



TRAUMA-INFORMED TEACHING PRACTICES

Teacher Notes

Understanding someone's suffering is the best gift you can give another person.
Understanding is love's other name. If you don't understand, you can't love.
– Thich Nhat Hahn

TEACHER NOTES

We do not need to know their story to know that they have a story.
We do not need to name specific sufferings to understand that suffering exists.

Educators can take action—we can make intentional changes in our practices to provide a safe and comforting atmosphere in which all children can learn to calm themselves, learn effectively, and experience happiness and a sense of true belonging.

Many of the children who cross the thresholds of our classrooms each day do so with some sort of baggage. It is often invisible to us, yet we can see the effects of its weight on their young shoulders.

Due to privacy laws and policies, there are often extremely difficult elements of any given student's life of which educators are unaware. And families who are not involved with an agency or system may also have personal situations, large and small, that affect a child's sense of safety and optimism.

we can make intentional changes in our practices to provide a safe and comforting atmosphere

Since we cannot and will not know every student's story, we must proceed every day with the sure knowledge that every student has one—and that it will affect their participation in class unless we can to some degree mitigate it through our attitude, our behavior and the climate we build every day. For many children, school is their most constant anchor. Every parent loves their child and struggles to do their best, which for any one of us can fall short of what we hope it to be on any given day.

Everything in this DESSA Strategy Guide aims at building an SEL community of practice in our classroom and school, supporting children who have experienced, and are experiencing, traumatic circumstances by: establishing enjoyable and consistent Routines and Rituals (1); building trusting and mutually supportive (2) student-to-student relationships (3); fostering connections between adults and students, at school and at home; (4), and specific skill building (5) to provide portable tools the students can use in school and in life.

Each lesson and resource provided on this website can help build these classroom elements and specific skills that are good for every child, and are absolutely essential for some. We cannot know what any given child is experiencing outside of our safe space. But we absolutely can help them know, with confidence, what they will experience inside our doors. Using our own self-regulation (6) strategies throughout the day, educators model the qualities we expect for interactions among people in our school community: warmth, empathy, (7), optimism (Opitz Do Over Self Management.mp4), and respect. We live up to our own high standards for how to treat one another, and continually build that habit through reflection and practice, practice, practice.

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Ultimately, the bar we set for ourselves, and those whom we can influence, is to put the humanity of each individual at the forefront of every interaction. Are we kind? Are we open? Are we respectful? Are we explicitly showing our authentic belief that each person is capable and caring, and deserves repeated opportunities to show those attributes?

The lessons connected to this Foundational Practice are all designed with adults as the participants. By increasing our own self-awareness and knowledge about the effects of trauma and related strategies, educators are better prepared to be effective with our most vulnerable students. Many educators come to the profession with a heartfelt mission to help others deal with difficulties that have been all too real in our own personal lives.

It is of utmost importance that we remain alert and aware of any triggers that arise for us while working with traumatized students. Taking care of ourselves (8) is a basic need, before we can effectively take care of others. (9)

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Remaining calm, present and caring with the very students who are sometimes the most difficult to interact with takes strong self-management skills. Students whose life experiences have reinforced for them that adults are not to be trusted or depended on will often respond negatively to the very tactics that work well with many other children—proximity, eye contact, a hand on the shoulder, repeated directions. Remembering not to take personally what may feel like rejection or disrespect, and allowing ourselves a private moment to connect with our deepest sense of compassion may be key to nurturing and sustaining these important relationships.

SUPPORT MATERIALS

1. [Routines and Rituals - Teacher Notes](#):
2. [Peer Coaching - Teacher Notes](#)
3. [Relationship Skills - Table Talk](#)
4. [Self Management - Parent Note](#)
5. [EBP providers](#)
6. [Routines and Rituals - Focusing Mindful Practices](#)
7. [Social Awareness - Teacher Reflection](#)
8. [Self Care for those working with Traumatized Children SEL Article \(pdf\)](#)
9. [Self Care for Teachers Compassion Fatigue \(pdf\)](#)

TRAUMA-INFORMED TEACHING PRACTICES



TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACHES AND ACTION STEPS

Tragically, a child is abused or neglected every 47 seconds in the United States, which amounts to 1,825 children every day (Children’s Defense Fund, 2014). In just one year, 2013, well over one million children received services related to allegations of child abuse and neglect (US DHHS, 2015). In addition to these children, many millions more experience other forms of trauma including natural disasters, loss of their home to fires, and witnessing violence or accidents.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) defines individual trauma as resulting from “an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotional harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being.” (SAMHSA, 2014).

Our classrooms are likely to have multiple students who have experienced trauma that is negatively influencing their behavior, their emotions, and their ability to learn. How we respond to these children can help them cope with and recover from their trauma history, or it can make things worse, in some cases even further traumatizing the student. An educator who raises their voice and uses threatening language can be very frightening to a child who has experienced domestic violence. When teachers and out-of-school time providers are aware that children in our classrooms and programs may have experienced significant trauma it helps us to think carefully about how our behavior is helping or hurting the child.

SAMHSA (2014) has identified six principles (1) that characterize a trauma-informed approach. These principles can be applied to all child-serving environments including schools and out-of-school time programs. The principles, with classroom and out-of-school-time modifications, include:

- Safety. Children must feel physically and psychologically safe (2). The environment must be safe and teacher and staff behavior must create and reinforce a culture of safety.
- Trustworthiness and transparency. Teachers and staff keep their promises, follow the rules, and are open about how and why decisions are made. They focus on building trust (3) with the students and their parents, and with their own peers.
- Peer support. Students can be a significant source of support and encouragement for each other. Classroom and group structures (4) can be instituted that provide thoughtfully designed daily opportunities for students to support each other’s learning and social growth. Although teachers and out-of-school-time staff likely will not create or supervise peer support groups for children who have experienced trauma, student support personnel might.
- Collaboration and mutuality. Teachers and staff understand the importance of relationships (5) with students and the importance of involving students in decision-making whenever appropriate. It is also vital that all of the adults model (6) good collaboration skills and show respect for one another.
- Empowerment, voice and choice. Students’ strengths are recognized, valued and built upon. Opportunities are provided for students to state their values and voice their opinions (7). Students are involved in decision-making and are given the opportunity to make good decisions and wise choices whenever possible. As appropriate, teachers and staff share power with students by involving them in establishing classroom rules,(8) routines and rituals (9).

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- Cultural (10), historical (11) and gender (12) issues. Teachers, staff, and organizations as a whole strive to be aware of stereotypes (13), biases (14) and discrimination (15), based on student characteristics such as race (16), ethnicity (17), gender-identity, (18), religion... Individuals and organizations make concerted efforts (19) to address these issues and create a welcoming environment (20) for all students and staff. Historical trauma (21) and its effects on students and staff are recognized and addressed. Cultural connections and assets are identified, valued, and incorporated into school and out-of-school-time programming.

When schools and out-of-school-time programs make concerted efforts to implement trauma-informed approaches, we can play a significant role in helping children recover and succeed.

SUPPORT MATERIALS

1. [SAMSHA Trauma Informed Practices Report \(pdf\)](#)
2. <http://www.edutopia.org/neuroscience-brain-based-learning-emotional-safety>
3. [Bryck Relational Trust SEL Article](#)
4. [Peer Coaching - Teacher Notes](#)
5. [Building and Sustaining Relationships - Teacher Notes](#)
6. [http://www.cehd.umn.edu/ceed/publications/tipsheets/preschoolbehavior/modeling\(pdf\)](http://www.cehd.umn.edu/ceed/publications/tipsheets/preschoolbehavior/modeling(pdf))
7. [Student Voice - Teacher Notes](#)
8. [Goal-Directed Behaviour - Working Agreements](#)
9. [Routines and Rituals - Teacher Notes](#)
10. <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/making-connections-culturally-responsive-teaching-and-brain-elena-aguilar>
11. <http://www.sharingculture.info/what-is-historical-trauma.html>
12. <http://itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2011/11/list-of-cisgender-privileges/>
13. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/199805/where-bias-begins-the-truth-about-stereotypes>
14. https://www.ted.com/talks/verna_myers_how_to_overcome_our_biases_walk_boldly_toward_them?language=en
15. <http://www.shankerinstitute.org/blog/what-implicit-bias-and-how-might-it-affect-teachers-and-students-part-ii-solutions>
16. <https://www.teachforamerica.org/top-stories/can-we-talk-about-race-young-children>
17. http://www.diffen.com/difference/Ethnicity_vs_Race

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18. <http://booksthathealkids.blogspot.com/search/label/gender%20expression>
19. https://www.ted.com/talks/verna_myers_how_to_overcome_our_biases_walk_boldly_toward_them?language=en
20. <http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2015/04/24/401214280/uncomfortable-conversations-talking-about-race-in-the-classroom>
21. <http://www.historicaltrauma.com/>