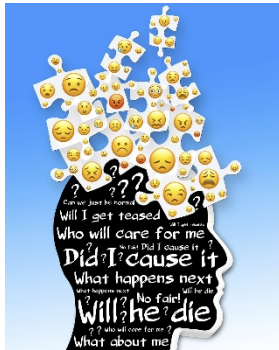


Trauma Informed Teaching – Part Three

No Surprises: Predictability Generates Calm

Providing visual schedules of the class agenda or the school day can go a long way toward keeping students who have experienced trauma calm and focused. Teachers can preview any changes to the normal routine ahead of time, for example, “We have an assembly today, so we will be going to lunch at 11:45” or “The track is being painted, so we will have recess in the gym today.” Knowing about changes in the routine ahead of time elicits calmer responses.



When students are working quietly and independently, in other words, when they are doing what we asked them to do, the teacher’s attention is often unpredictable. Students might go half an hour without any attention from the teacher if they are quietly reading. Because predictability is comforting to students who have experienced trauma and anxiety, they may engage in problematic behaviors because they know how the teacher will respond. For example, students with anxiety or trauma histories may drum on the desk, toss a water bottle or swear, confident that these behaviors will bring the teacher’s attention immediately.

A strategy to counter this asymmetry between attention during independent work and attention for inappropriate behaviors is use of predictable attention. During independent work, teachers often say, “Great job! I’ll be back to check on you,” but the students have no idea when (or often times if) the teacher will return. To make this more predictable and discourage attention-seeking behaviors, teachers can place a timer on the student’s desk and say, “Come and hand me the timer when it goes off.” This can be used in large classes as well, with teachers placing the timer in a desk-group rather than with an individual student.

With older students in middle and high schools, teachers can set up a daily check-in system with students experiencing anxiety and trauma. The first day, the teacher says to the student, “I will check on you during independent reading time at 10:30. If you don’t understand something, you can either ask me or know that I will be by to check-in and answer any questions then.” After that first day, teachers can hand a sticky note with their check-in time to any students with anxiety or trauma. Pairing the negative reaction (I don’t know how to



do this!) with the positive thought (My teacher will be here in 6 minutes!) helps students tolerate the negative feelings because they can predict when the positive interaction is coming. The trick here for teachers is that we must always follow through with the positive interactions so we are recognized as reliable and trustworthy adults. You can find more information and resources [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

<https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/the-two-minute-relationship-builder>

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