

Trauma Sensitive Approaches for Home & School

Video 2 Fact Sheet: Responding to Trauma

How Trauma Impacts Learning

Children and youth who have experienced trauma are often preoccupied with their physical, emotional and psychological safety. They may also have deficits in processing social cues and identifying their feelings in socially appropriate ways. Trauma can limit a child's ability to:

- Complete tasks
- Organize, understand, and remember information
- Concentrate and sustain attention
- Manage attention, emotions, and behavior
- Shift and transition to new activities and demands

Look Behind the Behaviors

Often adults observe confusing and concerning behaviors in children and youth who have experienced trauma or traumatic stress. These behaviors may not seem logical or proportional to the situation. It is really important to consider the function of the behaviors.

Ask: What is the child trying to gain or avoid? What is the underlying need? Your response matters!

ARC Framework for Addressing Trauma Impact *1

- Attachment: Building a trusting relationship between a child or youth and caring adult
- Self-Regulation: Identifying emotions and learning how to express and cope with them
- Competency: Strengthening resilience by building skills to help children and youth cope with trauma and change

Building Connections Prevents Problems

When presented with challenging tasks and transition, a child or youth may respond with disruptive, disrespectful or disengaged behaviors. A child's trauma history may interfere with his or her ability to meet expectations at home and school, and create obstacles in relationship development.

Creating a strong relationship of trust and respect can ease anxieties, convey a sense of safety and prevent small concerns from turning into big behavior problems. Adults can take simple actions to build attachments, strengthen relationships, and prevent problems:

- Make positive and specific acknowledgement
- Use active listening and reciprocity in conversation
- Follow through with your word and promises
- Establish clear and reasonable expectations and consequences
- Apply a compassionate understanding of a child's strengths and deficits

Fostering Self Regulation *2

Children learn to cope with the challenges of life by practicing the skill of self-regulation through failures and successes. Students need guidance in learning how to regulate emotions and behaviors, and opportunities for practicing self-regulation. Adults can support development of self-regulation skills over time:

- Use affective statement (for example, using “I” messages) to identify the cause and effect relationship between their actions and the impact on their relationships with others.
- Focus on consistency and reciprocity to help build strong relationships.
- Assist children and youth in learning to identify their emotions and manage their behaviors.
- Teach strategies for coping with stress and strong emotions.
- Partner with children and youth to solve behavioral issues.
- Listening to their ideas helps them feel empowered.
- Watch for your own triggers!
- Empower children and youth to develop resiliency; increase opportunities for choice and building decision making skills.

Strategies

- Look at the need behind the behavior
- The approach must be clear, consistent, reinforced, and promote a sense of safety
- Focusing on relationships is essential
- Listening to students builds relationships
- Naming emotions helps in understanding and managing them

When a child's behavior is saying "I won't," he or she may mean "I can't."

*1 Cite: Blaustein & Kinniburgh

*2 Resources: Childmind.org; ARCframework.org

Videos are available at www.FormedFamiliesForward.org.