Fundamental Considerations in Creating Trauma Sensitive Schools

Eric Rossen, PhD, NCSP
NASP, Director of Prof. Development & Standards
erossen@naspweb.org

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Compton Schools Lawsuit

“Peter P., 17, spent two months sleeping on his school’s roof after becoming homeless in April. When administrators at Dominguez High School learned of his situation, they didn't help with essential services or support. They suspended him and turned him over to the police for trespassing”

Source: Huffington Post: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/18/compton-school-complex-trauma-lawsuit_n_7309594.html
“If you’ve seen one school, you’ve seen one school”

– Natalie Turner
What is Trauma

• Exposure to conditions that
  – Cause harm to physical or psychological/emotional well-being
  – Overwhelm the ability to cope
  – Interfere with daily life or ability to function
Crisis ≠ Trauma

• Crisis
  – *Event* or *condition* that leads to danger or the potential for danger.
  – Does NOT always lead to trauma

• Traumatic event ≠ Bad event
  – Event that causes trauma to individual/community
  – Bad events do NOT always lead to trauma

• Crisis and trauma are not the same thing
Half of All Kids Are Traumatized
And nearly a quarter experience two or more stressful childhood events, setting them up for worse physical and mental health later in life.

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When a child experiences a traumatic event, it can trigger the immune system.

"If you have a y in each a way if Perrin, preside.

A new study in the U.S. have e

Here's how the

Half of American Kids Have Traumatic Childhoods

By Melissa Dahl

Nearly half of all kids in the U.S. experience at least one event in their childhoods that researchers would consider traumatic: witnessing domestic violence, experiencing racism, and even having parents who divorce are all examples, according to a new study in the journal Health Affairs. And the toxic stress that often follows these experiences can have a serious negative effect on the children's physical health, report Christian D. Bethell, of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, and colleagues.

Bethell and her team used data from the 2011-2012 National Survey of Children's Health, which includes responses from parents of 93,677 children, including questions about nine traumatic experiences: poverty, divorce, alcohol or drug abuse in the home, neighborhood violence, domestic violence, mental illness in the home, parental jail time, unfair treatment because of race or ethnicity, and the death of a parent. The researchers found a link between traumatic events and "chronic health problems, including asthma, ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorders, obesity, and other health issues, according to the press release. These children also tended to suffer academically: The children who experienced at least two traumatic events were two and a half times more likely to repeat a grade in school compared to the kids who hadn't experienced trauma.

But there is a silver lining here, according to the press release:
What makes an experience traumatic?

Subjective
- Individual factors
  - Previous experiences
  - Biology
  - Developmental level
  - Other risk factors
  - Perception
What makes an experience traumatic (cont.)?

- Event/Experience factors
  - Proximity
  - Severity
  - Availability of social support
  - Availability of intervention services/response
  - Whether stressor is chronic or single-event (acute)
  - Interpersonal or non-interpersonal
What do the data say?
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study

- Maltreatment
  - Physical Abuse
  - Emotional Abuse
  - Sexual Abuse
  - Neglect

- Family Dysfunction
  - Incarcerated family member
  - Mentally ill family member
  - Substance abusing family member
  - Domestic Violence
  - Absence of parent (divorce, separation, death)
ACE Results

- Collected between 1995 and 1997 (N=17,000+)
  - 26% reported one ACE
  - 16% reported two ACEs
  - 9.5% reported 3 ACEs
  - 12.5% reported 4 or more ACEs

- Negative Outcomes Among Youth

- Negative Outcomes Among Adults

- Dose-Response

http://www.cdc.gov/ace/index.htm
Implications

• Adverse experiences:
  – Are pervasive
  – Often begin at an early age
  – Are often chronic and reoccurring
  – Impact schools

• These data suggest the need for a new paradigm to support these students.
Other Adverse Experiences?
Why Is This the School’s Problem?
“When you two have finished arguing your opinions, I actually have data!”
Effects of Trauma

• Important note:

MOST children are resilient
Effects of Trauma

• Neurology
  – Impacts brain structure and function
  – Production of adrenaline and cortisol
  – Shorter telomeres
  – Reading emotions
What Does Trauma Look Like In School?

- Learning and Cognition
  - Difficulty processing instructions
  - Decreased attention, memory, and focus
  - Reduced executive functioning
  - Difficulty solving problems
  - Difficulty understanding consequences of actions
  - *De-emphasis on skills/tasks that are not directly relevant to survival*

- Looks like?
What Does Trauma Look Like In School?

- Heightened vigilance; Inaccurate perception of danger
- Rapid response to perceived threats
- Self-protective behaviors
  - Aggression
  - Withdrawal
“Focusing on academics while struggling with trauma is like trying to play chess in a hurricane.”

---Dr. Kenneth Fox, high school teacher
What Does Trauma Look Like?

- For some, it looks like:
Traditional Approaches in Schools: Responses to Stress, Adversity, and Trauma

• Special education or Section 504
  – “...there will be a referral for evaluation for early intervention services of a child who experiences a substantiated case of trauma due to exposure to family violence (as defined in section 320 of the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act).”
  • IDEA, Title I, Part C (Infants and Toddlers), Section 635
    – PTSD - may be eligible for accommodations under 504

• Tier III, Intensive evidence-based interventions
  – Pros & Limitations

• Discipline
“The most disruptive children dominated the schools. Teachers didn’t have control of their classrooms — in part because nothing in their training had taught them how to deal with traumatized children.”

“The traditional therapist’s response, of course, is to recommend therapy for traumatized children. But that’s an impossible solution in a big-city school of 1,000 or more students.”

Creating Trauma-Sensitive Classrooms and Schools
ARC Model
Trauma Center at the Justice Research Institute (Blaustein)

• **Attachment**
  – Create Safe Environment

• **Self Regulation**
  – Helping students manage responses to distress

• **Competency**
  – Building student capacities
SAMHSA’s Trauma-informed approach

• *Realize* the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery;
• *Recognize* the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system;
• *Responds* by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and
• Seeks to actively resist *re-traumatization.*

http://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/trauma-interventions
Trauma-Sensitive School Ecology
Trauma Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI)

• Provide safe school environment
• Increase staff understanding of and ability to mitigate impacts of trauma
• Encourage *all* staff to meet student needs
• Build student capacities
• Ensure students feel connected to school and community
• Adapt school planning and operations to adapt to student needs
• Include community resources and parents
Flexible Framework (Cole et al., 2005)

- Infrastructure and Leadership
- Professional Development
- Role of mental Health (internal and external)
- Classroom-based academic strategies
- Nonacademic strategies
- Policies, procedures, and protocols
Common themes

- School-wide focus
- Building safe environments
- Building student capacities
- Building staff capacities
Consider Discipline Approach

• Effective discipline
  – Develops self-discipline
  – Prevents misbehavior
  – Corrects misbehavior
  – Remediates and responds to serious/chronic behavior problems

Ask Yourself…

• Is your school safe? Do the students feel safe?
• What are your school’s strengths?
• What does your school do now to support students with trauma histories?
• How do they identify students in need?
• What do YOU do to support these students?
• What challenges does your school face in this area?
Takeaways

• Toxic stress and trauma impact the learning, behavior, and mental health of many students
• Knowledge of these factors continues to evolve
• Trauma has traditionally been difficult to identify and distinguish from psychological disorders or educational disabilities
• The traditional model of response is insufficient to support and educate students impacted by trauma
• Trauma-sensitive schools integrates well within the MTSS approach to supporting students
Questions?
Comments?
Insults?

Eric Rossen:
erossen@naspweb.org