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Implementing Trauma-Informed Tools to Change School Culture and Climate

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Building a Trauma-Informed School Culture

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School Culture and Climate

- **School Culture and Climate:**
  - **School climate is the school's' attitude** - the behaviors and points of view exhibited and experienced by students, teachers and other stakeholders.
  - **School culture is the way things are done in the school** - the underlying norms and values that shape patterns of behavior, attitudes and expectations between stakeholders in the school.
- **Impact of School Culture and Climate**
  - Rate of student suspension and discipline
  - Academic outcomes
  - Graduation rates
  - Attendance
  - Staff Morale

School Culture and Climate. (2015, March 24). Alliance for Education Solutions. https://aesimpact.org/school-climate-and-culture/

What is School Climate and Why is it Important? (2013). National School Climate Center. https://schoolclimate.org/school-climate/

Domains Affecting School Culture and Climate

- Alliance for the Study of School Climate
  - Physical Environment
  - Teacher Relations
  - Student Interactions
  - Leadership and Decisions
  - Management and Discipline
  - Learning and Assessment
  - Attitude and Culture
  - Parents and Community
- National School Climate Council
  - Safety
  - Teaching and Learning
  - Institutional Environment
  - Interpersonal Relationships
  - Leadership and Efficacy

Assessment. (2022). Alliance for the Study of School Climate. https://web.calstatela.edu/centers/schoolclimate/assessment/

School Culture and Climate. (2015, March 24). Alliance for Education Solutions. https://aesimpact.org/school-climate-and-culture/

Assessing School Climate and Culture

- Alliance for the Study of School Climate, School Assessment Instrument (SCAI)
- National School Climate Center, Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI)
- Center for Transformative Teacher Training, School Culture Survey

1. Physical Appearance				
	Level – 3 (high)		*Level – 2 (middle)*	*Level – 1 (low)*
	High	*high-middle*	*middle*	*middle-low*	*low*
1.a----------O---------- O ---------- O ---------- O ---------- O ----------					
My child's school projects a welcoming exterior. It is easy to find my way around		There are signs at the school, but it is only somewhat welcoming.		My child's school is not very welcoming to outsiders.
1.b----------O---------- O ---------- O ---------- O ---------- O ----------					
Students feel ownership of the school's appearance.		Students mostly refrain from vandalism and litter.		Students have no respect for the school and it shows.
1.c----------O---------- O ---------- O ---------- O ---------- O ----------					
I see little if any litter.		Litter cleaned at the end of most days.		People have given up the battle over litter.

Impact of Trauma and Trauma-Informed Approach

Trauma and Types of Trauma

- **Trauma: An emotional response to a deeply distressing or disturbing event that overwhelms and individual's ability to cope**
- Types of Trauma
  - Physical, sexual, or psychological abuse and neglect
  - Natural and technological disasters or terrorism
  - Family or community violence
  - Sudden or violent loss of a loved one
  - Substance use disorder
  - Refugee and war experiences
  - Serious accidents or life threatening illness
  - Military family related stressors

Trauma Types. (2018, May 25). The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types

Presentation of Trauma

Mental

- Negative thoughts
- Intrusive memories
- Low self-esteem
- Shame or embarrassment
- Sleeping problems
- Trouble concentrating

Emotional

- Angry
- Irritable
- Sad
- Numb
- Fearful
- Failing to move forward

Somatic

- Worries, fears or overreaction to loud noises or sudden movements
- Saying they feel "sick" or have a stomachache or headache

Behavioral

- Substance Abuse
- Wanting to be alone
- Anxious when away from family
- Show poor skill development
- Act out in social situations

Long Term Effects of Trauma

Physical Health

- Chronic illnesses
- Asthma
- Diabetes
- Obesity
- Substance abuse
- Early death

Mental Health

- Learning disabilities
- Suicidality
- Depression
- Anxiety
- PTSD

Behavioral Issues

- Struggling with self-regulation
- Dropping out of school
- Criminal behavior
- Unstable employment
- More likely to be victimized
- At greater risk of arrest

Early intervention is essential

Effects of Trauma on Learning

Fight	Flight	Freeze
Acting silly Hyperactivity Defiance Aggression Yelling	Withdrawing Fleeing Seeming to sleep Wandering or hiding	Refusing to answer Blank looks Appearing numb Feeling unable to move or act

Childhood trauma can negatively impact learning and behavior because of the way terror and fear create changes in the brain. Following exposure to a traumatic experience, survivors may become frozen in a heightened state of alertness or have a persistent fear for their safety.

Without trauma intervention, research has shown that these emotional states alter brain function and the student's ability to process information.

This leads to difficulty in:

- Processing verbal information
- Focusing
  - Following teacher directions
  - Recalling what was heard
  - Retaining information

Integrating Trauma-Informed Practices

What is Trauma Informed Care?

Trauma Informed Care (TIC) is an approach that focuses on understanding the impact of trauma and acknowledges the role that trauma may play in an individual's life. TIC promotes physical and emotional safety, collaboration, and trustworthiness as cornerstone of engagement in order to empower individuals by offering choices and control.

6 Principles of Trauma Informed Care

TIC Principle: Safety

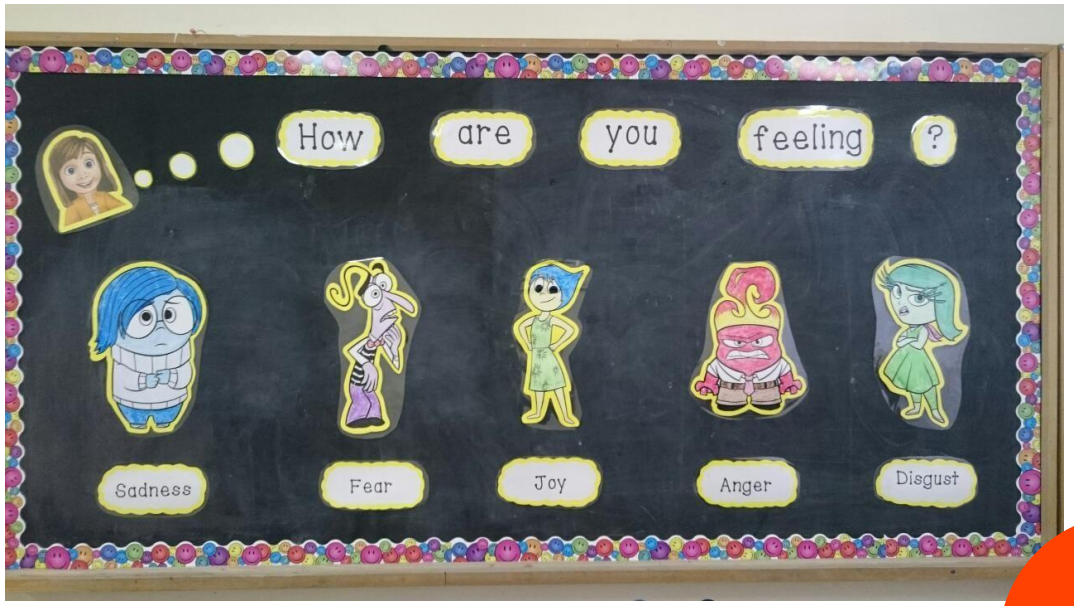
1) Create an environment where individuals feel emotionally and physically safe
2) Provide opportunities for individuals to self-regulate when they experience a stress response
3) Create a sense of belonging within the school
4) Provide opportunities for individuals to establish a sense of competence and achievement

Physical Safety

- Create calming spaces that are positive and allow students to identify, process, and regulate their emotions by using strategies to calm themselves so learning can occur
- Items that are helpful for calming spaces:
  - Seating (chair, bean bag, yoga mat, pillow)
  - Headphones (with or without music, sound machine)
  - List of emotions (wall art, plushies)
  - Visual list of calming strategies
  - Timer
  - Expressive items (coloring books, blank paper, crayons, markers, color pencils, play doh)
  - Sensory items (fidget toys, plushies, chewing items, essential oils, visuals)

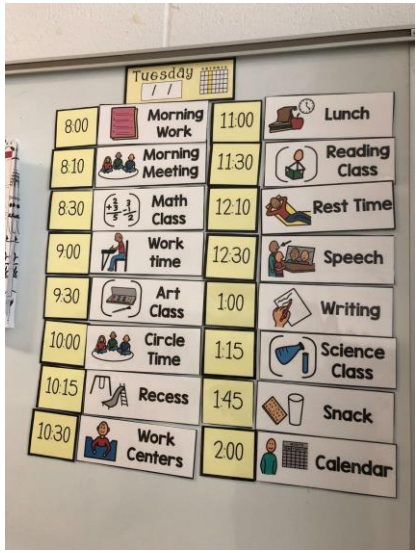
Emotional Safety

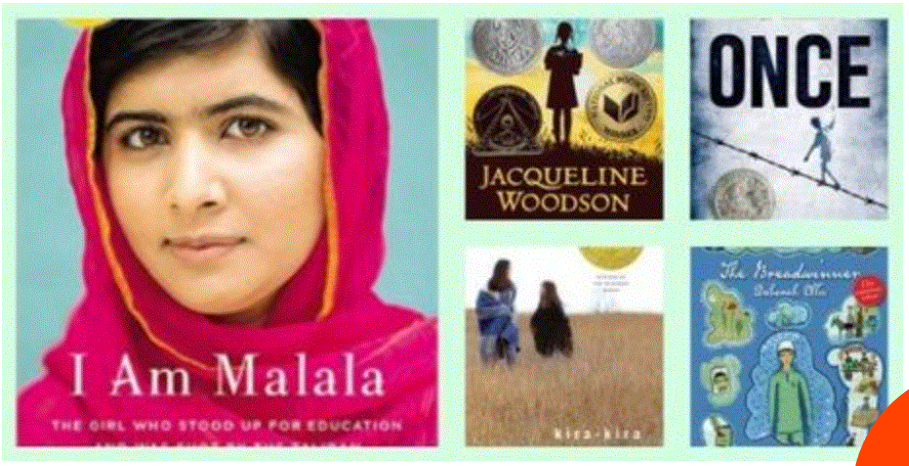
- Welcome students when they enter the classroom so they feel seen and supported
- Create space for feelings check-ins (feelings thermometer)
- Praise students' successes
- Use positive and inclusive language (classroom rules written positively, inquiring about pronouns, etc.)



Emotional Safety

- Wall signage, books, and toys that reflects your school communities
- Implement routines, schedules, and structures that are predictable

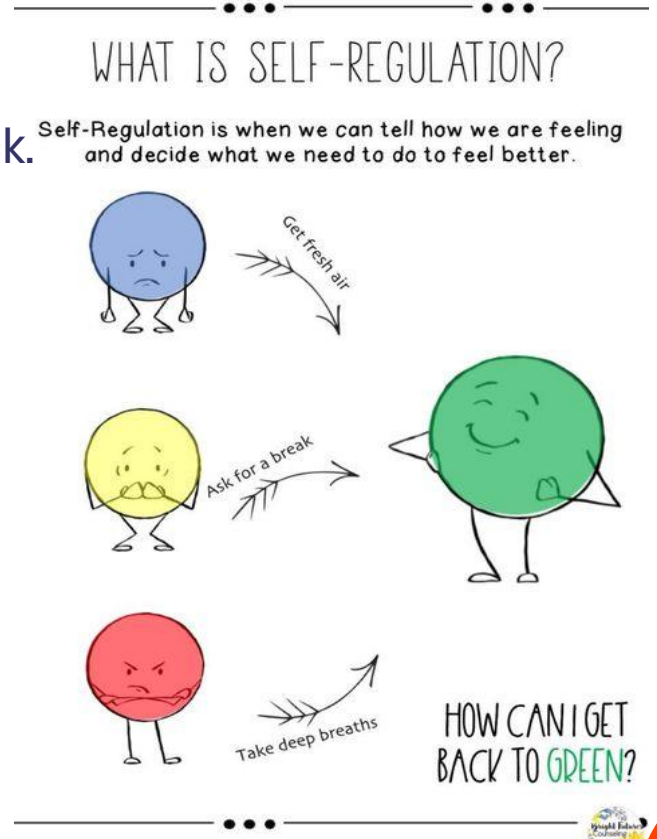




Regulation

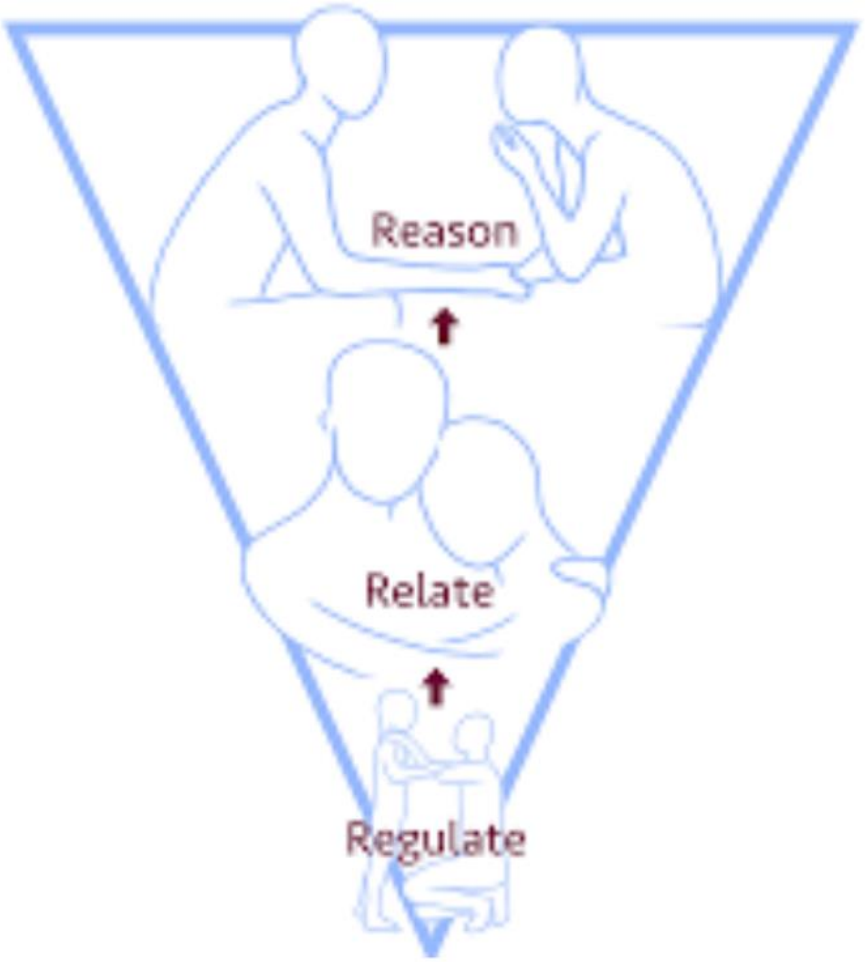
Two Types of Regulation:

- **Self-Regulate**: The ability to manage one's behavior, emotions, and thoughts to pursue long-term goals.
- **Co-Regulate**: An interactive process between two people to promote self-regulation through coaching, modeling, and feedback.



- **Signs of self-regulation:**
  - Acting in the person's best interest, long-term goal, and value
  - Calming themselves when there is a stress response
  - Engaging in assertive communication
  - Persisting through difficult times
  - Remaining flexible and adapting
  - Viewing challenges as opportunities
  - Identifying areas that are within their control

Regulation



Steps to promote self-regulation in students:

Step 1: Regulate

➔ First self-regulate to calm stress response. Once calm, help the student calm their fight/flight/freeze stress response

Step 2: Relate

➔ Connect with the student through empathy

Step 3: Reason

➔ Help the student reflect, learn, and verbalize their needs then try to address the problem

Bruce Perry's "The Three R's"

TIC Principle: Trustworthiness & Transparency

- Strategies to build a warm and responsive relationship:
  - Warm tone of voice
  - Soft/kind eyes
  - Praise students' behaviors and follow it up with a character praise
  - Consistent positive regard
  - Genuineness
  - Empathy
  - Support and comfort in times of distress
  - Responding to student needs
  - Validation of emotional experiences
  - Build rapport
  - Be accountable for mistakes
  - Elicit feedback regularly and anonymously
  - Give students an opportunity to be part of the decision making process
  - Share the agenda of the class/quarter/semester in advance
  - Acknowledge power differentials
  - If there is a rupture in the relationship, work to repair the relationship and empathize

Building Positive School Culture and Climate

- **School Leadership's Role is to create an environment where people feel safe, supported, and accepted**
  - Setting the Tone & Building Trust
    - Accessibility
    - Engagement
  - Trauma-Informed Skills in Relationship Building
    - Attunement
    - Deep Listening
    - Authenticity
    - Skillful Self-Disclosure

Citation: Sam Himelstein

Promoting Positive Relationships and Connections

- **Positive Relationships are a crucial part of protective factors and resiliency**

Impact of Healthy Relationships:

- Connection impacts the way our brain develops and performs
- Students' social emotional well-being
- Fewer disruptive behaviors
- Higher student academic achievement, attendance, grades
- Teacher well-being and retention

Brene Brown on Empathy and Sympathy

https://www.youtubeeducation.com/watch?v=KZBTYViDPlQ


Council for Exceptional Children
Back Pocket Words & Phrases
"I'm here for you."
"It looks like you could use some help with..."
"I like helping you."
"I'm ready to help - just ask."
"Can you trust me on this one?"
"You can count on me."
FOR ESTABLISHING TRUST
"What is the rule about...?"
"Where are you supposed to be?"
"Let's see if you can answer that question all by yourself."
"Do you think it would work better to tell me or ask me about that?"
FOR ADDRESSING UNHELPFUL ACTIONS
"I can tell this is important to you."
"It's okay to do this as long as you need to."
"Let me know when you're ready to..."
"Kiddo, I care about you too much to argue with you."
"I'll get back to you on that."
FOR REMOVING THE POWER STRUGGLE
"This could be difficult for you; what can you do to help yourself?"
"I'm not mad; breathe."
"Let's pretend to move this wall together."
"This feeling will pass. I'll stay with you until it does."
FOR COMMUNICATING WHEN A STUDENT'S DYSREGULATED
"I see you working hard."
"That's tricky and you aren't giving up. That takes courage."
"You did that all by yourself."
"Thank you for trusting me. I know that's hard for you sometimes."
FOR GIVING ENCOURAGEMENT
"What do you think I believe happened?"
"Would you like to know what some other kids tried in situations like this?"
"I've noticed you sometimes...What are some other things you could do?"
"We'll see how that works for you."
FOR BUILDING CAPACITY FOR TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

TIC Principle: Empowerment, Voice, & Choice

- Model active listening and assertive communication for students
- Include students in individual planning meetings or school wide committees
- Include student's voice and choice about their school services
- Offer options of the order and sequence of tasks in the classroom
- Offer students a variety of ways to engage and encourage them to choose the way that they want to engage
- In order to help students understand their options, provide information and explanation of each of the options to help them make choices
- Help students accurately convey thoughts and feelings
- Incorporate the various learning styles in lessons
- Encourage students to share their thoughts and feelings
- Validate students' feelings
- Be open to different ways of communication (verbal, written, art, etc.)

TIC Principle: Cultural, Historical, & Gender Issues

- Understand how trauma intersects with culture, history, race, gender, location and language
- Understand how systematic barriers and equalities contribute to traumatic experiences
- Examine our own biases, assumptions, and stereotypes that may contribute to the perpetuation of trauma
- Create an environment that is empathic, understanding and supportive
- Honors the diversity in cultural, historical, and gender identifies
- Create gender neutral spaces
- Attend and facilitate cultural sensitivity training
- Celebrate diverse holidays

TIC Principle: Peer Support & Mutual Self-Help

Create peer groups at school that allow for the following:

- Reciprocal receiving and giving of support
- Fostering relationships
- Decrease power dynamics
- Build on shared experiences
- Enhance collaboration
- Allows for students' voices and stories to be heard
- Healing and recovery

TIC Principle: Collaboration & Mutuality

- Healing and learning happens in relationships
- Share power across all levels of the school system
- Transparent and mutual decision-making
- Elicit ideas, suggestions, and feedback across all levels of the school system
- Everyone in the school system plays a crucial role in healing (e.g. parents, students, school staff)
- Foster caring and empathic relationships

Stakeholder Engagement

- Engaging caregivers in the learning process
  - Education: Trauma 101
- Sharing resources for support
  - Basic Needs
  - Health & Wellness
  - Mental Health

- Building trusting partnerships
  - Back to School Nights
  - Parent Conferences
  - Coffee with the Principal
  - Advisory Councils
  - Parent Committee

Providing Self-Care for Educators

Recognizing Educator Burnout and Secondary Trauma

- Creating a trauma-informed school culture includes being trauma informed about our teachers and school staff!
- Secondary Trauma Stress (STS): Sometimes referred to as compassion fatigue, this is emotional distress that arises when someone vicariously experiences the traumatic experiences of another individual
    - Signs of STS:
        - Increased anxiety and concern about safety
        - Intrusive negative thoughts and images related to students' traumatic stories
        - Fatigue and physical complaints
        - Feelings of numbness or detachment from students and peers
        - Diminished concentration and difficulty with decision making
        - Desire to physically or emotionally withdraw from others
        - Feelings of professional inadequacy

The Impact of Secondary Trauma on Educators. (2020, March 12). Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/the-impact-of-secondary-trauma-on-educator

Promoting Self-Care and Well-Being Strategies

School-Wide Strategies to Build Resiliency and Address Secondary Trauma Stress

- A culture of awareness and understanding
    - Acknowledge the work is difficult and appreciate those on the frontlines
    - Incorporate STS training into PDs
    - Assess for staff risk and resilience
    - Create an environment where staff can ask for and receive support
- Peer Groups

Helping Teachers Manage the Weight of Trauma. (2018, September 26). Harvard Graduate School of Education. https://www.gse.harvard.edu/ideas/usable-knowledge/18/09/helping-teachers-manage-weight-trauma

Secondary Traumatic Stress Introduction. (2018, February 1). National Child Traumatic Stress Network. *https://www.nctsn.org/trauma-informed-care/secondary-traumatic-stress/introduction*

Promoting Self-Care and Well-Being Strategies

Individual Strategies to Build Resiliency and Address Secondary Trauma Stress

- Increase self-awareness of STS
- Maintain healthy work-life balance
- Exercise and good nutrition
- Practice self-care
- Stay connected
- Develop and implement plans to increase personal wellness and resilience
- Continue individual training on risk reduction and self-care
- Use Employee Assistance Programs or counseling services as needed
- Participate in a self-care accountability buddy system

Secondary Traumatic Stress Introduction. (2018, February 1). National Child Traumatic Stress Network. https://www.nctsn.org/trauma-informed-care/secondary-traumatic-stress/introduction

Reflection

What is one thing you are going to bring back to your school/agency and put into practice?

Questions?

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Thank you