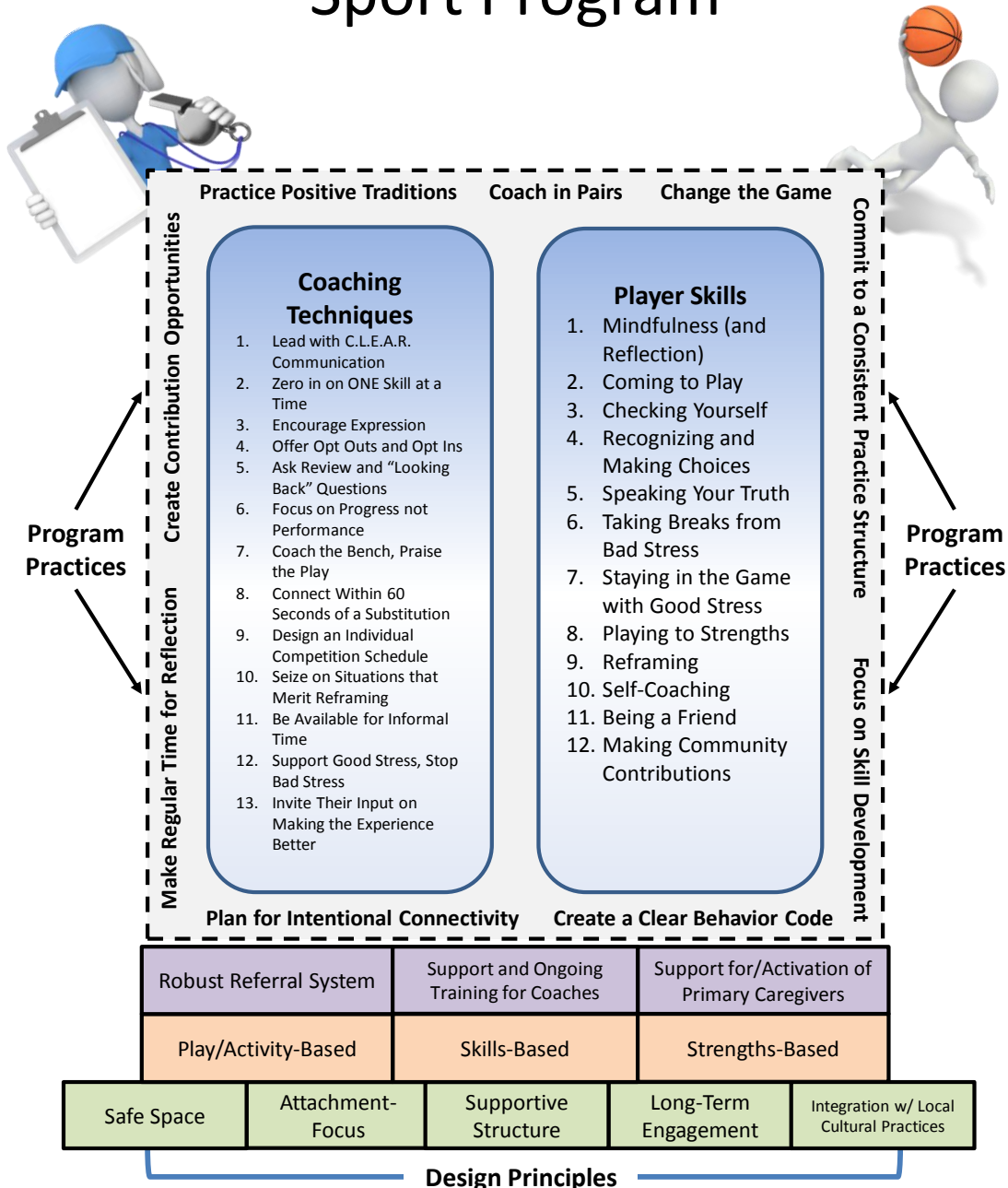
You can contact us at: [info@edgeworkconsulting.com](mailto:info@edgeworkconsulting.com)

Visit the tools section of our website for additional resources on sport for development, working with youth and monitoring and evaluation: [www.edgeworkconsulting.com](http://www.edgeworkconsulting.com).

If you would like to explore specific ways that we could train your staff or help you to take your trauma-sensitive programming and design to the next level, please contact us.



# A Design for a Trauma-Sensitive Sport Program



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## Acknowledgements

This paper could not have been completed without the openness and willingness of many individuals and organizations to share their experiences, expertise and resources. We are deeply grateful to everyone who has been involved.

A special acknowledgement goes out to Anna Barrett. She worked tirelessly and with great attention to detail to conduct the vast majority of the research for this paper, and exquisitely catalogued our sources. She also served as one of two primary writers on this paper (along with Lou Bergholz).

Additionally, we would like to thank Jessica Lipsey, Lauren Kinderknecht and Taylor Minore for their contribution at various phases of this paper's completion.

Over the past 10 years, we have engaged countless people in conversation throughout our work in the field of trauma, resilience and sport. For this paper we want to thank the following individuals for allowing us to interview them and study their work.

Megan Bartlett (Up2Us)	Steve Gross (Life is Good Playmakers)
Dr. Margaret Blaustein (Trauma Center/JRI)	Dr. Giuseppe Raviola (Partners in Health)
Lawrence Cann (Street Soccer USA)	Dr. Dean Ravizza (Salisbury University)
Alice Cohen (Manville School)	Dr. Joseph Spinazzola (Trauma Center/JRI)
Dr. Wendy D'Andrea (New School)	Susan Wayne (Doc Wayne)
Dr. Alice Diamond (University of Vancouver)	Dr. Mike Wessells (Columbia University)
Dave Emerson (Trauma Center/JRI)	

The following organizations contributed by sharing resources and their experiences:

Active Communities Network	Magic Bus
Beyond Sport	Mercy Corps
Care International	Serious Fun Network
Children in in the Wilderness	Partners in Health
Doc Wayne	Project Air
Eye to the Future	Save the Children
Grassroot Soccer	Street Soccer USA
International Rescue Committee	The Trauma Center at JRI
Justice Resource Institute	unicef
Laureus Sport for Good Foundation	Up2Us
Life is Good Playmakers	Worldwide Orphans Foundation

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