Beyond the Basics: Creating Trauma-Informed Classrooms

Karen Doyle Buckwalter, MSW, LCSW
Director of Program Strategy, Chaddock

Cory Powell
Director of Education, Chaddock

Training Objectives

1. Assess the prevalence of trauma and insecure attachment in schools and its impact on learning
2. Discuss specific ways to structure safe and secure learning environments
3. Develop trauma-informed IEPs

PART I

The prevalence of trauma and insecure attachment in schools and its impact on learning
Definition of Trauma

Experiencing or witnessing an event in which a person believed his/her life, or someone else’s life, was in danger

Source: www.nctsn.org

Why Should Educators Be Concerned?

• 1 in 4 children attending school has been exposed to a traumatic event that can impact learning and/or behavior.
• Trauma can impact school performance
  • Lower GPA
  • Higher rate of absenteeism
  • Increased drop outs
  • Increased suspensions/expulsions
  • Decreased reading ability

Source: www.nctsn.org

Impact of Trauma on Learning

• Single exposure to trauma may result in:
  • Intrusive thoughts
  • Interrupted sleep/nightmares
  • Anger and moodiness
  • Social withdrawal

• Chronic exposure to trauma may result in:
  • Adverse affects on attention, memory, cognition
  • Reduced ability to focus, organize, and process info
  • Interference with problem solving and/or planning
  • Overwhelming feelings of frustration and anxiety

Source: www.nctsn.org
Impact of Trauma on Physical and Emotional Well-Being

- Physical symptoms include headaches and stomach aches
- Poor emotional regulation
- Inconsistent academic performance
- Unpredictable and impulsive behavior
- Over- or under-reacting to environmental events such as:
  - School bells
  - Sirens
  - Doors Slamming
  - Classroom Lighting
  - Sudden Movements

Source: www.ncltn.org

Impact of Neglect on Brain Development

www.keepkidsafe.org

Emotional Regulation
Multiple Traumas and Impairment/Problems Likely to Undermine Resilience Development

Briggs-King, 2008 NCTSN New Grantee Orientation Meeting

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study

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

Felliti et al., 1998

ACE Impact on Education

- ACE Score of 0
  - 3% display learning/behavior problems

- ACE Score of 4 or more
  - 51% display learning/behavior problems

- ACEs in childhood lead to disparities in cognitive functioning. Literacy skills are impacted as early as kindergarten and on through adulthood.

Typical Classroom

PART II
Structuring Safe and Secure Learning Environments

The Environment
When creating a trauma-sensitive environment, the ultimate goal is to reduce environmental triggers and create a welcoming space. Consider the following:
- Warm, neutral colors
- Dimmable LED lights
- Programmable bells
- Wide hallways
- Natural light
“A welcoming and attractive environment helps not only on a physiological level, but conveys a clear message that those who work in and use the building are valued and respected.”

Children’s Services Practice Notes, v. 21, n. 2, www.practicenotes.org

Safe Spaces

• It is imperative that students have access to safe, structured spaces within the school building.
• Safe spaces should be provided within and outside the classroom.
• These spaces should include:
  – Chairs such as bean bags, couches, rocking chairs
  – Pillows
  – Sensory Toolkits
  – Books
  – Snacks
  – Music

Calm Room

• This room is a safe setting for students in grades K-8. Students may request a break in the calm room or may be sent by their teacher.
Sensory Rooms

Therapeutic Alternative Classroom
• This room replaces the traditional In-School Suspension Room for high school students.
• Students complete academic assignments, process with staff, and work toward objectives established by the clinical staff prior to returning to the classroom.

Social Emotional Groups
• Social-emotional groups are explicit opportunities for staff to model appropriate behaviors.
• Should be regularly scheduled throughout the school week.
• Balance SENC throughout the groups.
Keep in Mind

Structure
- Safety
- Organization
- Regulation

Engagement
- Connection
- Attunement
- Expands positive affect

Nurture
- Regulation
- Secure Base
- Worthiness

Challenge
- Support
- Exploration
- Growth & Mastery
- Competence & Confidence

Social Emotional Groups – Middle/High School

Social Emotional Groups - Elementary
Social Emotional Groups - Elementary

Mindfulness
- Paying attention in a particular way
- Being able to hover calmly and objectively over our thoughts, feelings, and emotions

Kabat-Zinn, 1994

Mindfulness

Meditation
Positive Affirmations

Environmental Assessment

• This tool can be used to measure observable evidence of trauma-informed practices in settings throughout the school building.
PART III

Trauma-Informed IEPs

Trauma and the Individualized Education Plan

• Trauma is not currently considered an eligibility domain for special education.
• Students with a trauma history are most likely to be labeled with an emotional disorder. What are the implications?

Trauma-Focused IEPs

Should trauma be added as a subcategory for emotional disorder?

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<tr>
<th>PROS</th>
<th>CONS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Trauma-sensitive goals and accommodations would be specific to the child’s needs.</td>
<td>Possible over-identification of students with emotional disorder who do not necessarily qualify</td>
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<td>May lead to an increase in trauma awareness in schools</td>
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<td>Trauma training for parents as a related service</td>
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Hofstra Law Review, 2015
Present Levels
Trauma can be recognized in the Present Levels of Performance by incorporating the following:
- Social history and psychological evaluations that address the trauma or attachment history of the student
- Adverse Childhood Experiences Scale

Let’s Compare!
Review the two IEPs. One is written from a trauma-informed perspective while the other focuses on traditional measures. Both represent the same student.
- Do these two narratives seem to represent the same student?
- How might these two narratives lead to different sets of goals and accommodations?

Thank You!
FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Karen Doyle Buckwalter, MSW, LCSW
kbuckwalter@chaddock.org
Cory Powell
cpowell@chaddock.org