

Trauma-Informed Steps That Build Relationships With Students Experiencing Trauma

OVERVIEW

Listen



The ability to understand what is being communicated verbally and nonverbally.

Reassure



The ability to transfer value to the perspectives of vulnerable students.

Validate



The ability to acknowledge what is being communicated by students.

Respond



The ability to communicate an explanation and not a defending statement.

Repair



The ability to repair relationships and establish trust between staff and students and improve peer-to-peer communication.

Resolve



The ability to come to terms with what happened and collaborate to prevent future misunderstandings.

Students' experiences with trauma, their trust issues and past letdowns make healthy communication extremely difficult. Recognizing some of the signs can help you identify children and adolescents who may need assistance and support. These strategies help build trauma-informed learning environments.



More than two thirds of children will experience a potentially traumatic event by the age of 16. Adverse childhood experiences (**ACEs**) can impact a child's cognitive abilities and have a negative effect on their academic performance. Trauma-informed schools have become essential to successfully addressing the broadening spectrum of ACEs. Fostering trauma-informed schools starts with a thoughtful review of all school policies, practices, staff development activities, and school culture issues to ensure that they are grounded in trauma sensitivity. School leaders play a critical role in articulating a commitment to adopting a trauma-informed school and in bringing about any change needed to ensure that all students, especially those affected by trauma, are able to experience social, emotional, and academic success in school. Adapting new policies and procedures will be crucial in your success in becoming a trauma-informed school. All school personnel need to understand trauma and its effects on students. This may require staff surveys, staff training, and other activities and resources to ensure buy-in on this approach in order to build a school wide action plan. Key to success with students will be implementing social and emotional learning tools and strategies for students and staff. Align trauma sensitivity programs with other school programs to increase the program's sustainability. Finally, implement a process for educating others in the future as they join your team including school volunteers.

Listen



Find out your staff's knowledge about trauma-informed strategies and their concerns. Provide training needed to support staff in this work. Develop a feedback loop to keep all staff informed and to encourage ongoing dialogue and exchange of ideas.

Reassure



Create school culture that allows students to be listened to even if the student's narrative may contradict the staff's narrative. Reassuring your students and making them feel their perspective matters is **profoundly healing and comforting**. Provide a safe place and way for students to talk and share; be culturally aware. Building trust in the fairness and integrity of decisions made about student discipline is essential.

Validate



Promote student perspectives. Provide professional development that equips teachers with strategies for validating students. Demonstrating that a student's worth is not contingent on good behavior or grades lets students know you care about them. Look for ways to include student voices in policies that govern students. When students feel safe, they take more risks-- this is how resilience is learned.

Respond



Learning environments that are safe and supportive enable trauma-informed strategies. Resilience building should be **modeled and taught by all staff**. Adopt restorative practices. **Restorative justice helps traumatized students** deescalate. It helps students understand their actions, teaches them healthy communication skills, helps them resolve conflicts in an appropriate manner, and allows students to take responsibility for their actions.

Resolve



Hold frequent staff meetings devoted to **reviewing best practices** for resolving conflict and miscommunication. Support staff development that includes social-emotional learning tools like meditation, breathing exercises, simple yoga poses, and self-awareness techniques to help students avert their negative emotions and behaviors.

Repair



Recognize teachers who demonstrate the most impactful classroom environment and encourage them to share. Share successes with all staff. Engage in routine visits to classrooms to observe how trauma-informed strategies are being implemented. Provide non-judgmental feedback on what is working or needs to be adjusted or modified. Consider a work group to help solve challenges or barriers and guide your trauma-informed work.