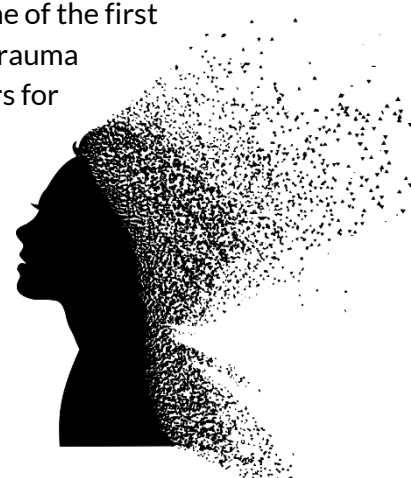


Trauma Informed Teaching – Part One

Mental health professionals are raising concerns about the traumas experienced by children associated with the pandemic. Educators across the country are looking for techniques to help them support their students who have experienced trauma. In response, SELF will provide a weekly series of bite-sized strategies for busy educators.

Trauma refers to an event that threatens the life or integrity of the individual or a loved one, including physical abuse, death of a parent, witnessing domestic violence, abandonment, natural disasters, war, community violence, or medical issues.

The groundbreaking Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study was one of the first and largest studies to demonstrate the relationship between childhood trauma and health outcomes later in life. The study was conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente's Health Appraisal Clinic in San Diego; the study involved more than 17,000 Kaiser patients. The study showed that individuals who have multiple exposures to abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction are at higher risk of developing health problems and dying earlier than their peers who have experienced one adverse experience or none. Further study results also indicate, if individuals have six or more ACEs, their life expectancy decreased by 19 years.



Perspective Taking with Student Interactions

One strategy for addressing trauma in students is to use perspective-taking. Teachers can try to imagine themselves in the child's role and then modify their interactions. For example, teachers can offer students choices rather than directives. Giving choices to students who have experienced trauma provides them a sense of control. In a 2019 study, Minahan refers to a teacher who is successful reducing problematic behaviors in children with trauma. In her classroom, the teacher asked, "Do you want to be in the front of the line or the back of the line?" instead of simply telling her student to "line up." This avoided a power struggle or a triggering event.

When asking her student to do things, she presented a reason first; for example, instead of saying, "No backpacks on the floor," the teacher would say, "Oh dear, I hope I don't fall. I have a bad knee! Could you please move your backpack?" Stating the context of the request first ensured that the student heard and understood the necessity before hearing and negatively reacting to a request from an authority figure.

When addressing behaviors during class, the teacher would write notes on small slips of paper and quietly drop them on his desk without his peers noticing, thus avoiding unwanted attention and shame. She never loomed over him physically or engaged in power struggles. In addition, giving extra time to comply by asking him to "please pick this up before lunch" provided the student with time to decompress and respond in a rational manner (Minahan 2019).



In each of these examples, the teacher practiced perspective taking, imagining the responses of a child who had experienced abuse and trauma, and then modifying her interactions to reduce the chance that her words, actions or proximity would trigger an inappropriate behavior. You can find more resources and tools to address trauma in your school [here](#).

This is part of a series of informative articles from the SELF Team to spread best practices for diverse learners. In 2018, SELF integrated trauma informed teaching into its Leadership Fellowship curriculum. In 2020, SELF took the next step forward and created a teacher centered yearlong training program focused exclusively on trauma informed teaching. This year, SELF partnered with New Schools for New Orleans to create a trauma focused hub for ten schools across New Orleans. If you are interested in learning more about how your leaders, teachers or school may get involved with SELF, contact Jeffrey Rothschild at jrothschild@selfnola.org or by text/call at 504.250.7053.

Sources

Felitti, V.J., Anda, R.F., Nordenberg, D., Williamson, D.F., Spitz, A.M., Edwards, V., Koss, M.P., & Marks, J.S. (1998). Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading cause of deaths in adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 14(4), 245–258.

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<https://resilienteducator.com/classroom-resources/trauma-informed-strategies/>