TRAUMA INFORMED
PRACTICES FOR SCHOOLS - TIPS

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OBJECTIVES:
Trauma Informed Practices In Schools

✓ Prevalence & Response - Why does this matter?
✓ Triggers – Why is this happening?!
✓ Tools – What can I do?! 
✓ Self Care – This is exhausting....
WHY THIS MATTERS ….

• Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)-study
  [http://www.cdc.gov/ace/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ace/index.htm)

• Kaiser Permanente, San Diego, CA
  • Original 286 patients
  • 17,000 participant sample
  • Participants completed a 10-question ACE Survey

❖ Something happens between infancy and adulthood to create a lifetime of addictions, abuse and mental health issues.  (Dube et al., 2003)
Of The 17,000 Respondents...

Two-Thirds reported at least one ACE:

• Physical, emotional or sexual abuse
• Emotional or physical neglect
• Growing up in a household where someone was an alcoholic, drug user, mentally ill, or suicidal
• Family violence
• Incarcerated family member
Additional Adverse Experiences

- Loss of a loved one
- Accidents
- Homelessness
- Community/School violence
- Witnessing of domestic violence
- Man-made or natural disasters
- Terrorism
- War
Untreated Adverse Early Childhood Events Only Exacerbate Over Time

**Childhood**
- Developmental Delays
- Expulsion

**Adolescence**
- Delinquency
- Mental Health
- Sexual Activity
- Drugs & Alcohol
- Violence

**Adulthood**
- Psychiatric Problems
- Drug Abuse
- Alcohol
- Crime

*Source: Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. Information available at [http://www.cdc.gov/ace/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ace/index.htm)*
OUR BRAIN’S TRIO

Amygdala – Brain Stem
- The NOW.
- Am I safe?

Limbic system – Mid Brain
- The PAST.
- Memories, emotions, past hurts & experiences.
- Can I trust you?

Pre-frontal cortex
- The FUTURE.
- Higher level functioning
- can plan & consider consequences
- Rational Thinking/Logic
Historical Trauma
Evidence of post-traumatic stress disorder across generations

Pregnant women impacted by the World Trade Center attacks on 9/11 who had PTSD from the event gave birth to babies with an elevated stress response and a hypersensitive stress axis.

Children of parents who survived the holocaust were found to have the same genetic changes to gene related to stress as their parents.

- Children in both cases are more susceptible to anxiety, depression and even PTSD than those whose parent did not experience PTSD
REMOVED Video
HOPE IS A ONE WAY STREET...

Resiliency is:

“The Deep Belief that at one time you really mattered to another human being”

Vincent Feletti, M.D.
WHAT IS TRAUMATIC STRESS?

- Overwhelming experience
- Involves a threat
- Results in vulnerability and loss of control
- Leaves people feeling helpless and fearful
- Interferes with relationships and beliefs

“Trauma can be a single event, connected series of traumatic events or chronic lasting stress.”

Complex Trauma:

- Multiple traumatic events, often that occur within a care-giving system that is supposed to be the source of safety and stability in a child’s life.
THE STRESS RESPONSE AND TRAUMA

The stress response is a chemical response

• Prepares the body for action
  - Fight
  - Flight
  - Freeze

• Most recover.

• Some develop more severe difficulties.
TRAUMA AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

Traumatized children are:

- 2.5x more likely to fail a grade in school
- Score lower on standardized achievement tests
- More likely to have struggles in receptive and expressive language
- Suspended and expelled more often
- More frequently placed in special education
- 51% of children with 4+ ACE scores demonstrated learning and behavior challenges in school-Compared with on 3% of children reporting no score

TRIGGERS AND BEHAVIOR

• Triggers include seeing, feeling, or hearing something that remind us of past trauma.

• Triggers activate the alarm system.

• When the alarm system is activated, but there is no danger, it is a false alarm.

• The response is as if there is current danger.

• The response in involuntary – remember the amygdala responds!
TRIGGERS AND BEHAVIOR

Some Common Triggers:

• Sirens
• Loud noises – school bell
• Police Officers / Fire Persons
• Schedule Changes
  • Minimum Days, testing days, fire/earthquake drills, picture day...
• Sights and Smells
• Resemblances – physical and verbal
• Terms of Endearment
• Unexpected Touch
• ....... You tell us?
TRIGGERS AND BEHAVIOR

It can take time to realize you are dealing with a trigger.

- Often involves knowing and being engaged with the student over time.
- Often it is a response that doesn’t make sense in any other way.

Remember that student responses do not always match our expectation...

- Example depression in children often looks like anger
WHAT IT MIGHT MEAN:

THIS....

• Oppositional
• Overly compliant
• Outburst
• Anger
• Depressed
• Argumentative
• Rapid escalation

MIGHT BE BECAUSE OF THIS..

• Avoid rejection
• Avoid emotions
• Built up
• Deny hurt feelings
• Anger turned inward
• Test relationship
• Heightened alarm system

Handouts: *Working With Students Exposed To Trauma* series
A PARADIGM SHIFT ….

Moving away from thinking about students in terms of

“What's wrong with you?”

to

“What happened to you?”

(Provides context, fosters compassion, helps to see strengths in face of adversity)
UNDERSTANDING THAT ….

TRAUMA **EXPLAINS** BEHAVIOR IT

DOES NOT **EXCUSE** BEHAVIOR

*Problem Behaviors are often due to a desire to Self Protect or Mechanisms for Coping*
TO ADDRESS TRAUMA WE MUST ADDRESS THE S-C-S OF STUDENTS IN OUR SCHOOLS

• Create a sense of-
  SAFETY
• Meaningful relationships or-
  CONNECTIONS
• Teach/Practice
  SELF-REGULATION
S-C-S SAFETY

• Trauma results in a loss of sense of safety
• Safety is a human beings number one priority
• In schools focusing on creating both physical and emotional safety must be a priority
• Emotional Safety is created by:
  ✓ Empowering Others
  ✓ Providing Choices
  ✓ Fostering Connections
  ✓ Opportunities to develop Genuine Relationships
ELEMENTS OF A SAFE SCHOOL SETTING

- **Safety**: physical and emotional safety
- **Structure**: predictable, consistent routines
- **Supervision**: eyes, ears, proximity to students
- **Self-Regulation**: model it/teach it
- **Sense of Belonging & Significance (Self-Esteem)**: “I can do this; I belong here”
- **Success-celebrate!**: In or out of the classroom
S-C-S CONNECTIONS

• Children need to feel *belonging* & *significance* before we can really expect them to respond or care about our rules or limits

• Healthy relational interactions with safe and familiar individuals *can buffer and heal trauma related problems*

• Research shows *social connectedness* as a protective factor against maltreatment

• Social milieu (safe environments): *major mediator of trauma*
CONNECTING

• Connections are created by:
  ✓ Role Modeling
  ✓ Listening
  ✓ Being Present
  ✓ Respectful Interactions
  ✓ Genuine Interactions

• Remember that connections must be built at all levels:
  • Staff to Student
  • Staff to Staff
  • Student to Student
  • Staff to Caretakers
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS IN THE SCHOOL:

- Give students a voice
- Allow student input on decisions
- Provide suggestions box
- Use students names
- Greet students in the hallway
- Listen without judgment
- Help them problem-solve ask open-ended questions to further conversation
Don’t Quit on Me!

GradNation
Every Kid Needs a Champion

Rita Pierson
S-C-S SELF-REGULATION

- Trauma impacts the way in which self-regulating skills are formed
- Trauma directly influences how a student develops their coping skills
- Schools that strive to build safe and nurturing schools where relationships are valued are more likely to promote and foster positive coping skills for their students
- School based programs/paradigms that support TIPS:
  - PBIS
  - Restorative Practices
  - SEL programs/2nd Step/Steps to Respect
  - Developmental Assets
“A child whose behavior is creating issues is not trying to cause a problem. They’re trying to solve a problem.”

• American Journal of Pediatrics, November 1956
EVERYTHING SPEAKS

Behavior is a form of communication

What is this behavior telling me about this youth? What is this youth trying to tell us through this behavior?

WHAT A STUDENT KNOWS AND HAS PRACTICED WILL ALWAYS FEEL THE MOST NORMAL

UNDERSTAND THAT:

✓ That the student is not out to get us.
✓ They act in a way that makes sense according to their understanding of how the world works.

• See handout The Belief Behind The Behavior
STEPS TO BUILD AFFECT IDENTIFICATION

• Build vocabulary
• Connect emotions with:
  ✓ Body sensations
  ✓ Thoughts associated with feelings
  ✓ Behaviors—manifestations of feelings
• Context
  ✓ External: Smells, Sounds
  ✓ Internal: Tired, hungry
• Use literature, music, film to help kids learn to identify emotions.

See Handout, *The Brain In The Palm of the Hand*
MORE TIPS FOR TEACHING STUDENTS IMPACTED BY TRAUMA

• Connections –

“Two by Ten” Strategy - Handout

✓ R. Smith & M. Lambert, Assuming the Best

• 85% Improvement in student behavior

• Behavior of all other students in class improved

• Often their worst student became an ally in the class
MORE TIPS FOR TEACHING STUDENTS IMPACTED BY TRAUMA

• Use and Teach what you know about trauma:

  ✓ Handouts: *Working With Students Exposed To Trauma*,

• Students who Don’t Perceive Safety

• Students Who Are Not Able To Self-Regulate Well

• Students Who Don’t Believe They Matter

• Students Who Don’t Succeed Academically or Socially

“Students often exhibit behaviors that are a result of trauma but that can be *misinterpreted* by a teacher as willful disobedience, or that the child has greater control over his/her behavior than he/she does.”

  Jody McVittie, MD, Sound Discipline
MORE TIPS FOR TEACHING STUDENTS IMPACTED BY TRAUMA

• Pay attention to the power of perception – or misinterpretation!

✓ Handout: The Belief Behind The Behavior – A Key For Mistaken Beliefs

Five Underlying Goals and Effective Response Ideas:
• Undue Attention
• Special Service
• Misguided Power (Control)
• Revenge
• Inadequacy or Avoidance of Humiliation (Anxiety)
“WE CAN’T TEACH WHAT WE DON’T KNOW. WE CAN’T LEAD WHERE WE WON’T GO.”

Malcolm X
Self Awareness.....

• **Educators and Empathy:**
  Empathy is the identification with or the experiencing of, the feelings, thoughts or attitudes of others.

• **Compassion Satisfaction:** the positive feelings we get when we realize that the compassion we put in working with others is resulting in some relief, growth or healing.

• **Empathy** is a double edged sword: It provides healing power, however empathy for the traumatic pain of another can result in personal upset or pain for the listener.
VICARIOUS TRAUMA

When empathy for a student’s suffering leads to internalizing or frightening realities not personally experienced we call this **vicarious (secondary) trauma**

- Constant demands to care for others may cause fatigue, emotional stress, or apathy. When trauma repeatedly overwhelm our ability to function normally we may experience **compassion fatigue**. High levels of compassion fatigue can, over time lead to;

- **Burnout**: physical and emotional exhaustion, involving the development of negative self concept, job attitudes and loss of concern and feeling for our students, their parents and our colleagues
THE PROFESSIONAL IMPACT OF VICARIOUS TRAUMA
(Adapted from The Heart of Learning and Teaching)

- JOB TASKS
- MORALE
- INTERPERSONAL
- BEHAVIORAL
- PHYSICAL
- EMOTIONAL

- BEHAVIORAL
- COGNITIVE
- REALTIONAL (INTERPERSONAL)
- WORLD VIEW (SPIRITUAL)
SELF-CARE TECHNIQUES

• PHYSICAL FITNESS
• NUTRITION AND HYDRATION
• SLEEP AND REST
• ASSERTIVENESS
• CENTERING AND SOLITUDE
• CREATIVITY
• FUN AND ENJOYMENT
• CREATE A PLAN FOR SELF-CARE
QUESTIONS???