TRAUMAWISE CHANGE AGENT FIELD GUIDE

# The Activator

## *You change the soil.*

You're the person who notices the pattern underneath the problem. When the same thing keeps going wrong, you start asking why: what in the schedule, the policy, or the culture keeps producing it. You care about the people in front of you, and you also care about the conditions they're living and working in.

At TraumaWise, we call that being an Activator. You don't need a title or a certificate to be one. If this is how you show up, you're already doing this work. This guide is here to help you see it, name it, and care for yourself while you do it.

*Healthy change happens together.*

traumawise.com

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## What an Activator is

An Activator is a trauma-informed leader who helps shape the systems around people: the policies, rhythms, team practices, and culture that make safety and healing more possible. Where others tend a person, a group, or a lesson, Activators tend the whole system. In everyday life, that can look like:

- Noticing a pattern that keeps causing stress, and naming it kindly
- Asking how a policy or schedule actually lands for the people living it
- Bringing the right people into the same room, across teams or groups
- Helping a group agree on small, steady changes it can sustain
- Staying with a change long enough to see whether it's working

Activators don't fix systems alone. They help a community see itself more clearly and build the conditions for change together.

## Why it matters

Training alone rarely creates lasting change. People can learn everything about safety and connection, then return to a schedule, a policy, or a culture that works against it. When the system stays the same, the stress keeps coming back.

Systems that support healing tend to need:

- Daily practices that match what they say they value
- Structures that protect people's well-being
- Predictable rhythms that ease overwhelm and burnout
- Policies and communication that feel safe to the people they affect
- Leaders who model safety and respect
- Shared ownership of care, so no one carries it alone

Activators help create and sustain those conditions. They're the architects of a trauma-informed culture that lasts.

## What it looks like where you are

Activating looks different depending on the system you're part of. Here are a few of the places it shows up:

| Where you are | What changing the soil can look like |
|---|---|
| **At home and with family** | Noticing the family rhythms that keep sparking the same conflict, and reshaping a routine so everyone has more room to breathe |
| **In a school** | Raising how a discipline policy or a schedule lands for students and staff, and helping a team try a more trauma-informed approach |
| **In a congregation or faith community** | Helping leaders shape how volunteers are supported, how hard disclosures are handled, or how new families are welcomed |
| **At work** | Bringing a team together to rethink meeting rhythms, workloads, or how hard news gets shared |
| **In your neighborhood or community** | Connecting organizations that serve the same families, so people stop falling through the gaps between them |

You may recognize yourself in more than one row. That's common for Activators.

## What you already bring

Activators tend to share a handful of qualities. You don't need all of them. Most people are strong in a few and growing in the rest.

- **Systems thinking.** You see patterns, structures, and how things connect.
- **Strategic leadership.** You can picture a path toward long-term change.
- **Steadiness.** You stay grounded through complexity and conflict.
- **Cultural attunement.** You notice power, equity, and community context.
- **Relational intelligence.** You build trust across roles, teams, and groups.
- **Courage and integrity.** You name what's out of alignment, with compassion.
- **Patience with the long view.** You hold the long arc while responding to what's needed now.

If you read this list and thought "that's me, on a good day," that counts. These grow with practice and support.

## The TraumaWise lens

TraumaWise is built on three pillars, drawing on the work of Howard Bath. Each one shapes how an Activator leads change:

| Pillar | What it means for an Activator |
|---|---|
| **Felt-Safety** | You shape the procedures and leadership habits that reduce fear and overwhelm across a whole system |
| **Connection** | You build bridges between teams, departments, and community partners |
| **Co-Regulation** | You bring a grounded presence, so groups can stay steady together through change |

Activators also carry the TraumaWise A.R.C.H.E.S. values: Authenticity, Respect, Compassion, Humility, Expansive Leadership, and System Integrity.

## How you differ from the other three roles

TraumaWise names four change agent roles. Each one matters, and change goes further when all four are present.

| Role | They tend to… | As an Activator, you tend to… |
|---|---|---|
| **Facilitator** | Shape group spaces and guide shared experiences | Shape systems and design the structures around them |
| **Advocate** | Coach caregivers and change daily practice in a family | Coach leaders and teams, and change the conditions they work in |
| **Trainer** | Build understanding through content and learning | Build frameworks, and address patterns and processes |

If your quiz result said you also carry another role, you may move between these. Many Activators also walk alongside one person, hold space for a group, or teach what they've learned.

## The cost of carrying

Changing a system is meaningful work, and it costs something. Naming the cost is part of caring for yourself, not a sign that you're doing it wrong. Activators often find themselves:

- Seeing what's wrong long before others are ready to see it
- Growing weary when change moves at the speed of the slowest part of the system
- Being the one who names hard truths, and feeling alone in it
- Carrying responsibility for outcomes that depend on many other people

None of this means you're not cut out for this. Systems change goes further together, and no one should hold the long work alone. Your capacity is part of the work, too.

> **A few ways to stay resourced**
>
> - **Pace yourself.** Choose one change at a time, and let small steps count.
> - **Find your people.** Other change agents can share the load and remind you why it matters.
> - **Celebrate what moved.** Notice the patterns that shifted, even a little.
> - **Scaffold yourself.** The Scaffold for Sustainability workbook *(coming soon)* will offer a way to build steady support around your own life while you support others.

## One thing to try this week

This week, you might notice one pattern you saw and named, even if nothing has changed yet. Then notice one person who could help you carry it.

If you'd like to go a little deeper, here are a few questions to sit with:

1. What pattern keeps showing up in the system I'm part of?

2. Who else sees it, or is affected by it?

3. What is one small change we could try together?

## Where to go next

There's no rush. Please take whatever step fits your capacity right now.

### FREE, WHENEVER YOU'RE READY

- **The Activator Path Library.** Podcast episodes, articles, and guides for people who shape the systems around them. traumawise.com/activator-path-library
- **Change Agent Starter Guide.** Your strengths, and small first steps toward change in your family, workplace, or community. traumawise.com/change-agent-starter-guide

### WHEN YOU'D LIKE TO GO DEEPER

- **The TraumaWise Activator Certification.** For those who feel called to lead trauma-informed change across their organization or community, with a cohort and mentor support. traumawise.com/traumawise-activator-program
- **TraumaWise Equip.** A community of people doing this work, with a monthly live Q&A and a six-step path you can walk at your own pace. traumawise.com/item/traumawise-equip-membership

Thank you for being someone who changes the soil.

*With Unconditional Positive Regard,*
*Renae M. Dupuis*