Understanding Our Students' Past in Current Classrooms

Trauma-Informed Teaching
Megan M. Oed, PhD LMFTA
A quick intro

Megan M. Oed, PhD

- Assistant Professor, Indianapolis Campus
- Human Services Program
- Training in both family and trauma therapy
- Experience working with traumatized students in all grade levels from kindergarten to college

Goals for today

- Brief explanation of trauma and brain reaction
- What is trauma?
- How to help students in our classes everyday
Does this ever happen?

- Student suddenly gets irritated during class discussion. She gets loud and begins arguing with you and her classmates.
- Student leaves abruptly during class without warning or follow up afterwards.
- Student chronically shares private or personal stories that may or may not relate to the topic at hand.
- Student is often distracted or disengaged during class.

How do we explain this behavior? How do we handle it?
What if it’s something else?

- Evidence that traumatic experiences can impact learning, health, and academic success

- Brain development
  - Trauma rewires the brain - out of learning and curiosity into survival
  - Once trauma is over, time and energy are spent trying to process what happened

- Experiencing trauma is linked to
  - Poorer mental health in college students (Karatekin, 2018; Hecox, 2018).
  - More barriers listed to academic success (Hinojosa, Nguyen, Sellers & Elassar, 2018)
  - Higher depression, anxiety, and risky behaviors (Swanholm, Vosick, & Chng, 2009; Read et al., 2014)
Ivy Tech and Baby Elephants
Let’s try it!

- I’ve got a simple problem for you to solve
- There are three boxes. One is labeled “APPLES” another is labeled “ORANGES”. The last one is labeled “APPLES AND ORANGES”. You know that each is labeled incorrectly. You may ask me to pick one fruit from one box which you choose.
- How can you label the boxes correctly?
- Here’s the trick, in 3 minutes I’m going to let a hungry tiger into the room
- Good luck!
What happened?

- Where did your focus go with the new info?
- How did it change your learning?
- How did it change how you felt about me?
- What about your other presentations for the rest of the conference?
Our students experience these same thing when they experience trauma

- **Trauma**
  - **Disrupts Learning**
    - Increases alert is all situations
What do you mean by trauma?

- Any situation or experience in which our internal resources and skills are not able to cope and respond to external stress (Hoch, Stewart, Webb, & Wyandt-Hiebert, 2015).
- Can be a single event or ongoing situations
- Examples?
Are you sure this is applies to our students?

- Difficulty focusing, attending, retaining, and recalling
- Tendency to miss a lot of classes
- Challenges with emotional regulation
- Fear of taking risks
- Anxiety about deadlines, exams, group work, or public speaking
- Anger, helplessness, or dissociation when stressed
- Withdrawal and isolation •
- Involvement in unhealthy relationships

Hoch et al., 2015.
What should we do about it?

- First step, create safety
  - Trust, compassion, understanding for our students
  - Avoid public criticism and shaming
- Provide clear structure, routines, and expectations
  - Uncertainty creates fear, this sets up trauma responses
  - Rules, syllabus, assignments
- Be a positive model and relationship
  - Calm behavior
  - Self care
More things to try

- Keep expectations high
  - Students achieve to the level we expect
- Be aware of bias and assumptions
  - Veterans, foster students, immigrants, LGBTQ, minority groups
- Provide resources
  - Use both IvyTech and community resources
Help! I’ve got a triggered student

- Prepare students beforehand
- Read the verbal and nonverbal signs.
- Stay calm, use a low voice, and move slowly.
- Listen and reflect what you hear.
  - Stay out of judgement.
- Invite them to take a cool down or time out.
- Ask for help from a trusted person.
- Follow up with student once he or she has calmed down
Want more information?

- National Resilience Institute [https://nationalresilienceinstitute.org/](https://nationalresilienceinstitute.org/)
References


- Karatekin, C. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), Stress and Mental Health in College Students. *Stress and Health*. 2018; 34: 36- 45. [https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.2761](https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.2761)


Questions?
Thank you
Tips for Educators
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Day to Day Teaching

Think about specific ways you can begin doing these strategies in your classroom or office

- Create safety
  - ___________________________________________________________________
  - ___________________________________________________________________

- Provide Structure
  - ___________________________________________________________________
  - ___________________________________________________________________

- Be a positive role model and relationship
  - ___________________________________________________________________
  - ___________________________________________________________________

- Keep expectations high
  - ___________________________________________________________________
  - ___________________________________________________________________

- Provide resources
  - ___________________________________________________________________
  - ___________________________________________________________________

- Watch for personal bias and assumptions
  - ___________________________________________________________________
  - ___________________________________________________________________

Responding to Distress

1. Provide **appropriate warnings and options** for alternatives. If you know an activity is distressing or personal, let students know beforehand. Provide alternatives or time outs as needed.

2. **Read the other person’s verbal and nonverbal signs.** These can provide a heads up before trouble.

3. **Stay calm**, use a **low voice**, and move slowly. The student can use you as an example of how to be calm. Your calm presence is less likely to be read as a threat.

4. **Listen** and **reflect** what you hear. “I can tell you’re feeling overwhelmed right now”. Stay out of judgement.

5. **Invite** them to take a **cool down** or time out. This works best if it is an option, not a command.

6. **Ask** for **help** from a **trusted person**. A classmate or fellow faculty who the student is comfortable with will help the student feel safe.

7. **Follow up** with student once he or she has calmed down. Touching base afterwards allows students to know you care and can provide an opportunity to plan for future situations.

Additional Resources


- National Resilience Institute [https://nationalresilienceinstitute.org/](https://nationalresilienceinstitute.org/)