

Rebuilding Confidence in GCSE English with a Trauma-Informed Approach

Important note

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Course details

Title of content	Rebuilding Confidence in GCSE English with a Trauma-Informed Approach
Learning objectives	• Explore what is meant by ‘trauma-informed practice’ in the context of GCSE English resits • Consider how to develop trauma-informed approaches for GCSE English resit learners
Course description	This on-demand course will explore what trauma means and how it can affect people, including your learners. You will also review approaches you can take to develop trauma-informed practice in your GCSE English resit classroom. (This course is part of the 16–19 English GCSE Resit CPD offer, which aims to transform how English is taught and experienced in post-16 settings. The content is built on a foundation of research, practitioner insight and learner voices.)
Who’s this course for?	Educators working with learners who are re-sitting GCSE English

Course content

Module 1: Understanding trauma-informed practice

Lesson: Welcome and introduction

Page: Welcome to the course

Welcome to 'Rebuilding Confidence in GCSE English with a Trauma-Informed Approach'

This short on-demand course was funded by the Department for Education (DfE) and developed by the Education Training Foundation (ETF).

It's part of the 16–19 English GCSE Resit CPD offer, which aims to transform how English is taught and experienced in post-16 settings. The content is built on a foundation of research, practitioner insight and learner voices.

What will you cover?

'Rebuilding Confidence in GCSE English with a Trauma-Informed Approach' is about understanding:

- what trauma-informed practice is
- how to develop it for GCSE English resit learners.

The course will provide bitesize advice and helpful links.

You should meet the following learning objectives:

- Explore what is meant by 'trauma-informed practice' in the context of GCSE English resits
- Consider how to develop trauma-informed approaches for GCSE English resit learners.

As you move through the course and discover new information, ideas and perspectives, you can refer to these objectives and check your progress against them.

Resources and media

The resources in this self-directed resource are available to use under the [Open Government Licence v3.0](#) except where otherwise stated.

Thanks are extended to everyone who took part in videos, audio clips and/or written case studies. (Please note: names and job titles were correct at the time of production – but some may have changed since then.)

Lesson: What's happening in this module?

Page: Welcome to Module 1

Welcome to Module 1

This module will help you understand what is meant by 'trauma-informed practice' in the context of GCSE English resits and how this relates to teaching GCSE English resit learners.

You'll explore:

- what is meant by trauma-informed practice
- how to recognise traumatised learners
- some considerations for delivering trauma-informed GCSE English resit courses.

Lesson: What is 'trauma-informed practice'?

Page: Developing your own definition

When you think about 'trauma-informed practice' in the context of GCSE English resit learners, what comes to mind?

Come up with your own definition – then watch [the first 52 seconds of this short video extract](#) and see if your ideas match the views shared by college staff in Manchester.

(You only need to watch the first 52 seconds – but you're welcome to watch the whole thing.)

Pause and reflect

To what extent did the speakers' definitions of trauma-informed practice match your own?

Page: What is 'trauma-informed practice'?

The word 'trauma' refers to the lasting effects of distressing past experiences.

Trauma can come from specific events in a person's life – such as abuse, neglect, violence, loss or discrimination – and/or ongoing struggles that might *seem* less dramatic on the surface

but can still have a powerful impact (including, potentially, repeated instances of anxiety, panic or pressure in an educational setting).

Those experiencing trauma may also be ‘triggered’ by what’s happening in the present – so even if a learner’s trauma has nothing to do with education, particular dynamics or approaches may bring it to the surface.

Taking all this into account, trauma-informed practice is an approach to working with people that:

- recognises the widespread impact of trauma in all its forms
- understands its signs and symptoms
- uses that understanding to create safe, supportive and empowering environments.

Key ideas

Trauma-informed practice is underpinned by the following key ideas.

Assume trauma may be present	Some of your learners may be experiencing trauma – even if they don’t disclose it. In the GCSE English classroom, this can affect their confidence with things such as reading aloud and speaking. Rather than waiting for trauma to be disclosed, assume that trauma is present and act accordingly.
Avoid re-traumatisation	This means structuring interactions, learning activities and environments so that they don’t accidentally trigger stress responses linked to past trauma. As such, it may be useful when reading or speaking to start small and in low-risk environments.
Prioritise safety and trust	Both physical and emotional safety are essential so learners feel secure enough to engage in learning. A GCSE English classroom should be a positive learning environment where learners can make mistakes and learn from these, avoiding dismissive comments or ridicule.
Empower and give choice	Trauma often involves loss of control; offering choices and respecting autonomy helps to restore a sense of power, so considering multiple options with texts for reading or for writing activities may help learners to feel more empowered.
Be culturally and contextually aware	Understand that trauma is experienced differently depending on personal, social and cultural backgrounds. Using carefully

	selected media from a variety of cultures and contexts (including videos, texts and audio content) could help to foster an inclusive environment.
Foster collaboration	Work <i>with</i> people, not <i>on</i> them, treating them as partners in decisions. Working collaboratively on reading and writing tasks may help to engender more self-confidence in learners and could be staggered, starting small and building to bigger activities, whilst also scaffolding for independent work.

Pause and reflect

- In light of the above ideas, to what extent do you *already take* a trauma-informed approach in your GCSE English teaching?
- What aspects could you develop further?

There is a helpful overview of trauma-informed approaches on the [BBC Bitesize website](#).

Page: Core principles of trauma-informed practice

There is no single 'trauma-informed framework' for public-facing institutions in England, like FE and skills providers.

However, there are some **core principles of trauma-informed practice** that can be drawn from other UK nations like [Scotland](#) and [Wales](#).

Safety	Create environments where people feel physically and emotionally secure.
Trustworthiness and transparency	Be honest, consistent and clear so people know what to expect.
Peer support	Encourage connection with others who have lived experience, as this can be validating and healing.
Collaboration and mutuality	Work in partnership, flattening power differences between people (eg leaders, teaching staff and learners).
Empowerment, voice and choice	Support people's strengths, give them meaningful choices and validate their perspectives.
Cultural, historical and social sensitivity	Be aware of and responsive to the impact of culture, history (including systemic oppression) and other personal dynamics on how trauma is experienced and expressed.

(NTTP, 2023) (Trauma-Informed Wales, 2022)

A simple way to remember these principles comes from the USA's now-defunct Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA): "*Safety first, trust always, peers together, collaborate, empower, and respect diversity.*"

Pause and reflect

Could you further develop any of the principles above in your GCSE English teaching practice?

References

National Trauma Transformation Programme (2023), *A Roadmap for Creating Trauma-Informed and Responsive Change: Guidance for Organisations, Systems and Workforces in Scotland* [online]. Available from: <https://www.traumatransformation.scot/implementation/> [Accessed 24 August 2026].

Trauma-Informed Wales (2022), *Trauma-Informed Wales: A Societal Approach to Understanding, Preventing and Supporting the Impacts of Trauma and Adversity* [online]. Available from: <https://traumaframeworkcymru.com/> [Accessed 24 August 2026].

Lesson: Recognising traumatised learners

Page: Diagnosing trauma is not a teacher's role

As a GCSE English resit teacher, I already have so much to do: I need to account for learners' prior knowledge and any neurodiversity or disabilities. I need to ensure they develop as 'good citizens' with regards to EDI and British Values. All that, before I even mention the GCSE English assessment objectives! I do care but I have no time to prepare individual activities for learners who have experienced trauma!



Your role is not to diagnose trauma or prepare for specific individuals who may struggle in certain situations. In trauma-informed practice, the guiding principle is to **assume that anyone could have experienced trauma**, because:

- Trauma is *common* – research suggests a significant proportion of people have faced at least one potentially traumatic event.
- Many signs of trauma are not obvious and some learners hide them well.
- Trying to 'diagnose' trauma without training can lead to wrong assumptions, stigma or overlooking learners who need support.

Don't look for 'symptoms'

Trauma can show up in many ways – or may not be 'visible' to you at all – and the same behaviours could have other causes (eg medical issues, family stress, learning differences).

With this in mind, **possible indicators** might include the following.

- **Changes in behaviour**
eg sudden withdrawal, aggression, perfectionism or risk-taking.
- **Difficulty regulating emotions**
eg frequent meltdowns, strong startle responses or seeming 'numb'.
- **Concentration issues**
eg zoning out, restlessness or avoiding certain topics.
- **Physical signs**
eg tiredness, frequent illness, unexplained injuries or poor self-care.
- **Interpersonal patterns**
eg trouble trusting adults, clinginess or isolation from peers.

Important!

While you might be able to spot signs of past/current trauma, trauma diagnosis is not your role. Treat every learner as though they might have a trauma history and everyone's experiences should be safer, calmer and more engaging.

Page: Treat everyone as if they might have experienced trauma

The safest approach when working with learners in any context is as follows.

- **Universal precautions**
Treat *all* learners as if they might have a trauma history. Ensure your learning environments and relationships are safe, predictable and empowering for everyone.
- **Observe, don't label**
Notice patterns, track changes and refer concerns to trained safeguarding or pastoral staff.
- **Respond, don't react**
When you see challenging behaviour, think "*What might have happened?*" instead of "*What's wrong with you?*".

Page: Case study: Aiden's story

Read the below case study from the point of view of Aiden – a 16-year-old beginning GCSE English resit classes at college.

"I'm 16 and back in an English class again. Honestly, I didn't think I'd have to do this once I left school, but because I failed my GCSE in the summer, here I am, resitting. I got a grade 2. People keep saying English is important for jobs and whatever, but for me it just feels like going back to the thing I'm worst at.

English has never been good for me. Reading was fine, but when it came to writing, I just froze. I'd stare at the page and nothing would come out. Teachers said I was lazy or that I wasn't trying. Once in Year 9, I got called out in front of everyone for not finishing my work and the class laughed. That's stuck with me ever since.

Then in Year 10, I had to read out loud. I messed up a word and everyone laughed again. Even the teacher made a joke. I was so embarrassed. After that, I just stopped joining in. English lessons felt like a place where I'd always get it wrong.

Exams were even worse. In one mock, I had a full-on panic – my chest went tight, my hands were shaking and I couldn't think straight. I left half the paper blank. In the real exam, I did the same. So when my results came back and I saw that grade 2, I wasn't even shocked. It just felt like confirmation that I'd failed.

Now in college, I keep my head down. I sit at the back, keep my hood up and don't put my hand up. When we get writing tasks, I tell myself there's no point because I'll fail anyway. But weirdly, when the class talks about stuff like music or social media, I find myself joining in. I've got

opinions and I know I can explain myself when I want to. But as soon as it's about writing essays or exams, I just freeze.

For me, English isn't just another subject. It's tied up with all the times I got laughed at, told off or made to feel like I wasn't good enough. Deep down, I'd like to prove I can actually do it this time. But mostly, I'm scared of failing all over again."

Barriers and opportunities

Aiden has a series of barriers to GCSE English resit learning that are linked to trauma.

- **Hypervigilance**
He remains sensitive to perceived criticism, interpreting even neutral feedback as negative.
- **Avoidance behaviours**
He avoids tasks that resemble past failures, such as timed essays.
- **Low self-esteem**
He internalises failure as a reflection of his intelligence and worth.
- **Disconnection from school identity**
He associates English with humiliation, making engagement more difficult.

Pause and reflect

How could trauma-informed practices support Aiden to rebuild his confidence?

On the next page, you'll revisit Aiden's story and learn how trauma-informed practices made a difference to his GCSE English resit journey.

Lesson: Trauma-informed GCSE English resit courses

Page: Trauma-informed practice in FE and skills

In FE and skills settings, many successful trauma-informed practices result from **whole-organisation approaches** in which all aspects of learners' experiences are seen through a trauma-informed lens.

Every teacher or educator is responsible, however, for the approaches they use with their respective groups. Here are some ideas for trauma-informed approaches that you might have tried.

Safety (physical and emotional)	• The room is arranged so that all learners can see the door. • The teacher uses a calm tone instead of shouting.
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	• There are clear, consistent rules.
Trustworthiness and transparency	• Course and session outlines are shared. • Any timetable changes are explained in advance. • Staff follow through on promises.
Peer support	• There is a class culture of peer support. • Group work tasks are focused on teamwork over competition.
Collaboration and mutuality	• Learners help to set group norms. • Joint problem solving is used to deal with conflicts.
Empowerment, voice and choice	• Different formats are used for assignments. • A calm space is set aside (if possible) for self-regulation. • Learner-led activities are used.
Cultural, historical and social sensitivity.	• There is a diverse, 'decolonised' curriculum. • There is understanding about different cultural behaviours. • Staff use inclusive language and ensure that the facilities are inclusive, too.

Revisiting Aiden's story

Reflect on Aiden's story again and consider the following steps that Aiden's teacher(s) could take to offer trauma-informed support.

- **Relationship-building**
Building a trusting relationship through consistent encouragement and predictable routines.
- **Low-stakes tasks**
Providing low-stakes writing opportunities with gradual scaffolding to rebuild confidence.
- **Choice and voice**
Using choice and voice in lessons (eg selecting texts that are relevant to his interests).
- **Growth and effort**
Emphasising growth and effort over grades, reframing mistakes as part of learning.
- **Classroom culture**
Creating a classroom culture that prioritises respect, safety and positive peer interaction.

With trauma-informed strategies, Aiden could begin to reframe his relationship with English. Over time, he may develop resilience, build confidence in his writing and improve his performance in resit exams. More importantly, he may start to see English not as a source of shame but as a skill he can develop for his future.

Page: Trauma-informed practice in GCSE English

Look again at some principles for trauma-informed practice in education:

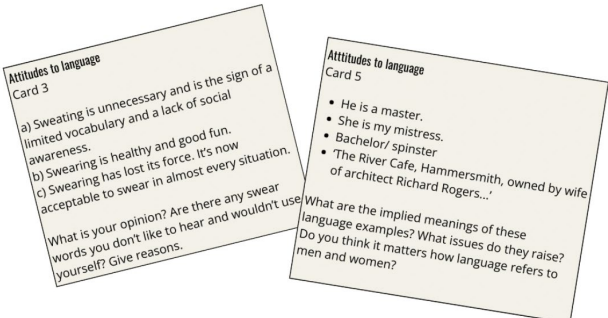
1. **Safety:** Ensure physical and emotional security.
2. **Trustworthiness and transparency:** Be clear, consistent and honest.
3. **Peer support:** Encourage connection with supportive peers.
4. **Collaboration and mutuality:** Work with learners as partners.
5. **Empowerment, voice and choice:** Build on strengths and offer options.
6. **Cultural, historical and social sensitivity:** Respect identity, background and lived experience.

These apply to teachers in any setting – but there are many ways that GCSE English teachers can work them into their sessions.

An example

Critically review the following extract from a GCSE English activity through a trauma-informed lens.

 How would you define 'good' speaking and listening? How can you tell if someone is a 'good' listener? What qualities make a speech or presentation 'good' or memorable?	Ask learners to write an open question on a sticky note to ascertain a peer's views on what 'good speaking and listening' means. Then give learners 5 minutes in pairs to pose their questions and discuss. (Pair learners who have worked well together before.)
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 Attitudes to language Card 3 a) Swearing is unnecessary and is the sign of a limited vocabulary and a lack of social awareness. b) Swearing is healthy and good fun. c) Swearing has lost its force. It's now acceptable to swear in almost every situation. What is your opinion? Are there any swear words you don't like to hear and wouldn't use yourself? Give reasons. Attitudes to language Card 5 • He is a master. • She is my mistress. • Bachelor/spinster • 'The River Cafe, Hammersmith, owned by wife of architect Richard Rogers...' What are the implied meanings of these language examples? What issues do they raise? Do you think it matters how language refers to men and women?	Keep the same pairs and distribute 'attitudes to language' cards. These are broad statements that allow different points of view to be shared. Ensure that all topics are covered and each pair has a couple of cards to discuss.
 Are there 'right and wrong' ways of speaking and listening? If your friend wrote: "Them's minel" or "She didn't do owt" in an essay what would you say?	Open up a discussion about 'social conventions' and 'written vs spoken styles' with the whole group by posing questions. Use the 'think-pair-share' strategy to ensure that individuals have time to consider, then share their ideas in pairs before responding more publicly.

Pause and reflect

To what extent did the activity extract above use trauma-informed approaches?

Page: Extending the idea

Think about the three stages of the example activity you've just considered.

1. **Elicit/build on learner's own ideas** of what 'good' speaking and listening might be about.
2. Provide stimuli for **paired/small group discussions** about the topic (designed to allow different points of view to be shared).
3. Use a **scaffolded question/discussion technique** (eg think-pair-share) to direct learners' focus to key ideas (eg about social conventions and spoken vs written styles).

Did you notice that the activity included opportunities for peer support and collaboration – and allowed different points of view to be shared?

There was also an opportunity to demonstrate cultural sensitivity (because different ideas about 'good' ways of speaking could be accommodated).

These are some of the ways that the activities were trauma-informed – you might have thought of others, too.

Next step

Which of the following would be a good next step for this activity with trauma-informed approaches in mind?

a. Share a poem

Share a poem written and performed in 'non-standard' English (eg 'Six a clock news' by Tom Leonard). Discuss in pairs if it is 'good' or not. Explain the idea of 'standard English' and discuss how it relates to 'good' English.

b. Sort three short texts

Ask learners to sort three short texts according to how good they are (including two written in 'non-standard' forms). Discuss why they thought each was good or not so good.

c. Ask learners to rewrite a 'colloquial style' text in 'standard' English, then share their version with the class

Learners work individually to rewrite a short text from colloquial style to Standard English, then read their version aloud.

Answers

A and B - both adopt trauma-informed principles. They include small group discussions and allow learners to share their own views without worrying about things being 'right' or 'wrong' (thus, developing learners' judgement).

If you selected C, you might want to consider how this may feel performative or exposing for some learners, especially those with low confidence or negative experiences with correction.

Lesson: Review your learning

Page: Well done

Well done – you've reached the end of Module 1

In this module, you explored:

- what is meant by trauma-informed practice
- how to recognise traumatised learners
- some considerations for delivering trauma-informed GCSE English resit courses.

On the next page, you'll have the opportunity to review the tools recommended during this module – and some additional reading.

Page: Further resources

Links from this module

- [Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership | Trauma informed colleges \(YouTube video\)](#)
- [BBC Bitesize | Supporting care-experienced children: 2. A trauma-informed approach](#)
- [Scottish Government | Psychological trauma and adversity including ACEs \(adverse childhood experiences\)](#)
- [Trauma-Informed Wales | Homepage](#)

Additional reading

- [National Education Union | Trauma-informed practice and approach](#)
 - [Protocol Education | A Teacher's Guide to Trauma-Informed Practice in UK Schools](#)
 - [The Innovate Project | Trauma-informed Practice](#)
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Module 2: Developing trauma-informed approaches in GCSE English

Lesson: What's happening in this module?

Page: Welcome to Module 2

Welcome to Module 2

This module will help you understand how to develop trauma-informed approaches when working with GCSE English resit learners.

You'll explore:

- common teacher mistakes and how to avoid them
- how to develop consistent routines and emotional safety on GCSE English courses
- how to involve learners in decision making.

Lesson: Common teacher mistakes

Page: Common mistakes

When you reflect on your GCSE English teaching practice through a trauma-informed lens, you might identify some situations in which you could've acted differently to better support your learners.

That's perfectly normal – and it's part of professional development.

Some common mistakes are listed below.

Taking behaviour personally	Reacting as if a learner's behaviour is an attack escalates tension.
Inconsistent rules or unpredictable changes	Unpredictability fuels anxiety and hypervigilance.
Ignoring small wins	A lack of recognition discourages progress and may negatively affect self-esteem.
Overloading learners with demands during dysregulation	A dysregulated brain will struggle to process instructions.
Not considering cultural context	Misinterpreting behaviour can lead to unfair discipline.
Assuming no obvious signs means no trauma	Learners may mask distress through over-compliance or withdrawal.

Of course, there are other practices that can be very damaging to learners who have experienced trauma, including public discipline, or shaming and forcing disclosure about traumatic events.

However, the table shows mistakes that anyone could make without meaning to cause harm.

Page: Avoiding mistakes

Work through the scenario below, which will help you to think about how to best support your learners.

At each stage, choose the most appropriate response from the two options provided. You'll receive feedback explaining why your choice either supports or undermines trauma-informed practice.

Scenario 1

During a group activity to plan a writing task, a learner suddenly snaps and says, "This is pointless!" before pushing their paper away.

How do you respond?

1. "If you're going to be rude, you can leave."
2. "Let's take a moment. I'll check in with you shortly."

Answers

1. That isn't the right answer. This escalates the situation and interprets behaviour as defiance rather than distress.
2. That's right. This models emotional regulation and recognises the behaviour as a possible stress response.

Scenario 2

You decide to change the seating plan mid-week without warning so that small groups can practise speaking and listening.

How do you explain the change?

1. "I'm the teacher. I can move people when I want."
2. "I'm making a change to the seating plan tomorrow. I'll explain why and give you time to adjust."

Answers

1. That isn't the right answer. This undermines trust and predictability, which are key for trauma-affected learners.
2. That's right. This maintains consistency and gives learners time to prepare.

Scenario 3

A learner who usually avoids writing has completed three sentences today. You asked learners to write three paragraphs.

How do you respond?

1. "You still haven't finished the task."
2. "You've written more today than usual. Great effort!"

Answers

1. That isn't the right answer. This overlooks effort and may discourage future engagement.
2. That's right. This celebrates persistence and builds confidence.

Scenario 4

A learner is visibly upset and withdrawn during a timed writing task.

What do you say?

1. "You need to finish this now or you'll never manage in your exam!"
2. "Take a few minutes to reset. Let me know when you're ready to continue."

Answers

1. That isn't the right answer. This adds pressure and ignores the learner's emotional state.
2. That's right. This allows space for regulation and supports re-engagement.

Scenario 5

A learner avoids eye contact and rarely speaks in group discussions.

How do you interpret this?

1. You decide that they're disengaged and not trying.
2. You decide to learn more about their cultural background and adapt how you support them.

Answers

1. That isn't the right answer. This risks misinterpreting culturally influenced behaviour.
2. That's right. This shows respect and responsiveness to cultural norms.

Scenario 6

A learner is quiet and punctual, and completes work without issue.

Do you use trauma-aware strategies?

1. No – they're fine and there's no need to worry.
2. Yes – you continue using trauma-aware strategies with all learners.

Answers

1. That's not the right answer. This assumes visible behaviour is the only indicator of trauma.
2. That's right. This applies universal support and avoids assumptions.

You've just explored how trauma-informed practice can shape your responses to learner behaviour in meaningful ways. These strategies don't just help learners feel understood; they also foster trust, resilience and engagement in your GCSE English classroom.

Alternatives to common mistakes

Here is a summary of the common mistakes teachers might make and some trauma-informed alternatives.

Common mistake	Trauma-informed alternative
Taking behaviour personally	Pause, regulate yourself and view behaviour as a possible stress response, rather than a personal insult.
Inconsistent rules or unpredictable changes	Apply class 'rules' consistently and warn learners before you make any changes.
Ignoring small wins	Celebrate effort, persistence and gradual improvement. Even if a learner who usually doesn't write much writes more than usual, or somebody answers a reading question with more detail than their normal responses, this should be acknowledged positively.
Overloading learners with demands during dysregulation	Allow time for learners to calm down before re-engaging them and provide tools to support this. GCSE English can easily lead to cognitive overload with learners, so be mindful of how much content and teacher talk you are inputting at any one time.
Not considering cultural context	Learn about and respect cultural norms, then adapt your responses accordingly. It may also be useful to consider texts, video and audio from different cultures to bring awareness and education of these into the GCSE classroom.
Assuming no obvious signs means no trauma	Use universal trauma-aware strategies for all learners.

As a GCSE English resit teacher, you might already be thinking about specific trauma-informed ideas for your learners.

On the next page, you will explore some examples.

Page: Trauma-informed effective practices

Here is a recap of the principles of trauma-informed practice that you explored in Module 1:

- Safety (physical and emotional)
- Trustworthiness and transparency
- Peer support
- Collaboration and mutuality
- Empowerment, voice and choice
- Cultural and historical sensitivity.

Mindful of the mistakes people can easily make, you will focus now on some ideas for practising this with GCSE English resit learners.

Safety (physical and emotional)	• Share the lesson structure on the board. • Flag any sensitive content in reading materials. • Provide consistent start/end routines. • Create a pause space for emotional regulation; allow short breaks during stressful tasks.
Trustworthiness and transparency	• Explain why certain tasks are used (eg “we are using this writing frame to guide your planning”). • Co-create and explain success criteria clearly.
Peer support	• Create low-stakes tasks that allow peers to support one another – eg carefully structured peer assessments.
Collaboration and mutuality	• Use techniques that enable learners to validate their ideas with peers. • Set up group tasks (eg around responding to an unseen text) and allow people to choose roles (eg ‘theme spotter’ ‘quote finder’, ‘SPaG checker’ etc.).
Empowerment, voice and choice	• Offer choice in reading materials for practice tasks. • Link speaking/writing tasks to vocational subjects or real-life contexts.
Cultural, historical and social sensitivity	• Use texts that reflect learners’ backgrounds. • Challenge stereotypes.

Lesson: Consistent routines and emotional safety in GCSE English

Page: Consistent routines in GCSE English contexts

So, ‘what works’ in GCSE English contexts? Unfortunately, there are no rules about which routines to follow. Different things will work in different settings – and employing a variety of approaches can keep learners engaged and appeal to a wide range of preferences.

However, consistency can be powerful, too.

Look at the following three ideas and reflect on the extent to which you already do them:

- Begin every lesson with a 5-minute ‘Do now’ task on the board
eg sentence correction, short quotation analysis – so learners know exactly how to start.

- Create a clear structure and explain this
eg introduction of objectives → main activity → reflection/exit ticket.
- Follow marking and feedback commitments, whatever technique you use
eg use of marking codes, directed improvement and reflection time (DIRT) marking, etc.

Pause and reflect

Is there more you can do to develop consistent routines for your learners?

Page: Emotional safety

You will see that many trauma-informed practices overlap with other important considerations in a GCSE English context, like safeguarding and inclusion.

This is especially true with **emotional safety**.

What does emotional safety mean to you?

Come up with your own definition, then compare it to the one provided:

Emotional safety	Learners feel secure, respected and accepted in their learning spaces so they can engage fully in learning without fear of humiliation, rejection or harm.
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Achieving emotional safety

Emotional safety can be achieved through a variety of (trauma-informed) approaches.

Match each approach on the left to an explanation on the right.

1. Freedom from ridicule or shame	A. Staff treat learners – and learners treat each other – with dignity, kindness and fairness.
2. Respectful relationships	B. All learners' identities, backgrounds and experiences are recognised and valued.
3. Predictability and consistency	C. Learners know that mistakes are part of learning, not a cause for embarrassment.
4. Trust and openness	D. Routines and expectations are clear, reducing anxiety about what might happen next.
5. Support for emotional regulation	E. Learners are given tools and space to manage strong feelings safely (eg calm corners, time-outs, grounding strategies).

6. Inclusion and belonging	F. Learners feel confident that they can express opinions, ask questions or share concerns without being dismissed or punished.
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Answers

1. C
2. A
3. D
4. F
5. E
6. B

Lesson: Involving learners in decision making

Page: Involving learners in decision making

It's important to involve learners in decision making. From a trauma-informed perspective, it helps them to develop agency and confidence.

Moreover, if you think about success in GCSE English, there are many decisions to make – eg when inferring an author's meaning or choosing which words to use to express an idea you have.

Consider the following ideas for decision-making activities in GCSE English contexts.

- **Text selection choices**

Give learners agency by offering a choice of extracts or texts.

- **Choose the question**

Encourage learners to practise autonomy by deciding between three past-paper questions.

- **Debate and discussion 'stances'**

Get learners to decide which stances or roles to take in class discussions.

- **Group task role allocation**

Invite learners to choose their roles within collaborative work – eg quote-finder, summariser, presenter, etc.

- **Lesson structure input**

Learners can influence the order or method of activities – eg they could vote on whether to start with guided practice or peer analysis.

- **Exit ticket choices**

Ask learners to select how they reflect on their learning at the end of class – eg they can write a quotation, summarise the theme in one sentence or pose a question.

There are many similarities here with ‘active learning’. If you are not familiar with this idea, you may wish to read a helpful [blog](#) on this topic by Geoff Petty.

Page: Using artificial intelligence to support learner confidence

In the video below, Nathan Rogan – Senior Education Advisor at ETF – explores how you might use artificial intelligence (AI) to help GCSE English learners feel more confident with their own speaking, reading or writing.

AI tools can provide feedback on all three skills, and this video will explore some suggestions of how to do so.

As you watch, note any ideas you could develop and/or try with your learners.

Video: <https://youtu.be/anSy15YEXCM>

A quick summary

- When used effectively, AI tools can support **resit learners who have low self-confidence and varied prior experience**.
- Some functionality is **embedded in existing programmes** – eg the speech coach in Microsoft PowerPoint – as well as **dedicated tools** like CoPilot, ChatGPT and Google Gemini.
- AI tools allow teachers to **quickly generate texts on specific topics and differentiate them** (eg produce them in more or less complex language) to meet different needs.
- They also **allow learners to have ‘conversations’ with AI** and (for example) **request feedback** on their speech or their writing.
- They can be particularly helpful for **ESOL learners** – or for teachers working with ESOL learners who need help **identifying and correcting grammatical issues**.
- AI tools can **supplement what teachers are already doing** in lessons. You can display them on the board, or get learners to make use of them on class laptops or tablets.

Lesson: Review your learning

Page: Congratulations

Congratulations – you’ve nearly reached the end of ‘Rebuilding Confidence in GCSE English with a Trauma-Informed Approach’

Over the past two modules, you’ve covered the following learning objectives:

- Explore what is meant by ‘trauma-informed practice’ in the context of GCSE English resits
- Consider how to develop trauma-informed approaches for GCSE English resit learners.

What next?

Remember: this course is part of the 16–19 English GCSE Resit CPD offer, which aims to transform how English is taught and experienced in post-16 settings. The content is built on a foundation of research, practitioner insight and learner voices.

Page: Further resources

Links from this module

- [Geoff Petty | Active Learning](#)

Additional reading

- [British Council: TeachingEnglish | How to address the effects of trauma in the English language classroom](#)
- [Trauma-Informed Schools UK | An example of Trauma Informed Practice \(TISUK\) Implementation in Schools \(YouTube video\)](#)

Page: Action planning

Now that you have completed the course, what will you do next?

Use this page to set yourself short- and long-term targets relating to any part of this course.

Professional development is an ongoing process. Making time to reflect on and refine how you work can be really challenging – but it is time well spent. Creating a simple plan will help you to embed what you have learnt and set a timescale for your next steps.

Target	What will I do to achieve my target?	Who might help me?	When will I achieve it?

Remember: this is a process for you. It might be helpful to share some of your thinking with colleagues, a mentor or a line manager at an appraisal – but, first and foremost, an action plan should reflect what you feel is important.