Amplifying Our Voice: Leading Boldly for Our Students, Our Professions, and Our Union

Building Trauma-Sensitive Schools: What Works and Why
Jen Alexander (MA, NCC, SB-RPT)

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NEA LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY: LEADING OUR PROFESSION

- Progression Level(s): Level 1-Foundational and Level 2-Mobilizing & Power Building

- NEA Leadership Competency Theme:
  - Supports professional excellence and builds capacity for continual improvement to ensure the success of all students.

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NEA STRATEGIC GOAL AND NEA ORGANIZATIONAL PRIORITIES

• NEA Strategic Goal:

- Advancing opportunities that will identify, organize, and engage new and early career educators; amplify the voices of all educators, support our members’ professional growth, and promote social justice for our students, communities and our nation;

• NEA Organizational Priorities:

- Early Career Educator
- Racial Justice in Education

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WHO IS IN THE ROOM TODAY?

- Elementary Educators
- Middle School Educators
- High School Educators
- Special Education Teachers
- Administrators/Supervisors
- Counselors/Social Workers
- Psychologists/Consultants
- Health Staff
- Paraprofessionals
- Other Leaders

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Trauma...
Trauma is a distressing experience or set of experiences that threatens a person's actual safety or perceived sense of felt safety to such a degree that it exceeds an individual's capacity to cope in healthy ways.

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POSSIBLE TRAUMATIC EVENTS

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Neglect
- Domestic violence
- Neighborhood violence
- Separation from parents
- Medical trauma
- Natural disasters
- Poverty
- War
TYPES OF TRAUMA

• Single Event Trauma

• Developmental Trauma

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EDUCATORS IN TRAUMA-SENSITIVE SCHOOLS

- **Realize** the widespread impact of trauma on learning and behavior.
- **Recognize** the signs and symptoms of trauma in students, families, and staff.
- **Respond** by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into school policies, procedures, and practices.
- **Avoid Re-Traumatization.**

(Adapted from SAMHSA, 2015)
WHAT IS THE PREVALENCE OF CHILDHOOD TRAUMA?
VIDEO: ACEs PRIMER

ACES Primer.mp4

https://vimeo.com/139998006

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Students have been negatively impacted by trauma.
ACEs LINKED WITH AN “ABC” “DOSE EFFECT”

As the number of ACEs go up for students, risk for the following goes up too:

- **A**ttendance concerns
- **B**ehavior challenges
- **C**oursework problems

(Blodgett, 2012)
HOW DOES TRAUMA CREATE THESE PROBLEMS?
THE NEUROBIOLOGY OF STRESS
DR. SIEGEL’S HAND MODEL OF THE BRAIN

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# FLOODED STATES OF HYPERAROUSAL: FEELING “TOO MUCH”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fight</th>
<th>Flight</th>
<th>Freeze</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>– Difficulty concentrating</td>
<td>– Withdrawn</td>
<td>– Lacks emotional expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Hyperactivity</td>
<td>– Terrified</td>
<td>– Overly still</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Anger/irritability</td>
<td>– Flees</td>
<td>– Overly compliant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Aggressive/violent</td>
<td>– Runs away</td>
<td>– Denial of needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Hides</td>
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(Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010)

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STATES OF HYPOAROUSAL: FEELING “NOT ENOUGH”

– Shut down
– Feels tired, numb, or depressed
– Experiences helplessness or hopelessness and may be perceived as unmotivated
– Disconnected from others
– May dissociate and present in a trance-like state
– Possible memory difficulties or personality changes

(Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010)
REGULATED AROUSAL STATE: FEELING “JUST RIGHT”

- Feeling safe and relaxed in one’s comfort zone
- Experiencing a calm, alert processing state
- In control of one’s actions
- Able to connect with others and show compassion as well as flexibility
- Ready to focus, think, plan, and learn

(Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010)
THINK & PAIR SHARE

• Think about a stressful experience if you want to.
• How did you feel?
• What did you need?
• What can this teach us about being trauma-sensitive?

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HOW DOES DEVELOPMENTAL TRAUMA AFFECT STUDENTS AT SCHOOL?
Dr. Bruce Perry et al. (1995) stated, “It is an ultimate irony that at the time when the human is most vulnerable to the effects of trauma - during infancy and childhood - adults generally presume the most resilience (p. 272).”
CHILDHOOD TRAUMA IMPACTS
THE BODY

• Fight, flight, or freeze reactions
• Sensory & motor challenges
• Unusual responses to pain
• May be sick often or complain of psychosomatic symptoms and frequent the health office
EMOTIONS

- Anxiety and hyper vigilance
- May seem to over-react to things
- High states of distress
- Self-regulation problems
- Difficulty labeling or describing feelings
- Struggling to communicate wants or needs
- May dissociate
BEHAVIOR

- Hyperactivity and poor impulse control
- Oppositional behavior
- Aggression or dangerous actions
- Sexual or aggressive play or behavior
- Lying, stealing, or other dishonest actions
- Self-harm
- Overly compliant or helpful
- Eating, sleeping, or bladder and bowel issues
- Substance use
THINKING

• Lack of curiosity
• Learning disabilities, processing problems, and memory impairments
• Language difficulties
• Problems regulating attention, focus, and work completion
• Executive function concerns
SELF-CONCEPT

• Lack of sense of self
• Low self-esteem
• Toxic shame and guilt
• Believe that... “I’m the best...” Or, “I’m the worst...”
• Believe that... “Nothing I do matters...”
• May overly blame self or others
• Body image concerns
• Self-sabotaging behaviors

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RELATIONSHIPS

- General mistrust and need for control
- Clingy and overly dependent or detached
- Unhealthy boundaries
- Problems with peers
- Overly helpful or solicitous of attention
- Difficulty with social cues and communication
- May lack empathy
- Vulnerable to re-victimization and/or victimizing others
NO EFFECTS AT SCHOOL

Some traumatized youth show little to no signs at school but have difficulty at home in relationships with primary caregivers. These connections can be marked by patterns of push and pull. “Shape shifting” may be common.
#ThereWasThisKid

- Think of a child or teen who may have been traumatized.
- What signs of trauma did the student exhibit?
- How might you respond differently to this kid now?
THERE IS...
HOW CAN EDUCATORS BEGIN TO HELP TRAUMATIZED STUDENTS?

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ask yourself,

“is it a can’t or a won’t?”
WHEN YOU SEE DYSREGULATION...
“Relationship is the evidence-based practice.”
-Christopher Blodgett-
Trauma-Sensitive Schools Build Resiliency By Helping Students:

- Feel Safe
- Be Connected
- Get Regulated
- Learn

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TRAUMA-SENSITIVITY LOOKS LIKE...

- Playfulness with no strings attached
- Staying regulated ourselves
- Unconditional acceptance
- Utilizing co-regulation
- Teaching self-regulation
- Being curious about actions
- Setting limits with empathy
- Disciplining to teach, not punish
- Restorative discipline practices
- Dr. Ross Greene’s “Collaborative & Proactive Solutions”
The Trauma-Sensitive School Team

- Administrators
- School counselors
- Teachers
- Other staff (i.e., bus drivers, secretaries, paraprofessionals, cafeteria workers, nurses, custodians, and coaches, etc.)
- Support personnel (i.e., school psychologists, social workers, and consultants, etc.)
- Mental health providers
- Parents
- Students themselves
Self-Care...
HELP YOURSELF TO HELP OTHERS

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On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being very important), how important do you think it is to train educators in trauma-sensitivity?

? What questions do you have?

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A comprehensive framework for building a safe & supportive school environment

Learn how to:

- make five key shifts in the way you view and approach students, so that you’re better equipped to support them
- implement universal instructional strategies that foster safety, connection, regulation, and learning for all students

Learn more and preorder: http://bit.ly/trauma-sensitive-schools
FOLLOW MS. JEN ON FACEBOOK

Check out Ms. Jen Alexander (author) on Facebook. Thanks! 😊
WHAT IS YOUR TAKE AWAY TODAY?
SESSION OUTCOMES

The content from this session can be used in the following ways in your current position/role:

• Outcome #1: Identify how trauma may affect students at school and begin thinking about how to respond in trauma-sensitive ways.

• Outcome #2: Realize the importance of educator self-care and brainstorm how to improve your own self-care practices.

• Outcome #3: Explore the benefits of further professional development on the topic of building trauma-sensitive schools.
CLOSING

• Please complete the evaluation for this breakout session by using the NEA Summit Mobile App.
• Please also visit the Leadership Development Resources website at www.nea.org/leadershipdevelopment
REFERENCES


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