Trauma in the Classroom: Helping Hurting Kids Learn

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Learning Objectives

1. Discuss three ways instability and trauma can impact childhood growth and development.
2. Describe how traumatized children learn differently and at least two ways to improve the learning experience for hurting children.
3. Explore ways to apply concepts at the individual/family level as well as to promote systems change.

Agenda

• Overview of Instability & Trauma
• Child Development in the Face of Trauma
  – Behavior
  – Biology
• Strategies for Helping Hurting Kids Learn
  – Whole person approach
  – Emotion regulation
  – Environment
• Trauma-Informed Schools
• Wrap-Up

What is Trauma?

What makes an experience traumatic?

• Involves a threat to one’s physical or emotional well-being.
• Is an overwhelming experience.
• Results in intense feelings of fear and lack of control.
• Leaves people feeling helpless.
• Changes the way a person understands himself/herself, the world, and others.


Adverse Childhood Experiences

Abuse and Neglect
1. Physical abuse (by parents)
2. Emotional abuse (by parents)
3. Sexual abuse (by anyone)
4. Physical neglect
5. Emotional neglect

Indicators of Family Dysfunction
6. Witnessing domestic violence against the mother
7. Mentally ill, depressed, or suicidal person in the home
8. Alcoholism or drug use in the home
9. Loss of biological parent before 18 – indicated by divorce, separation, abandonment
10. Incarceration of any family member

ACE Score:
The number of categories of adverse childhood experience to which a person was exposed

Other Possible Traumatic Experiences

• Chronic bullying
• Homelessness
• Pervasive community violence
• Forced to seek refugee status
• Multiple foster care placements
• Natural disasters
• Live with a parent traumatized by combat
• Others?

Child Development in the Face of Trauma

• Studies of children who are homeless have documented many developmental delays, including:
  – Delays in fine and gross motor skills
  – Difficulties with attention
  – Speech delays
  – Language disabilities
  – Immature peer interactions
  – Cognitive delays


Childhood Trauma & Academic Performance

Trauma can disrupt:

• Language and Communication Skills
  – Learning and retrieving new verbal information
  – Social and emotional communication
  – Problem solving and analysis
• Organizing Narrative Material
• Cause-and-Effect Relationships


Childhood Trauma & Classroom Behavior

Challenging behavior often originates in immense feelings of vulnerability and feeling out of control, and can look like:

• Reactivity and Impulsivity
• Aggression
• Defiance
• Withdrawal
• Perfectionism


More on Teaching Students

Teachers and parents can help diminish trauma symptoms by:

• Helping children regulate emotions in order to master social and academic skills
• Maintaining high academic standards
• Helping children feel safe
• Managing behavior and setting limits


ARC Model

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More on Teaching Students

Teachers and parents can help diminish trauma symptoms by:

• Reducing bullying and harassment
• Helping children have a sense of agency
• Building on strengths
• Understanding the connection between behavior and emotion
• Avoiding labels


Vision for a Trauma-Informed School

In a trauma-informed school, adults:

• share an understanding of how trauma impacts learning and why a school-wide approach is needed for creating a trauma-sensitive school
• support all students to feel safe — physically, socially, emotionally and academically
• address students’ needs in holistic ways, taking into account their relationships, self-regulation, academic competence, and physical and emotional well-being


Program Overview

Services

Birth to 11 years old
Family-focused treatment approach
- Therapy for children and families
- Case management, parent education, & support
- Parenting classes
- Community awareness & education
- Professional collaboration & capacity building

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Questions?

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