

TEACHER INFORMATION SHEET

TRAUMA INFORMED TEACHING/PRACTICE

TRAUMA DEFINITION

The experiences that cause intense physical and psychological stress reactions. It can refer to a single event, multiple events, or a set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically and emotionally harmful or threatening and that has long lasting adverse effects on the individual's physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.

WHAT IS TRAUMA INFORMED TEACHING/PRACTICE?

A trauma-informed approach is one that realizes the impact of trauma, recognises the symptoms of trauma, and responds by integrating knowledge about trauma policies and practices and seeks to reduce re-traumatisation. Key concepts that need to be addressed include safety, trust, peer support, collaboration, empowerment, and understanding of cultural, historical, and gender issues.

Trauma-informed teaching/practice is not a curriculum or set of prescribed strategies, but rather it is a lens through which teachers/adults can choose to view children which will help them build better relationships, prevent conflict, and teach or engage with them effectively. Every child has a different capacity to cope, so it is important to acknowledge each child's reactions and interpretations.

EFFECTS OF TRAUMA ON THE BRAIN AND DEVELOPMENT AND BEHAVIOUR

- Neuroscientists studying the impact of trauma on brain development have determined that these experiences actually alter brain structure – “When a child is threatened, various neurophysiological and neuroendocrine responses are initiated. If they persist, there will be ‘use-dependent’ alterations in the vital neural systems involved in the stress response.” (Walkley & Cox, 2013).
- Hypervigilance – “Fight, flight, or freeze” is a common state of many trauma-affected children. These quickly over-stimulated children have difficulty with emotional self-regulation and may struggle to put feelings into words. (Perry, 2000.)

RECOGNISING TRAUMA IN CHILDREN

Some of the symptoms of trauma in children (and adults) closely mimic depression, including too much or too little sleep, loss of appetite or overeating, unexplained irritability and anger, and problems focusing on projects, school work, and conversation. The symptoms may appear more like an anxiety disorder and can involve obsessive or pervasive worry and difficulty separating from parents.

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CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF TRAUMA-INFORMED TEACHING AND PRACTICE

- It is a whole-school/group approach – a child, in order to feel safe needs to know that they can approach a trusted adult/classroom teacher, specialist, principal, teacher's aide, wellbeing support, or instructor, and receive the same response.
- Assume complexity, approach with empathy.
- Commit to building trust and relationships. For children and families living with prior and ongoing trauma, each day can bring a new struggle, and the school/organization can provide a sanctuary.
- Connect with the whole family if at all possible.
- Behaviour is a symptom of the problem, not the problem. This is not to say that violence or breaches of safety do not incur serious consequences, but that the consequences include a depth of investigation and a great deal of support.
- Support children to build the skills that are a struggle for them – include them in the process.
- Connect with appropriate professional agencies.

TRAUMA-INFORMED TASKS FOR ADULTS

There are five tasks: Remain "Calm," be "Attuned," stay "Present," be "Predictable," and "Do not let children's emotions escalate your own." (CAPPD) (Perry, 2009).

"Be kind, everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle."

– Plato

REFERENCES

The Good teaching, trauma-informed practice

<https://documentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/Good-Teaching-Trauma-Informed-Practice.pdf>

Resilience, rights and respectful relationships

<https://arc.educationapps.vic.gov.au/learning/resource/2JZX4R?fuse=1>

Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010– Safeguarding Children Program provides a five-tenet outline for practice with traumatized students.

<https://professionals.childhood.org.au/resources/>