Overcoming Childhood Trauma through a Creative School Social Work Intervention Model

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Learning Objectives:

1. List three findings from the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) and how it impacts youth health;
2. Recite the definition of resilience and provide 3-4 examples of resilience skills to implement an engaging youth development program for difficult-to-serve youth;
3. Describe how a STEM framework can help youth overcome the effects of childhood trauma.
Raised by a Farm working Family
Migrated across the Country

Elected to School Board at age 23. Served for 18.5 yrs.

Helped develop a local Vol. Fire. Dept.
Served as Chief for 10 yrs.

Managed Residential Youth Centers
Day Treatment Centers
Truant & Runaway Programs
Diabetes Self-Care Management Programs
Afterschool Programs
School Social Work Programs

Afterschool & School Social Work Programs
ACE Pyramid

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Disrupted Neurodevelopment

Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Impairment

Adoption of Health-risk Behaviors

Disease, Disability, and Social Problems

Early Death
As the number of ACEs increases so does the risk for the following:

Dose-response describes the change in an outcome associated with differing levels of exposure to a stressor (e.g. ACEs). A graded dose-response means that as the dose of the stressor increases the intensity of the outcome also increases.

- Alcoholism and alcohol abuse
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
- Depression
- Fetal death
- Health-related quality of life
- Illicit drug use
- Ischemic heart disease
- Liver disease
- Poor work performance
- Financial stress
- Risk for intimate partner violence
- Multiple Sex Partners
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Smoking
- Suicide attempts
- Unintended pregnancies
- Early initiation of smoking
- Early initiation of sexual activity
- Adolescent pregnancy
- Risk for sexual violence
- Poor academic achievement

Source: CDC-Kaiser ACE Study
Let’s look at Trauma through the eyes of schools...

1. Four Perspectives of Trauma
2. Impact of Trauma on student learning
3. Effective Interventions – a team approach
4. Role of school mental health professional
FOUR PERSPECTIVES

1. The Student

The last thing on a traumatized student’s mind is school work.

“I find myself staring out the window during class. Next thing I know two weeks have passed and I have failed yet another algebra or biology test.”

“I really try to listen to what the teacher is saying. Sometimes I can see her mouth moving but can’t hear a thing.”

“I wish they understood how hard it is.”
2. The Parent

Parents are faced with trying to cope with their life’s situations not knowing how to handle their child’s behavior.

“The teacher told me my six year old, Tyrone, is the terror of his first grade class. He pinches, hits, and refused to obey her.” “At home he wakes up with nightmares and a bed that is wet.”

“Tyrone fled with me and his sister from a father who abused us.”

“The school can help him learn if they focus on helping him feel safe. I hope the school will listen to us.”
3. THE TEACHER

“Every year, there a few students in my 6th grade class I just can’t reach no matter what I try.”

“Sometimes a student’s disruptive behavior keeps him sitting in the principal’s office more than at his desk.”

Other times, a student can’t focus on one thing for more than 30 seconds. The whole year might go by without one homework assignment turned in.”

“After learning about trauma’s impact at school, these behaviors began to make sense to me.”

“Now I focus on making routines predictable and try to be more conscious of the tone of voice I used with all my students.”

“I know that for students to truly feel safe, trauma sensitive approaches must be infused throughout the entire building.”
4. THE PRINCIPAL

“We have dedicated teachers at our school, but we couldn’t make gains in academic achievements.”

“Our teachers became masters at collecting and analyzing data and planning individualized interventions to address the needs of every child.”

“We did everything we could think of to improve academic progress, but our scores were the lowest in our district.”

“We began to learn about the impacts of trauma and the importance of creating a whole-school environment where every child feels safe.”

“We started to see positive results”
What are we talking about when we say trauma? (ACEs)

....A deeply distressing or disturbing experience.

- Homelessness
- Physical Abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Accident Survival
- Loss of Loved One
- Relationship Break-up
Child trauma and academic performance

Learning to read, write, take part in a discussion, and solve mathematical problems rests on many underlying foundations – organization, comprehension, memory, the ability to produce work, engagement in learning, and trust.

Prerequisites for classroom achievement competency is the ability to self-regulate attention, emotions, and behavior.

Trauma resulting from overwhelming experiences has the power to disturb a student’s developmental of these foundations for learning.
Childhood Trauma....

- undermine the development of language and communication skills,
- thwart the establishment of a coherent sense of self,
- compromise the ability to attend to classroom tasks and instructions,
- interfere with the ability to organize and remember new information, and hinder the grasping of cause-and-effect relationships – all which are necessary to process information effectively.
- Trauma can also interfere with the capacity for creative play, which is one of the ways children learn how to cope with the problems of everyday life.
Childhood trauma and classroom behavior

For many traumatized children, the school setting can feel like a battle ground in which their assumptions of the world as a dangerous place sabotage their ability to remain calm and regulate their behavior in the classroom. Unfortunately, many of these children develop behavioral coping mechanisms in an effort to feel safe and in control, yet these behaviors can frustrate educators and evoke exasperated reprisals, reactions that both strengthen their child’s expectations of confrontation and danger and reinforce a negative self-image.
1. The inability to process social cues and convey feelings appropriately,

2. Behavior can be highly confusing and therefore children are profoundly misunderstood,

3. Externalizing or internalizing traumatic experiences leads to lost learning time and strained relationships with teachers and peers.
Childhood trauma and relationships

1. Insecure relationships with adults and peers.
2. Preoccupied with their physical and psychological safety.
3. Delays in the development of age-appropriate social skills.
4. Inability to cultivate healthy interpersonal relationships with others.
Trauma-sensitive schools help children feel safe to learn.

1. **Shared understanding among all staff**
2. **School supports all children to feel safe** physically, socially, emotionally, and academically.
3. **School addresses students needs in a holistic way.**
4. **School explicitly connects students to the school community** and provides multiple opportunities to practice newly developed skills.
5. **School embraces teamwork and staff share responsibility for all students.**
6. **Leadership and staff anticipate and adapt to the ever-changing needs of students.**
Building Resiliency in youth.

“Capture their HEARTS and their MINDS will Follow”
What do these numbers represent?

3%  55%

23%  71%
3% Minorities earn a PHD

23% Minorities earn a BA

55% College Drop-outs 1st year and 9th grade – 12 grade

71% Jail population are minorities
What are schools doing to engage and help students?
Many of our students have experiences some form of trauma.

Violence

Domestic Abuse

Child Abuse

Emotional/Sexual/Physical

Divorce

And much more...
Our Approach

“Capture their HEARTS and their MINDS will Follow”

Came from the idea of a juvenile judge who sent youth from his court to his friend who was a marine scientist.

The results were incredible!
The Design

Student Services

- After school Program
- Teen Pregnancy Prevention
- Family Engagement & Support
- Social Work Case Management
- CJD Youth Leadership Program
Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program
An Abstinence Plus
*Juntos Podemos*

**Partnership with Tx. A&M**
- Cuidate Curriculum for HS
- Cuidate Curriculum for HS

**School Administrators**

**School Health Advisory Council SHAC**

**School Board**
Changing the environment for students...
We give students an opportunity to experience new things and get a sense of belonging.

Greenpower USA Electric Warrior Spear Racing Car (Raced at Huntsville)
Conjunto Warrior Band
Outdoor Youth Leadership Program
Camping, hiking, biking, fishing, kayaking
Family Meal Time
Family Engagement
Mum Night-Warrior Spirit
Life Changing Experiences
Helping students see themselves differently
QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

“Education is not in the child’s radar when he/she is struggling to survive”

Once a child TASTES Success, they want more of it!

Have you ever heard:
“That fluffy stuff doesn’t work."

In fact, it is the only thing that has ever WORKED!
Thank you!

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