



Using a Trauma Focused Lens in Schools

Approximately 25% children in the United States experience at least one traumatic event by the age of 16. A child's reactions to trauma can shape his or her life, impede neurological development and impact learning and emotional wellness. Schools serve as a critical **system of support** for children who have experienced *trauma*.

Teachers, administrators, and other staff members can help reduce the impact of trauma on children by **recognizing** trauma responses, **accommodating** and responding to traumatized students, and referring children to outside professionals when necessary.

What can school staff do to help a student who has experienced trauma?

Make life predictable: school schedules and routines helps tremendously. Let students know what to anticipate each school day, even in the next 30 minutes.

Empower children with choice: Often traumatic events involve loss of control; help children feel safe by providing them with some choices over small decisions.

Increase support and encouragement: Designate an adult who can provide additional support if needed. School counselors, with permission, often provide a safe place for the child to talk about what happened.

Recognize that behavioral problems may be transient and related to trauma. Remember that even the most disruptive behaviors can be driven by trauma-related anxiety.

Normalize Feelings: Help students to understand that emotional ups and downs are part of the road to wellness. There is no “right way” to react to traumatic events.

Be compassionate: to the cues in the environment that may cause a reaction in the traumatized child. For example, victims of natural storm-related disasters might react strongly to threatening weather or storm warnings. Children may increase acting out (externalized behaviors) or withdraw (internalized behaviors) near an anniversary of a traumatic event.

Support school communities to “practice kindness” or make a “kindness plan” to increase the sense of community in the classroom and the larger school setting.

Anticipate difficult times and provide additional support. Many kinds of situations may be reminders. If you are able to identify reminders, you can help by preparing the child for the situation. For instance, for the child who doesn’t like being alone, provide a partner to accompany him or her to the restroom.

Be aware of other children’s reactions to the traumatized child and to the information they share. Protect the traumatized child from peers’ curiosity and protect classmates from the details of a child’s trauma.

Reach out to ask for support for your school or classroom: Start with your school principal.

See more at:<http://www.nctsn.org/resources/audiences/school-personnel/trauma-toolkit>

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/traumainfo.pdf>

For more information about **Trauma-Informed Practices** please contact:

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