Managing the Effects of Childhood Trauma at your School
The Role of Mental Health Professionals in Trauma-Sensitive School Settings
What is Trauma?

- Exposure to a highly stressful event or events
- Characterized by unpredictable behavior
- Threatens physical and mental well-being
- Brings up feelings of extreme fear and helplessness
- Overwhelms a person’s capacity to cope
The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACE Study) 1995-1997
### What is the ACE's Trauma Definition?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABUSE</th>
<th>NEGLECT</th>
<th>HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Mental Illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Incarcerated Relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mother treated violently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Substance Abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Divorce</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Credit: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
(Beyond ACES)

More Sources of Trauma

- Exposure to community violence
- Exposure to violent and explicit media
- Bullying
- Prolonged exposure to traumatic stress
- Secondary PTSD
- Intrauterine stress
- Epigenetics
Washington State determined that 13 out of every 30 students in a classroom will have toxic stress from 3 or more traumatic experiences. Those children are likely to be more “unruly”, more “unmotivated” or more absent than the others.


From Stevens, 2012
How to use the ACES information in the schools

Questionnaire Screeners
Role of School Psychologists in Supporting Trauma-Sensitive Schools

School psychologists are uniquely trained to deliver high-quality, evidence-based mental and behavioral health services in schools to ensure that all students have the support they need to thrive. Specifically, school psychologists:

1. Provide comprehensive mental and behavioral health services to all students
2. Develop comprehensive data collection and management plans to help coordinate service delivery
3. Consult with other educators on strategies and interventions for reducing barriers to learning
4. Work with administrators to implement school-wide mental and behavioral health programs
5. Promote school policies and practices that ensure positive and safe learning environments for all students
6. Provide ongoing professional development regarding trauma informed practices
7. Educate families about the impact of toxic stress, adversity, and trauma

Trauma-Sensitive Schools, 2016
1. Provide comprehensive mental and behavioral health services to ALL students
Provide comprehensive mental and behavioral health services to ALL students

School-wide Systems/approaches

- PBIS: Positive Behavior Intervention Supports
- Unconditional Education (Seneca): Shifting to a Trauma-informed view.

Multi-tiered Systems of Support

1- All
2-Some : selected 10-20%
3-Intensive: high risk 3-5%
PBIS: Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports

PBIS is a systems approach to create and maintain a positive school climate.

PBIS is an evidenced-based, data-driven framework that focuses on modeling, teaching, and recognizing positive, safe, and appropriate behaviors.

PBIS makes schools more predictable, consistent, positive, and safe for all staff and students.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMMON/TRADITIONAL VIEW</th>
<th>TRAUMA-INFORMED VIEW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students choose behavior and need consequences</td>
<td>Students want to do well but lack the skills or have learned bad behavior patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characterizes student behavior negatively (i.e. manipulative)</td>
<td>Characterizes student behavior constructively (i.e. needs calming strategies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses labels to describe students (&quot;EBD&quot;)</td>
<td>Reframes behavior to identify strengths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian</td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimizes coping strategies</td>
<td>Behavior is communication and serves a function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics focused</td>
<td>Whole-student focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student should already know the expectations</td>
<td>Teaches and re-teaches expectations using differentiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates systems that make students work for support</td>
<td>All students receive support regardless of their needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff-centered environment</td>
<td>Student-centered environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses jargon with parents and non-educators</td>
<td>Uses language so that all can understand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Trauma and Core Beliefs:

- Core beliefs are the thoughts and assumptions we hold about ourselves, others, and the world around us. They are deep-seated beliefs which often go unrecognised and yet they constantly affect our lives.

- A traumatic childhood or traumatic event can have a very adverse effect on Core beliefs and in turn the way that we behave and interact with the world.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Healthy Core Beliefs</th>
<th>Negative Core Beliefs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I am loved</td>
<td>- I am unlovable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I can trust others</td>
<td>- People will hurt/reject/leave me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I am worthy</td>
<td>- I am worthless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I am capable</td>
<td>- I am a failure/incompetent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Adults keep me safe</td>
<td>- The world is unsafe/scary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Develop comprehensive data collection and management plans to help coordinate service delivery

- Behavior charts
- BIP’s/Crisis Plans
- Contracts
- Pre and Post measures in small groups, etc. and PBIS reporting
- IEP tracking of goals
- Behavior data in assessments
What Behaviors?
To collect data on

Some get a lot of attention.
Some go under the radar.

Van der Volk, (2015)

Executive Function & Self-Regulation, (2017)

Hypervigilance
Numbness (Dissociation)
Unusual Triggers
Somatization
Lessened Executive Functioning
Lowered Sensory Awareness
Limited Language to Express Feelings

Finding Relief in:
- Cutting, Picking, Biting on skin
- Substance abuse
- Problems with food, sexual behavior
Identifying Trauma?

Identify problem behaviors typically associated with trauma and collect data.

Gabriella Grant, Director of California Center of Excellence for Trauma-Informed Care—“Stop thoroughly screening for trauma and start thoroughly screening for safety.” Grant, G. (2016, April 6). Personal Interview.

A Recovery Bill of Rights for Trauma Survivors by Thomas V. Maguire

Observe, Observe, Observe

Use observations to support behavior hypotheses and strengthen eligibility decisions.
Measuring Improvement

Progress Monitoring
Looking at the big picture.

Daily behavior data improvement
Post-measure data better than pre-measure data
Executive functioning and emotional regulation goals are met.
Parent, Teacher, Student reported scores are improved on BASC, Conners, BRIEF
Student attitudes concerning sense of belonging and safety at school per student, teacher, parent interview.
Improved working memory scores
Expressive language concerning feelings is improved.
Grades are improved.
Less restlessness, more on-task behaviors per observation. Less needs for breaks, etc.
# Emotional-Regulation Goal Example

*(Please Use and Improve)*

## Self-Regulation for On-task Behavior
*(Using I-statements about executive functioning and coping skills)*

**Staff Instructions:**
1. When the student displays an off-task behavior, prompt the student to objectively state what is happening, e.g. “I am not starting work after recess,” or “I am restless and unfocused,” “The class has been doing an assignment for 30 minutes, but I have not yet begun.” Record the sentence, if possible.
2. Prompt the student to choose an I-statement from the Executive Function I-statement list that matches the situation. Have the student record the number in the appropriate box.
3. Prompt the student to choose a coping skill from the Coping Skill List. Have the student record the letter in the appropriate box.
4. Prompt the student to do the coping skill (if necessary), then prompt him/her to attempt to begin the task again (if necessary).
5. Acknowledge/reward the student for beginning and maintaining on-task behavior.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Situation</th>
<th>Possible Solutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **1** My attention is not strong right now (inattentive) | a. I will take a stretch break  
  b. I will use a cardboard “office”  
  c. I will chew gum |
| **2** I don’t remember all the instructions that were given (working memory) | a. When it is an appropriate time, I will ask the teacher or a friend to repeat the instructions.  
  b. I will look to see if the instructions are written down in the assignment. If not, I will ask the teacher for a written copy.  
  c. I will create routines/checklists for repetitive tasks. |
| **3** Something besides the assignment is catching my attention (distraction) | a. I will use self-talk “I will finish what I am doing then I can take a break.”  
  b. When I catch my mind wandering, I will concentrate on my breath and refocus.  
  c. I will use a cardboard “office” |
| **4** I am acting quickly without fully thinking the situation through (impulsivity) | a. I will give myself a “stop” signal, then concentrate on my breath and refocus.  
  b. I will take a stretch break  
  c. I will estimate how long a task will take, set a timer and stay with the task until the timer rings. |
| **5** I feel _______ (name emotion) and I am not very motivated to work. (emotional control/self-regulation) | a. I will stop, name my feeling and tell myself to “calm down.”  
  b. I will make a list of 5 things that I am grateful for  
  c. I will take a stretch break |
| **6** I don’t see where I need to start. (initiation) | a. I will make a sketch of the “big picture” of the assignment.  
  b. I will look at a classmate to see how they began the task.  
  c. I will use a sequential organizer or priority ladder. |
| **7** I am having trouble beginning the next activity. (flexibility) | a. Throughout the day, I will check the teacher’s written schedule to anticipate the next activity.  
  b. When I am finished one activity, I will take the time to reset my materials in preparation for the next activity.  
  c. I will watch the other students and do what they are doing. |
| **8** I don’t see how I can do all the work I am supposed to do. (prioritizing) | a. I will use a sequential organizer or priority ladder.  
  b. I will estimate how much time that a task will take, then time myself doing it. Then I will know how much time I need to do certain tasks.  
  c. I will create routines/checklists for repetitive tasks then schedule them into my days. |
| **9** I don’t have the things I need to do the assignment. (organization) | a. I will use a checklist of things I need to do an assignment  
  b. I will keep things in the same place in my backpack and my desk so I can find them.  
  c. After I have tried to find the things I need, I will ask for help. |
### Sample Crisis Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Circumstance</th>
<th>Who AR talks to</th>
<th>Staff’s Immediate Response</th>
<th>Action Step</th>
<th>When?</th>
<th>How Long?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AR feels agitated/restless/angry, etc.</td>
<td>His gen ed teachers</td>
<td>Talk to the person supervising AR at the time.</td>
<td>Give AR a 2-min. movement break (or a drawing break)</td>
<td>As soon as is practical.</td>
<td>2 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR feels disturbed about something—wants to talk about it.</td>
<td>Any of the following</td>
<td>Call Ms. B, Mr. T or Mr. Z or one of the 3 trusted people</td>
<td>Set up a time for AR to speak to one of the 3 trusted people.</td>
<td>Sometime during the school day or immediately after school (let mom know if is after school)</td>
<td>Approximately 10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR feels an urge to cut or pick to the point of bleeding at school</td>
<td>Any of the following</td>
<td>Call Ms. B, Mr. T, Mr. Z, Mr. J and/or the one of the 3 trusted people</td>
<td>Arrange for AR to have quiet time away to draw, do origami or other craft with hands.</td>
<td>ASAP</td>
<td>For about 10 minutes, then reevaluate. Repeat the 10 minutes, if necessary. (Use judgement to determine if class escape is the motive.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR has suicidal thoughts</td>
<td>Any staff member</td>
<td>Suicide Assessment</td>
<td>ASAP</td>
<td>Time varies with each case</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Consult with other educators on strategies and interventions for reducing barriers to learning.
Educate teachers and staff
Ways to build safe classroom communities

- Allow for whole class **rhythmic breaks** throughout day
- Give students **choices** and sense of control
- Write agenda on board
- Let students know of upcoming changes in schedule
- Classroom environment—can I reduce sensory input?
- Provide **safe place** to calm down
- Allow for time to just be **one-on-one** with student and connect
- Give more time, shorten assignments, homework?
- Teach, practice, model classroom and school-wide **rules** and why they’re **important**
- Model/teach **social/emotional** skills
Encourage staff to watch out for secondary trauma or compassion fatigue

- Processing thoughts and feelings with colleagues
- Self care
  - Eating well
  - Exercise
  - Sleep
  - Engaging in favorite or enjoyable activities
  - Taking breaks throughout the day

http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/CTTE_SelfCare.pdf
4. Work with administrators to implement school-wide mental and behavioral health programs

- Administration- buy in
- PBIS Meetings
- COST Meetings
- Shifting staff mentality
Identifying At-Risk Students

Administration buy-in: Raise awareness and educate key players on effects of trauma: school principals, special education directors, mental health directors, school board

Teacher Support Team meetings

Student Success Team meetings

PBIS meetings

- Meetings need to be held regularly (weekly/bi-weekly) to discuss students and their needs
- PBIS framework can help change assumptions about a student
  - Behavior tells us something
  - “Students do well if they can”- Dr. Ross Greene

Identifying skill deficits
"Being able to feel safe with other people is probably the single most important aspect of mental health; safe connections are fundamental to meaningful and satisfying lives."

Bessel Van der Kolk
5. Promote school policies and practices that ensure positive and safe learning environments for all students.

Teach, model, promote desired safe and appropriate behaviors. Consistency is key.

- Clearly defined and visible behavior expectations. Consistent across school. (PBIS)
- School Wide-Social-emotional lessons/curriculum (Second Step)
- Safe classrooms

Staff is Trauma-informed.
Trauma-informed policies and practices

School discipline policies are trauma-informed when they:

- Balance accountability with an understanding of traumatic behavior;
- Teach students the school and classroom rules while reinforcing that school is not a violent place and abusive discipline (which students who have experienced trauma may be accustomed to) is not allowed at school;
- Minimize disruptions to education with an emphasis on positive behavioral supports and behavioral intervention plans;
- Create consistent rules and consequences;
- Model respectful, nonviolent relationships.

Communication procedures and protocols are trauma-informed when they:

- Respect confidentiality;
- Involve open communication and relationship-building with families;
- Ensure ongoing monitoring of new policies, practices and training.
Tiered Interventions: Tier 1 & Tier 2

Tier 1: Whole class access to social emotional learning and strategies

- Second Step / Love and Logic
- Mindfulness
- Classwide movement breaks
- Sensory opportunities in class

Tier 2: Match student needs to targeted intervention

- Self-regulation small groups (yoga, Zones of Regulation, mindfulness)
- Trauma sensitive small groups
- Help student foster relationships with safe people (Check in/ check out, connecting with a peer mentor, being a helper at school)

Progress monitor interventions weekly to make sure that student is making progress!
# Positive Behavior Expectations

## Catch a Wave at PV!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Behavior</th>
<th>Classroom</th>
<th>Cafeteria</th>
<th>Bus</th>
<th>Hallway</th>
<th>Playground</th>
<th>Bathroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Respectful</strong></td>
<td>Use kind words and actions&lt;br&gt;Raise your hand&lt;br&gt;Inside voice</td>
<td>Use your manners&lt;br&gt;Recognize others’ space&lt;br&gt;Inside voice</td>
<td>Hands to self&lt;br&gt;Be aware of personal space&lt;br&gt;Inside voice</td>
<td>Stay to the right&lt;br&gt;Quiet Zone!&lt;br&gt;Appreciate hallway displays</td>
<td>Hands to self&lt;br&gt;Take turns&lt;br&gt;Use kind words and actions</td>
<td>Value Privacy&lt;br&gt;Value Property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsible</strong></td>
<td>Take care of all learning materials&lt;br&gt;Do your best work alone and in groups&lt;br&gt;Be organized</td>
<td>Eat only your own food&lt;br&gt;Clean your space/personal trash</td>
<td>Be on time&lt;br&gt;Backs against the seat&lt;br&gt;Backpack on lap</td>
<td>Hands to self&lt;br&gt;Walking safely</td>
<td>Play safely&lt;br&gt;Stay in designated area&lt;br&gt;Return playground equipment</td>
<td>Flush properly&lt;br&gt;Wash your hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ready-to-Learn</strong></td>
<td>Eyes and ears on designated speaker&lt;br&gt;Sit safely&lt;br&gt;Ask for help when needed&lt;br&gt;Complete all class work and homework on time</td>
<td>Listen for directions&lt;br&gt;Sit safely&lt;br&gt;Raise hand&lt;br&gt;Line up quietly</td>
<td>Stay seated&lt;br&gt;Listen carefully</td>
<td>Be on time</td>
<td>Have a plan&lt;br&gt;Listen to adults in charge&lt;br&gt;Quick and quiet lines</td>
<td>Return Promptly&lt;br&gt;Quiet Zone!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social-Emotional Curriculum

Social-emotional education for all students.

- Part of curriculum at all grade levels.
- Teaches social skills, skills for learning emotional regulation, Problem solving skills
- Builds positive and safe school culture
Tiered Interventions: Tier 3

Tier 3: Intensive Intervention

- Individual interventions to teach students emotional regulation, coping, stress management, and problem-solving strategies (Counseling, in-class strategies)
- Behavior Intervention Plans for specific students
- Wrap-around services and interventions that involve multidisciplinary teams from the school, mental health, the family and other systems (e.g., child welfare, juvenile justice), as appropriate
- Intensive case management
- IEPs & 504 plans for students with identified disabilities
- Parent/caregiver training and support to help adults understand how to effectively parent the child.
6. Provide ongoing professional development regarding trauma informed practices

- Staff Professional Development Days–Mental Health presentations
- Staff meeting presentations and resources
- Aide training
- Sell the idea to present! To directors, admin, etc.
- Stay up-to-date with training and collaboration.
Providing Executive Function/Self-Regulation Academic Resources

Teachers get behind this!

- 10-15 minute presentations at school staff meetings
- Whole class social skills and *EF in the classroom* lessons

**EF in the Classroom Lessons**

- Executive functioning shared resource file

(For link: send email to ltanner@loomis-USD.k12.ca.us)

Results can be measured in the gradebooks!
Train the Aides

And the secretaries, custodians, lunch workers, etc.

Teach trauma-informed skills:

- Behavior/de-escalation techniques
- Data collection
- Accurate reporting of behavior
- Using crisis plans and BIP’s

Recruit:

- Enlist mentors, service opportunities.
- Scout for staff willing to teach whole class social skills lessons.
7. Educate families about the impact of toxic stress, adversity, and trauma.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Strengths</th>
<th>Trauma History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e.g. Likes showing new students around the school</td>
<td>e.g. Witnessed domestic violence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviors: Describe the student’s observable behaviors</th>
<th>Our stuff: What thoughts, feelings and assumptions do these behaviors bring up for YOU?</th>
<th>Invitations: How is the child inviting you to respond? What does it seem like he/she wants you to do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e.g. Physically aggressive with peers and adults (hits, pushes, kicks)</td>
<td>e.g. This student takes up too much time and energy.</td>
<td>e.g. Student is inviting me to avoid and ignore him.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Working Model Hypothesis: Use first person to describe the student’s core beliefs about themselves, relationships and their world</th>
<th>Disconfirming Stance: What approach can we take to correct unhelpful beliefs about themselves, relationships or their world?</th>
<th>Intervention Strategies: What specific strategies can you use in your classroom to disconfirm unhelpful beliefs?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e.g. I have to be in control in order to feel safe. e.g. No one likes me.</td>
<td>e.g. Adults are here to keep you safe.</td>
<td>e.g. Create a calm corner in the classroom (student is still welcome in the classroom even when feeling upset)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e.g. We like you.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More information on Seneca’s trauma-informed approach to care and the Internal Working Model can be found in the book Unconditional Care: Relationship-Based, Behavioral Intervention with Vulnerable Children by John S. Sprinson and Ken Berrick.
Levi is a 5th grade boy. He was recently removed from his home and placed in foster care. His Mother is addicted to prescription painkillers and Levi had been physically abused by his Mother’s boyfriend on several occasions.

This morning, when he arrived at school, his teacher asked him for his homework and Levi did not have it. She expressed frustration and took away his recess as a consequence. A short time later, his desk-mate accidentally bumped Levi. Levi punched him in the stomach. His teacher, upset by this outburst, began to yell at Levi to stop. Levi began to scream, kick chairs and hide under his desk. After 10 minutes of trying to get Levi out from under the desk, he was brought to the principal’s office and given a five day suspension for fighting and disruptive behavior.
REFERENCES


