



Trauma

WHAT TEACHERS NEED TO KNOW

Trauma is an exceptional experience in which powerful and dangerous events overwhelm a person's capacity to cope (Rice and Groves, 2015). Every person has a different capacity to cope, so each person will be affected differently by trauma. Examples of trauma include: separation from a parent/caregiver, domestic violence, abuse, neglect, homelessness, and mental illness or substance abuse of parent. As trauma most often occurs within the context of a relationship, the person's ability to form and maintain relationships is usually impaired.

Signs/Symptoms of Trauma in the Classroom:

- Excessive anger
- Unusual startle reactions
- Extreme Fatigue
- Physical or verbal aggression
- Regular tardiness or absence from class
- Perfectionistic, controlling, or anxious behavior
- Difficulty concentrating
- Frequent headaches or stomachaches
- Low self confidence
- Irritability
- Clinginess
- Self-harm or suicidal ideation
- Risky behaviors (including drug or alcohol abuse or sexual acting out)
- Panic attacks
- Extreme self-reliance
- Defiance
- Social isolation/trouble making friends

Classroom Tips

1. **Create a safe space:** ALL students thrive when the classroom is a space that is physically and emotionally safe, but that is doubly true for student with a history of trauma. Let the student know, they are not alone.
2. **Establish predictability:** Dealing with unknowns usually provokes fear in students who have experienced trauma. Creating routines and structures that provide an environment of consistency allows students to know what to expect.
3. **Build trust:** Forming trusting relationships with students is vital. Let them know that they can count on you. You can do this by communicating expectations clearly and following through on consequences.
4. **Offer choices:** The student did not have control over the trauma, and it makes being out of control scary. By offering choices, you increase the student's feeling of control which can decrease their trauma response.



5. **Stay regulated:** Students who have experienced trauma are very sensitive to adults' stress levels, facial expressions, tone of voice, etc. Seeing that you are stressed will often trigger a stress response in the student. If you maintain a regulated tone and energy, the student will often match you.

Feeling overwhelmed? Here are some coping skills for you!

- Take deep, slow breaths
- Connect with loved ones
- Practice self-compassion/self-love
- Don't try to manage this alone. Get support!!!

Additional Resources:

- [This is your students brain on trauma](#)
- [Safe Shores: Recognizing Abuse](#)
- [Wendt Center: Trauma Types](#)