

Fact Sheet No. 20-9

March 2020

This *NYSUT Fact Sheet* is intended to provide guidance on trauma-informed instructional practices.

Many students' sense of safety and security has been jeopardized by the Covid-19 pandemic. For many students' school provides safety, food, routine, socialization, connections, in addition to an academic learning environment. Any change from normal routine can be stressful. Trauma-informed instruction establishes specific practices to help students understand their emotions and what's happening during these uncertain times. Trauma-informed practices benefit all students and can help them build skills to cope during this traumatic time in their lives.

Our students come from a variety of homelife situations. Many families will experience income loss, food insecurities and loss of loved ones. Many students may have a parent/guardian designated as an essential worker, working in the health care or associated field while hearing the news about virus and death rates and testing, ventilator and hospital bed shortages. The students themselves may have compromised immune systems, other family members that do or other major health concerns. Older students may be providing childcare and some students may be less supervised. Keeping up with schoolwork will be difficult for many students who don't have computer access, internet connections, or an adult or older sibling to help them with their continued learning. Due to a variety of circumstances, many of our students may be embarrassed to share with educators why they can't complete their assignments and some students may not complete work at all. One of the most important things we can do for our students is to simply be the caring adult who is there to support and comfort them.

Strategies that educators should use with students experiencing trauma are best practices that should be used with all students. Here are some identified trauma-informed practices (not meant to be all inclusive):

- Establish a routine - This helps students maintain a sense of safety. Encourage students to establish a daily schedule to provide them with some predictability and structure. If necessary, provide students with some examples of age appropriate schedules. Reinforce the need for normal routines and to practice good hygiene, eat regular meals, take breaks, exercise and get a good night's sleep. Students who experience trauma often suffer from low self-esteem and low self-image. Having these students experience success is essential to helping them develop confidence and a sense of agency (meaning they realize that they can influence what happens in their lives.) during these challenging times. They need to know that they are good at something and that they are valued.
- Clear Communication – Student's experience with remote learning and understanding the pandemic vary greatly. Make sure students have a clear explanation of what to expect with schoolwork and carefully explain the changes to learning that will be occurring. Make sure the information provided is easily understandable and not overwhelming. If using a virtual learning environment, make sure it is a safe space to help students learn both academic and social and emotional skills. Model effective and respectful virtual/online communication.

- Continuity of learning – Maintain high expectations. Continuity of learning is being addressed statewide in a variety of ways such as hard-copy packets and online instructional activities. It sounds counterintuitive if a student has experienced a traumatic event, it may feel natural to say, “You don’t have to do this week’s work.” Despite coming from a place of love and compassion, lowering expectations for children experiencing trauma can validate feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness. Be flexible and adjust timelines by working with the students to establish reasonable guidelines. Let students know the expectations for remote learning, that you still expect great things from them, and that you will work with them to get the support they need.
- Connectedness – Connections help students regulate emotions. Having positive relationships with peers and adults is also critical to the success of all students. Children experiencing trauma may suffer delays in the development of age appropriate social skills and may not know how to initiate and cultivate healthy relationships. Many students may feel increasingly isolated, so it is important to encourage them to interact with others, by phone if being online isn’t possible. Offer students a way to connect with you and to connect with others while practicing social distancing. Reach-out to students regularly. For those students without internet or access to digital platforms, connect by phone.
- Social Emotional Learning - Help students identify their emotions. The ability to recognize and name emotions and feelings is critical to the social and emotional development of all students, including those who have experienced trauma. Gaining awareness of emotions and feelings is the starting point for helping students self-manage. Often, children who experience trauma will disconnect from their feelings or use unhealthy coping skills, neither of which are effective solutions. Include social emotional learning lessons and have students communicate their feelings. Suggest breathing exercises, drawing and artwork, listening to calming music, and getting some fresh air and exercise. Use games, movement and the arts/drama as much as possible. Providing safe opportunities for students to share their feelings about COVID-19 may help students identify their feelings in a safe forum as well.
- Hope – Hope is powerful. When the world feels out of control, students need to know that there is someone they can count on-someone who cares, who loves them, and who will support and help them. This isn’t always a child’s primary caregiver. It’s often their educators. Regardless of the challenge’s students face, appreciate and affirm their efforts. Strengthen your relationship with students. Relationships and well-being should take priority over assignments. Students need to be reassured that their teachers care about their well-being. Students and educators can share a tough moment and a hopeful moment. Determine the district support services that are available to all students and share those with students and their families. Educators can work with school counselors and mental health providers to provide stress management techniques such as mindfulness and breathing exercises. The single most common factor for children who develop resilience is at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver, or other adult.
- Educators are the calm for so many. It is important to remember to take care of yourself as well.

Resources:

[NYSUT Family Resources and Activities](#)

[Teaching Tolerance](#)

[The National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

[Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)

[New York State Education Department Covid-19](#)

[New York State Office of Mental Health](#)

[First Book Trauma Toolkit, Tools to Support the Learning & Development of Students Experiencing Childhood & Adolescent Trauma](#)

[Center on the Developing Child Harvard Center](#)

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MARCH 2020