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Trauma Sensitive Practices

Understanding Trauma and Engaging Teachers and Students

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Learning Intentions

- Define trauma and identify types of trauma
- Become familiar Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) study and the relationship between ACES and trauma
- Identify the impact of trauma on students and their families
- Understand the importance of relationships for students who have experienced trauma.
- Identify strategies to foster an environment that supports a trauma sensitive classroom



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What is Trauma?

Results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally 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



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What is Trauma?

- Traumatic experiences may occur at any time in a person's life. They may involve a single traumatic event or may be repeated over time.
- Many of our students have experienced multiple traumatic experiences and for some, trauma is a chronic part of their lives.



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Types of Trauma

- Acute Trauma
- Chronic Trauma
- Complex Trauma
- Historical Trauma



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Acute Trauma

- Acute trauma is a single, isolated event
- Examples:
 - Natural disaster
 - Accident
 - Single act of violence
 - Unexpected loss



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Chronic Trauma

- Traumatic experiences that are repeated and prolonged
- Examples:
 - Prolonged family or community violence
 - Long term health issues
 - Repeated incidents of bullying
 - Financial stress



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Complex Trauma

- Exposure to multiple events from an early age, often within the caregiving system or without adequate adult support that has short- and long-term effects in many areas
- Examples:
 - Abuse within caregiving systems
 - Ongoing neglect by caregivers
 - Witnessing or experiencing chronic violence without support



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Historical Trauma

- Collective and cumulative trauma experienced by a group across generations that are still suffering the effects and current experiences of the trauma
- Examples:
 - Systemic oppression of particular groups across generations
 - Discrimination
 - Harassment



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Impact of Trauma

- Trauma in early childhood can have a detrimental effect of the developing brain.
- Brain structures that regulate emotion, memory, and behavior can be smaller in size; decreased integration of brain hemispheres and irregular brain activity correlated with poor emotional control & aggression.
- Abnormally high levels of stress hormones.



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Childhood Trauma

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study
 - Center for Disease Control and Kaiser Permanente (an HMO) Collaboration
 - Over a ten year study involving 17,000 people
 - Looked at effects of adverse childhood experiences (trauma) over the lifespan
 - Largest study ever done on this subject
 - The study continues a number of states



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Adverse Childhood Experiences

- People enrolled in the Kaiser Permanente health plan were asked ten questions related to the following adverse childhood experiences:
 - Physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse
 - Neglect or abandonment
 - Divorce
 - Alcoholism or drug addiction in the family
 - Family violence
 - Poverty, homelessness, lack of food and basic needs
 - Family member in prison
 - Family member with mental illness



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Adverse Childhood Experiences

While you were growing up, during your first 18 years of life:

- Did a parent or other adult in the household often ...
 Scream at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you?
 or
 Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?
 Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
- Did a parent or other adult in the household often ...
 Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you?
 or
 Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?
 Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
- Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever ...
 Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way?
 or
 Try to or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal sex with you?
 Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
- Did you often feel that ...
 No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special?
 or
 Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?
 Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
- Did you often feel that ...
 You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you?
 or
 Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?
 Yes No If yes enter 1 _____

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Adverse Childhood Experiences

- Were your parents ever separated or divorced?
 Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
- Was your mother or stepmother:
 Often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her?
 or
 Sometimes or often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard?
 or
 Ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?
 Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
- Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street drugs?
 Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
- Was a household member depressed or mentally ill or did a household member attempt suicide?
 Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
- Did a household member go to prison?
 Yes No If yes enter 1 _____

Now add up your "Yes" answers: _____ This is your ACE Score

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Adverse Childhood Experiences

Of the 17,000 respondents

- 1 in 4 exposed to 2 categories of ACEs
- 1 in 16 was exposed to 4 categories.
- 22% were sexually abused as children.
- 66% of the women experienced abuse, violence or family strife in childhood.
- Women were 50% more likely than men to have experienced 5 or more ACEs

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Adverse Childhood Experiences

- The impact of trauma over the lifespan are neurological, biological, psychological and social in nature.

They include:

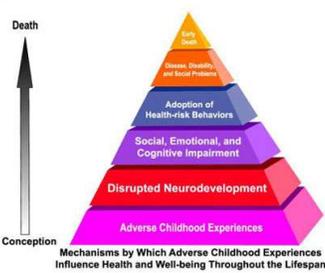
- Changes in brain neurobiology;
- Social, emotional & cognitive impairment;
- Adoption of health risk behaviors as coping mechanisms (eating disorders, smoking, substance abuse, self harm, sexual promiscuity, violence); and
- Severe and persistent behavioral health, health and social problems, early death.



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Adverse Childhood Experiences



Death

Conception

Mechanisms by Which Adverse Childhood Experiences Influence Health and Well-being Throughout the Lifespan



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How do Children React to Trauma

- Every child reacts to trauma differently
- Reaction will depend on:
 - > Developmental level
 - > Premorbid functioning
 - > Previous life experiences
 - > Level of exposure to the trauma
 - > Parental reactions
 - > Subsequent changes in living situation



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Trauma Related Symptoms

Multiple trauma experiences raise the risk for these internalizing symptoms:

- **Depression/Anxiety**
- Social withdrawal
- Feelings of loneliness, guilt, low worth
- Sad, nervous, fearful
- Difficulty concentrating
- Changes in sleeping or eating patterns
- Unexplained physical symptoms, i.e., headaches and stomach aches, not due to a medical condition



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Impact of Trauma

Multiple trauma experiences raise the risk for these externalizing symptoms:

- **Conduct/Oppositional behaviors**
- Physical aggression
- Destruction of property
- Substance use
- Running away from home



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Impact of Trauma

- Traumatic events can effect memory, language development, and writing
- Children may respond apprehensively to people or situations in the school setting
- Trauma response may impact a child's ability to self-regulate emotionally, behaviorally, and may also impact that child's ability to attend
 - This can manifest in withdrawal, inattention, and aggression



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Impact of Trauma

Over time trauma can have impacts in many areas:

- Poor hygiene, appearance
- Deterioration in relationships
- Sleeping/eating
- Academic failure
- Use of drugs or alcohol
- Avoidance of people or places
- Increase in discipline issues
- Absenteeism



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Trauma Affects the Heart of the Whole Child



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Role of Educators

We don't know what kinds of experiences our students have had when they come to school each day, so we need to approach **all** students in a trauma sensitive manner

If we assume that students' challenges in school are not related to trauma, then we miss a great opportunity to help

If we assume trauma may be playing a role, then we begin to pay attention to signs of trauma and ask the right questions

The steps we take to create a safe and trusting environment benefits everyone



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Trauma Sensitive Thinking

- **Think:** lack of skill, **not** intentional misbehavior
- **Think:** building missing skills, **not** shaming for lack of skills
- **Think:** nurture, **not** criticize
- **Think:** teach, **not** blame
- **Think:** discipline, **not** punishment



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Trauma Sensitive Classroom

Three Key Areas:

- Relationships
- Environment
- Classroom Practices



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Relationships

“If children experience stress (trauma) but also have a warm, loving adult to support them, then that child will be able to respond to and recover from even the most difficult of circumstances.”

Melissa Bright, Research Scientist Univ. of Florida



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Relationships

Strategies:

- Commit to greetings
- Learn about the student(s)
- Use student voice
- Appeal to the interest of students
- Have high expectations
- Speak with respect



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Ways to Connect

Daily Connections - brief interaction between student and an adult.
Community Building circles - use a circle format to get to know one another in the classroom, discuss topics, have shared experiences.
Team building activities
One and done - in the first thirty days of school, demonstrate a single act of empathy (do a favor) for a different student each day.



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Ways to Connect

Two by Ten - for ten days in a row, spend two minutes talking to a student about anything except school
Three in Thirty - ask enough questions in the first thirty days to learn three things about each student
Me Bag - have each student and teacher fill a bag with two or three items that represent who you are and then provide an opportunity for everyone to share



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Environment

When creating a trauma-sensitive environment, the ultimate goal is to reduce environmental triggers and create a welcoming space.

- Traffic patterns
- Furniture arrangement
- Materials accessibility



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Environment

- Provides a sense of safety for students.
- Creates frequent opportunities to interact with students to develop, strengthen and maintain relationships.



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Considerations

- Establish a quiet space in the classroom/ school for students to go to when feeling overwhelmed
- Use visual supports when possible
- Have sensory materials available for students
 - stress balls, stuffed animals, pillow, clay, markers, etc.



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Considerations

- Have pictures of pleasant things that students can focus on when they become dysregulated.
- Use warm, neutral colors.
- Pay attention to lighting:
 - fluorescent lighting can act as a stressor for some students.
 - could use dimmable LED lights or natural light.



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Classroom Practices

- Classroom rules are aligned with school-wide expectations
- Classroom rules are observable, measurable, positively stated, clearly defined and prominently posted
- Teacher has a plan and schedule to actively teach classroom rules and expectations several times throughout the year



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Classroom Practices

- Established expectations is important for all students. (Consistency is key!)
- High expectations show the student they are capable and worthy.
- Help students differentiate purposeful rules from unpredictable rules that may occur in other areas of their lives.
- Helps students establish a sense of security.



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Review

Relationships *Unless our students know that we care, they will not learn from us. How will you connect with each student?*

Environment When creating a trauma-sensitive environment, the ultimate goal is to reduce environmental triggers and create a welcoming space. **How will you create a welcoming space?**

Classroom Practices Clearly defined rules, students are taught classroom rules, consistency in routines, and high expectations for our students. **What classroom practices can you incorporate into your daily routine/teaching?**



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VDOE Professional Development Opportunities

- Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports
 - Tier 1 implementation enhancement with a focus on trauma-sensitive practices
- Annual Mental Health in Schools Conference
- Office of Student Services offering regional professional development in collaboration with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS)
- Youth Mental Health First Aid
 - <https://vtss-ric.org/initiatives/youth-mental-health-first-aid/>



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