



File: Trauma and Schools

The Trauma-Informed School:

A Step-by-Step Implementation Guide for Administrators and School Personnel

By Jim Sporleder and Heather T. Forbes, LCSW (Beyond Consequences Institute, 2016)

Reviewed by: Nancy A. Colflesh, Ph.D., Leadership Coach. ncolflesh@gmail.com

What are the main ideas?

The main ideas of the book are:

- ~ Lives of trauma can be changed to lives of hope and resilience, one relationship at a time.
- ~ Some say that children today are different than in years/generations past. This team believes that it is CHILDHOOD which is different today, fraught with adverse childhood experiences.
- ~ It is a brain issue, not a behavioral issue.

Why would a school leader want to read this?

There are several reasons why a school leader would want to read this book:

- As I have listened to principals during the past five years, I have heard their stories of increasing instances of disruptive student behavior. They want to rethink what their faculty and staff understand about childhood and trauma. They know the culture must change, but don't always know how to make it happen.
- Few schools have the financial resources to hire an outside expert to help the adults understand the value of building a culture based on addressing the emotional and relationship needs of all of their students and how to do it.
- The content of this book provides valuable professional learning for teachers and support staff in K-12 schools about trauma and specific strategies, true stories and resource materials to aid implementation of becoming a trauma-informed school.

Highlights

Part One: Toxic Stress and Its Relationship to Learning

This section highlights the need to rethink learning and provides a rationale for re-culturing schools based on relationship, trust and emotional safety. This team of principal and social worker provides five critical steps to implementing a trauma-informed school:

1. The stress is coming from outside the school.
2. Allow the student to de-escalate and regulate before solving the issue at hand.
3. It is never about the issue at hand. It goes much deeper.
4. It is a brain issue, not a behavioral issue.
5. Discipline is to teach, not to punish.

Part Two: Implementing a Trauma-informed School

- Working as a Team
 - As with most change initiatives, the authors recommend that 75-80% staff support is needed to begin the implementation of the model.
 - During the first year, a strong Leadership Team will guide their colleagues' learning through modeling, book studies and guidance as others take initial steps to rethink disruptive student behavior.
 - The second year requires 1-1 conversations, coaching support for teachers, and thoughtful questions to foster reflection and problem solving (outlined on page 35-36).
- Creating a Calm Room
 - Based on the belief about keeping students at school when disruptive behavior occurs, it is recommended that a Calm Room be established for the younger grades.
 - Here, a student can deregulate within a context of relationship and trust facilitated by an adult with extensive training in trauma.
- Creating an In-school Suspension Room (ISS)
 - In this room for the upper grades, the student is assisted in what to do next time when his/her behavior issue is discussed.
 - Again, the adult in the ISS Room is highly trained in trauma and skillful at helping the student recount the experience and generate or learn strategies for doing things differently next time.
- Students of Concern (SOC)
 - Using a SOC form (identifying up to 40 reasons), Student of Concern Meetings are held twice a month to discuss the details and develop an Action Plan of interventions to use with the student of concern.
 - A SOC Document follows the student, Action Steps, interventions and progress throughout the year in a Google document for all to review and support.
- Creating a Relationship-Based Culture
 - Make a shift from a traditional school culture of “us versus them” to an “us with them,” trauma-informed, relationship-based culture.
 - Find a wide variety of ways to make connections with the students and model healthy relationships between and among the administrators, teachers and support staff.
 - This school will become a place students want to be instead of a place they are mandated to be.
- Accountability Comes Through Relationship
 - A trauma-informed school has strong boundaries and holds student accountable for their behavior through strategies of kindness and empathy combined with strength and boldness.
 - The definition of discipline in this school culture is to teach, not punish.
- Effective Use of Your School Resource Officer (SRO)
 - This key person in a trauma-informed school must be trained in trauma as well.
 - It is best if the SRO takes an approach which combines Mr. Rogers with General Patton!
- Tracking Dysregulation Through Behavior
 - All staff must understand that a student's behavior provides insight into his/her level of regulation.
 - Use of the Behavior Tracker of disruptive behavior helps the Leadership Team analyze what patterns and themes are emerging for individual students and across the school.
- Implementing the Trauma-Informed Model
 - It is essential to begin building relationships with students prior to the start of the new school year, especially with those who are registering as new students at the school.
 - All-school kick-off events and student ambassadors are key in providing connections with new students.
- Step-by-Step
 - This chapter outlines a monthly, step-by-step process for implementing the trauma-informed school model, starting with teaching students and parents about stress.
 - Along the way, teachers and support staff are asked to assess the effectiveness of the implementation process to inform repetition, revisions, and adjustments in the process.
 - A key, ongoing question is: “What do the faculty and support staff need to sustain the momentum?”

Part Three: Strategies

This section is overflowing with practical relationship strategies and 53 classroom strategies to use in a trauma-informed school and its classrooms. The relationships strategies can be used by the principal, teachers, support staff and volunteers in its hallways, playgrounds, traffic areas, cafeteria, etc.

Appendix:

This section includes forms and templates for assessments, surveys, record-keeping and handouts. For electronic versions of forms in this section, visit: www.TheTraumaInformedSchool.com/appendix

Additional Materials

ASCD Quick Reference Guide: Creating a Trauma-sensitive Classroom. Souers & Hall. 2018.

ASCD Webinar: Welcome to the Nest: The Benefits of Using Trauma-Informed Practices in the Classroom. Souers & Hall. 2016.

A Study Guide for Help for Billy: www.help-for-billy.com

Books:

Becoming an Emotionally Intelligent Teacher. Powell & Kusuma-Powell. 2013.

Fostering Resilient Learners: Strategies for Creating a Trauma-Sensitive Classroom. Souers & Hall. 2016.

Teaching to Strengths: Supporting Students Living with Trauma, Violence and Chronic Stress. Zacarian, Alvarez-Ortiz & Haynes. 2017.

Trauma-Sensitive Schools for the Adolescent Years: Promoting Resiliency and Healing, Grades 6-12. Craig & Sporleder. 2017.

Trauma-Sensitive Schools: Learning Communities for Transforming Children's Lives, K-5. Craig & Stevens. 2015.

Consultants:

Jim Sporleder. <http://jimsporlederconsulting.com/>

Beyond Consequences Institute. www.beyondconsequences.com