



Trauma Informed Care in the Classroom

A Resource Guide for Educators in Higher Learning

Purpose: Over the past twenty years, there has been growing knowledge concerning the prevalence and impact of trauma on the lives of people who interact within the human service systems. Institutions, including schools, often perpetuate trauma rather than reduce it leading to experiences of chronic stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue (Harris & Fallot, 2011). Creating academic environments that are trauma informed can have lasting benefits for students, staff, and the community alike. This TIP sheet aims to provide educators with tools that acknowledge the diverse backgrounds of each student that enters their classroom in order to enhance learning opportunities for all.

A Trauma Informed Environment:

Realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery

Recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system

Responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices

Seeks to actively resist *re-traumatization*

SAMHSA, 2012

Principles of Trauma Informed Care in the Classroom

(See reverse page for examples)

Safety:

The classroom activities and settings ensure the physical and emotional safety of its students

Trustworthiness:

The classroom activities and setting maximize trustworthiness by making the classroom tasks clear and consistent by maintaining boundaries that are appropriate to the school

Choice:

The classroom activities and settings maximize student experiences of choice and control

Collaboration:

The classroom activities and settings maximize collaboration and sharing of power between students and staff

Empowerment:

The classroom activities and settings prioritize student empowerment and skill building

"Trauma-informed care is a strengths based framework that is grounded in an understanding of a responsiveness to the impact of trauma, that emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both providers and survivors, and that creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment."

-Hopper, Bassuk, & Olivet, 2010

❖ Safety

- Ensure there is adequate personal space provided for each student
- Make sure that each student knows where to find the bathrooms, drinking fountains, and other important facilities throughout the building
- Problem-solve classroom variables that cannot be controlled (example: lights, temperature, volume of the hallway) so that everyone knows what to expect
- Ensure that exits are clearly marked & easily accessible
- Actively recognize and address historical trauma (interrupt oppression, provide culturally appropriate student support, acknowledge bias, etc.)
- Provide advance-notice when material could be emotionally/psychologically challenging
- Keep secondary trauma in mind when asking students to talk about their personal experiences (example: “what brought you to this field of study?”)
- Provide/encourage students to bring fidget toys such as rubber bands or crayons & paper to aid focus
- Encourage students to take care of themselves during class by standing up, drinking water, stretching, etc.

❖ Trustworthiness

- Be clear, consistent, and transparent about roles, tasks, boundaries, activities, expectations, rationale, student rights, etc.
- Clearly display an agenda that includes break times and stick to it

❖ Choice

- Allow for as much student choice as possible in classroom activities (example: give the choice of writing a paper or creating a presentation)
- Remind students to only share personal information that they want to share

❖ Collaboration

- Create a culture of doing “with” rather than “to” or “for”
- Create community agreements and revisit them throughout the duration of the course
- Provide instructional materials in as many formats as possible (paper, screen, video)
- Create opportunities for shared leadership with students (student lead lectures, facilitation, fishbowls)

❖ Empowerment

- Remind students when a “pass” is an option (ice breakers, reading aloud, classroom discussions, etc.)
- Solicit student feedback and incorporate it into classroom practices
- Ensure classroom content reflects the diversity of the students within in the classroom

References:

1. Fallon, R.D., Harris, M., (2011). Creating Cultures of Trauma Informed Care. Community Connections, Inc.
2. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2012). SAMHSA’s Working Definition of Trauma and Principles and Guidance for a Trauma Informed Approach.
3. Hopper, E. K., Bassuk, E. L., & Olivet, J. (2010). Shelter from the Storm: Trauma-Informed Care in Homelessness Services Settings.



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For more information: www.traumainformedoregon.org

