Trauma Sensitive Practices for School Psychologists

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Objectives

Discuss symptoms of trauma and how trauma affects behaviors and learning.

Provide tips on how school psychologists can support children with histories of trauma.
Prevalence

- 67% of adults have had at least 1 adverse childhood experience, 20% have had 2+
- 33% have experienced domestic violence
- 25% have experienced physical abuse or grew up with alcoholic relatives
- 20% have experienced sexual molestation
Examples of Traumatic Events

- Natural disasters
- Emotional, physical, sexual abuse or assault
- Abandonment, betrayal of trust, neglect
- Serious accident/illness or medical procedure
- Acts or threats of terrorism
- Bullying

- Witnessing or victim of Community Violence
- Domestic Violence
- Interpersonal Violence
- Incarceration or deportation of family
- Trauma occurring to a close family member or friend
Trauma & Cultural Sensitivity

Refers to sensitivity to culture & trauma

- When cultural, racial, & economic challenges are repetitive & unresolved, it can create pain, distress, & powerlessness

- Contributes to disparities in educational achievement, health, criminal justice involvement, & employment
Types of Trauma

**Acute trauma:** Results from a single, sudden, usually unexpected event

**Chronic trauma:** Arises from long-standing, repeated events, such as neglect, sexual or physical abuse, or domestic violence

**Complex trauma:** Cumulative trauma involving the simultaneous or sequential occurring traumatic experiences that are chronic and begin in early childhood.
According to DSM 5, PTSD is defined as:

- Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence
- Intrusive symptoms
- Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the traumatic event(s)
- Negative alterations in cognitions and mood
- Marked alterations in arousal and reactivity
The Triune Brain

- **Neocortex** - Thought (including planning, language, logic & will, awareness)
- **Limbic System** - Emotion (feelings, relationship/nurturing, images and dreams, play)
- **Reptilian Brain** - Instinct (survival, breathing/swallowing/heartbeat, startle response)

Three Brains in One
Movement Break

**Energy up**: Do what your body needs and stretch, sashay, or do-si-do around the table & high 5 at least one person outside your table.

**Energy down**: Mindfully walk, slowly, & with full attention to your breath around the table.
Impact of Trauma

- Experience challenges with self-regulation
- Expect bad things will happen
- Have difficulty relating to others
- Lack a positive sense of self
- Have a need for integration
Impact of Trauma on Learning

- Decreased reading ability
- Lower GPA
- More suspensions & expulsions
- Higher rate of school absences
- Increased dropout rates
Observed Symptoms of Trauma

Changes in behavior
  activity level
  attention
  withdrawal
angry outbursts
difficulty interpreting & responding to social cues

Worried about safety
Clingy
Increased somatic complaints
Over or underreacting to sound, physical contact, lighting, & movements
Difficulty with authority, direction, or criticism
Numbing
Observed Triggered Behaviors

**Fight**: Physiological arousal
- Aggression
- Irritability/anger
- Trouble concentrating
- Hyperactivity/"silliness"

**Flight**: Withdrawal & Escape
- Social isolation
- Avoidance of others
- Running Away

**Freeze**: Stilling and Constriction
- Constricted emotional expression
- Stilling of behavior
- Overcompliance & denial of needs
- Disassociation
Healing

does not mean the damage never existed. It means the damage no longer controls our lives.

Daily Dose
Resilience & Hope

Neural plasticity: the ability of the brain to adapt and change in response to experience.

If environment is safe, the toxic stress can stop, and practices that build resilience are adopted, the brain can repair itself.

Mindfulness practices, exercise, good nutrition, adequate sleep, and healthy social interactions helps.
Trauma Sensitive Components

1. Ongoing school-wide trauma sensitive trainings.
   
a. Recognize and understand symptoms of trauma & respond appropriately.

b. Develop a safe, predictable, and bias-free school.

c. Build students’ self-regulation and social-emotional learning skills.
Trauma Sensitive Components

2. Incorporate restorative practices to strengthen healthy relationships and resolve conflicts peacefully, and avoid re-traumatizing students through the use of punitive discipline.

   a. Instill a safe and supportive environment

   b. Incorporate restorative practices to address conflict

   c. Use interventions to help students in crisis.
3. Ensure consistent mental health support is available to appropriately meet student needs.

   a. Consult with trained mental health providers.
   b. Plan for and provide immediate support and intervention to students promptly after a discrete traumatic event.
   c. Involve, when possible, primary caregivers & others important in the child’s life.
Self-Care

- Be aware of compassion fatigue.
- Use social support.
- Seek help with your own traumas.
- Attend to your well-being.
Circle Activity:

• What is an in-the-moment strategy that you use when dealing with challenging youth behavior? Share a story about such an experience.

• What self care activity do you do?
Assessment Tools

To assess PTSD symptoms: UCLA PTSD Index; Traumatic Events Screening Inventory, Trauma Symptom Checklist

http://www.nctsn.org/content/standardized-measures-assess-complex-trauma

Know when and where to refer.
Treatment & Helpful Links

Cognitive Behavioral Intervention Treatment in Schools (CBITS)
http://cbitsprogram.org/

Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)
http://tfcbt.musc.edu/

National Child Traumatic Stress Network.
http://www.nctsn.org/
Fundamental Principles of Trauma Sensitive Schools

- Comprehend the Prevalence and Impact of Trauma
- Empowerment and Resiliency
- Perspective Shift
- Caregiver Capacity
- Using Relationships to Heal and Build School Connectedness
References


Complex Trauma class action lawsuit against Compton Unified School District. Retrieved from: file:///home/chronos/u-24746acab7ac05b6d2959f8a1b0353c706fa96da/Downloads/FINAL%20TRAUMA%20AND%20LEARNING%20COMPLAINT.pdf
References


