Fixing the Hole in the Soul: Trauma Informed Teaching Practices

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Trauma & 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 & expressive language
  - suspended & expelled more often
  - more frequently placed in special education
CT Scans of Children: What do you See?
The Child Trauma Academy. Copyright 1997 Bruce D. Perry, MD, Ph.D.

Impact of Trauma on the Child
- Cognitive/academic
- Physical
- Emotional
- Spiritual
- Developmental

Impact on Worldview
Typical Development vs. Developmental Trauma
- Nurturing & stable attachments with adults
- Belief in a predictable & benevolent world/generally good things will happen to me
- Feeling of positive self-worth/others will see my strengths
- Optimism about the future
- Feeling that I can have a positive impact on the world
- Basic mistrust of adults/inability to depend on others
- Belief that the world is an unsafe place/bad things will happen & they are usually my fault
- Assumption that others will not like me
- Fear & pessimism about future
- Feelings of hopelessness & lack of control

Impact on Learning
- Organizing narrative material
- Cause & effect
- Taking another’s perspective
- Attentiveness
- Regulating emotions
- Executive functioning
- Engaging in curriculum

Impact on Classroom Behavior
- Reactivity & impulsivity
- Aggression
- Defiance
- Withdrawal
- Perfectionism

Impact on the Brain
- If there is danger, the “thinking” brain shuts down, allowing the “doing” brain to act
- Traumatized children experience changes in brain structures, neurochemistry & genetic expression
Some Key Points

• Traumatized children spend most of their lives in a state of low-level fear – even though outwardly they may look calm and relaxed.
• While in this state, it takes very little to move them up the arousal continuum.
• They will respond by using either a dissociative or hyperarousal adaptation. Their functioning on every level (emotional, behavioral, cognitive) will reflect this state.

You Tube Video

Trauma-Sensitive Schools

Trauma-sensitive schools acknowledge the prevalence of traumatic occurrence in students’ lives & create a flexible framework that provides universal supports, is sensitive to unique needs of students, & is mindful of avoiding re-traumatization.

Classroom Strategies to establish SAFETY

• Clear & consistent rules for managing behavior & setting limits
• Accommodations to meet individual strengths & needs
• Predictable structure, relationships, & environment
• Reduce bullying & harassment
• Use seclusion/restraint only as a last resort

How do I know how to line up? What in the environment helps me?

This rubric for a clean desk helped students understand clear expectations in K-3.
I try to limit distractions while learning at circle time.

Give them ideas on where to stand!
Environmental Cues with Wiggle Room.

The Day starts out challenging, but I ready know what Tim will do.

WHAT can I do?!

Knowing directions helps children feel safe. Take time to create direction books WITH children and Send these books.

Give them ideas on where to stand! Environmental Cues with Wiggle Room. This helps children feel safe and know where their place is.

Start the day with a transition box and tissue for tears.
Create safe play learning zones for children that need it.

It helps children feel safe to know the rules and visuals help understanding.

Do you have “peaceful” areas?
What in environment lets me know rules

- Outside Rules
  - We try our best to
  - We use gentle words and hands
  - We share and take turns with our friends

Know when I go next helps me feel safe

- Sensory pillows can calm me and give me a "hug"

Break assignments down into small bits to help children feel safe!

Lunch time steps

- How could you adapt this?

Give CLEAR boundaries and supports

Kids often have trouble with bathroom transitions. Consider posting a bathroom mini-schedule for each transition, to and from the bathroom, on your bathroom door. While waiting for a turn, review the visual schedule so kids know where to go next.
Visual supports for children with challenges with comprehension skills—they need a visual to show who to chase and how to be gentle.

Environmental Cues

Do you have ways for children to calm down around the room?

Put pinwheels around the room to help children with deep breathing when they become upset! Send pinwheels home.

Teach deep breathing with Dragon Breathing and other tools

Help children manage their worries with a Worry Eater.
Creating a Safe Environment at School through Relationships

- Rebecca S. Brown, LCSW suggests these strategies in working with students impacted by trauma:
  - Clarify your role with the student.
  - Establish yourself as a safe individual.
  - Create an environment of respect.
  - Give the student opportunities to make choices.
  - Talk about safety and what steps you will take to help the student be and feel safe.
  - Connect the student to the appropriate resources and people.
  - Message to students: “You are not alone.”
Help children get to know each other and become friends.

Who am I? Help children get to know each other and become friends.

Creating a Safe Environment at School

Some safety approaches for the classroom:
- Have a predictable environment with clear expectations for behavior
- Have structure during the day, try not to deviate from it often
- Establish a quiet, safe place in the classroom for students to go when they are feeling overwhelmed. It should be a comfortable space away from others, with comfortable furniture, blankets and pillows.
- Have some sensory materials for students, such as a small rubber ball they can squeeze, stuffed animals, pillows with different types of fabric, pipe cleaners, rocks, crystals, play doh or clay, paper for scribbling, color markers/pencils, puzzles, etc.
- Have pleasant colors, pictures of nature, cute animals, etc. in the classroom that students can focus on when dysregulated
- Incorporate music into the classroom that is playing in the background, rhythmic sounds

Friendship Color Mixing

KINDNESS POTIONS
I try to improve a child's mood with the mood duster!

Trauma Informed Interventions for Trauma Impacted Students

- **Teach Feelings Expression and Coping**
  - Identify and label emotions and feelings.
  - Use of scales and "thermometer" to rate emotion intensity.
  - Identify coping skills to help decrease emotional intensity. Help youth find positive ways to cope.
- Connect students to friends, peers, or supportive adults.
- Give ideas about participating in creative and positive social activities.
- Think of ways to reach out to parents/caregivers that involves them in the educational process.
- Deepen your understanding about the community the student lives in and available resources for the student and family.

Trauma Informed Interventions with Trauma Impacted Students

- **Teach Stress Management/Relaxation Skills**
  - BREATHE: Teach breathing for relaxation
    - Provide students with a calm or quiet place to sit or talk.
    - Remains calm, quiet, and present. Use LOW and SLOW when needed.
    - Watch the tone and speed of your voice/words—these children are hyper-sensitive to facial expressions, volume of voice, tone, etc. They pick up on stress-related behaviors of adults.
    - Don't lecture or ask too many questions because the student can't process too much.
    - Make sure to take deep breaths yourself to calm yourself and the student will imitate you.
    - Slow yourself down, talk slower, use a lower pitch for your voice, don't use complex sentences, don't use lots of body movement.
  - Offer suggestions on self-calming techniques, such as mindfulness, grounding, tracking, positive memories.
  - Teach positive self-talk to students and practice it before you need it. "I can calm myself down. I am a good, loving person.
  - Use music, exercise, movement, stretching.
  - Incorporate more opportunities for humor and laughter into the curriculum. (Laughter reduces the traumatic response in the brain.)
I try to improve Tim’s mood as soon as he walks through the door, I can always get a smile out of Tim using the mood duster!

Secondary Trauma

Trauma Informed Interventions with Trauma Impacted Students

- Help students identify internal and external people and places that are safe.
- Teach students how to ask for help until someone responds.
- Role play accessing additional supports.
- Best friend role play: “What would you tell your best friend to do?”
- Recognize that change happens very slowly.
- Know that you may never see the outcomes of your efforts.
- Trust that our simple compassionate gestures are important elements of healing and surviving.