



**Early Childhood Classrooms:
Reaching & Teaching Children
Exposed to Trauma**

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When I say these words, what comes to mind?

Trauma

Trauma-Informed

Trauma-Informed Instruction

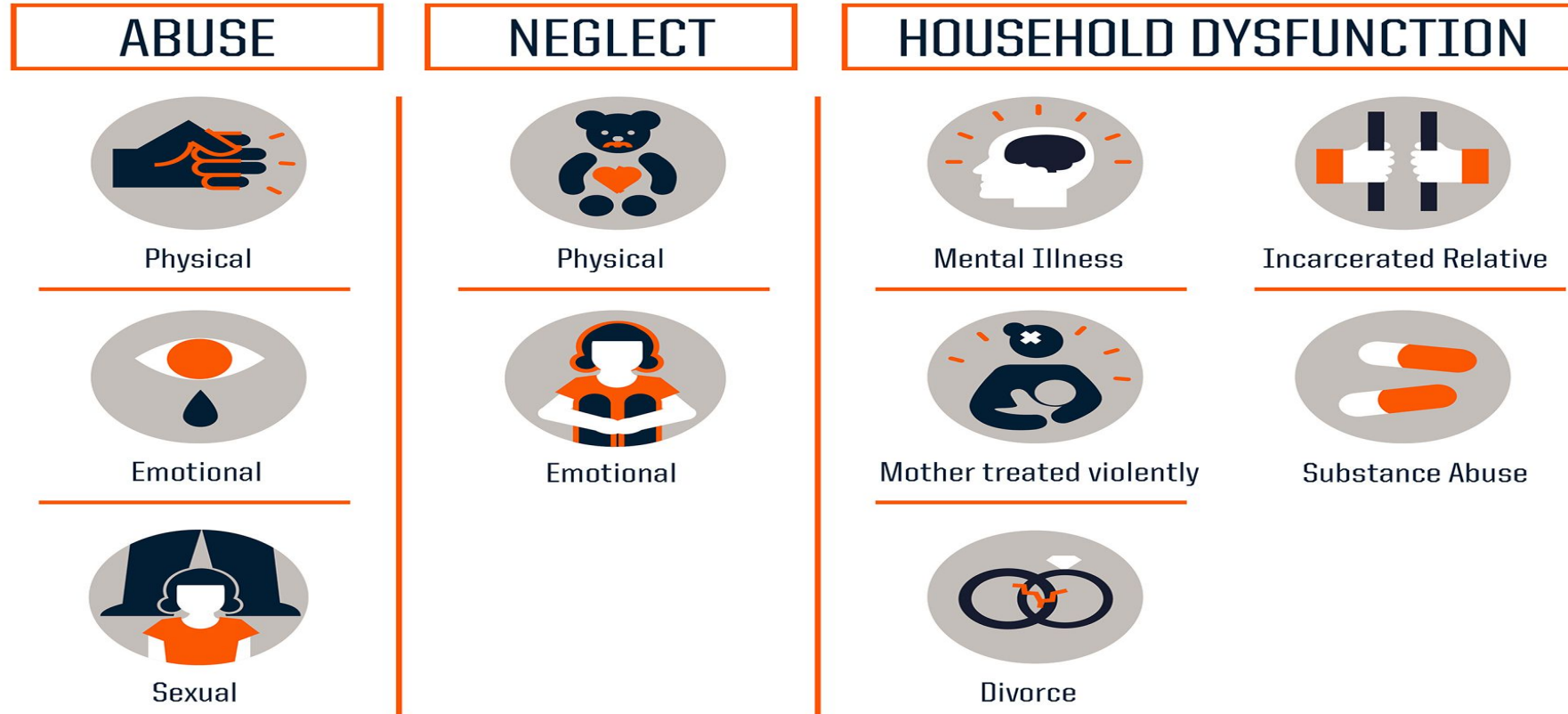
Take a minute and write what these terms mean to you and looks like in your classroom.

What is Trauma?

- Trauma is anything that changes the brain's development.
- Examples include:
 - Abuse, assault, natural disaster, death of loved one.
- Really, anything can lead to trauma depending upon the person and the circumstance.



Adverse Childhood Experiences



ACEs and Brain Development

- Difficulty trusting others
- Social isolation
- Hypersensitivity to physical contact
- Increase medical, emotional and mental problems
- Problems with coordination and balance
- Poor affect regulation
- Problems with academic achievement
- Oppositional/antisocial behaviors
- Difficulty planning for the future



Why We Need Trauma-Informed Schools

- Research tells us that students who survive trauma and grow to be successful have identified one single variable:
 - A caring adult who believed in them and cared about their well-being
- Trauma-informed strategies help students feel safe and students learn how to self-regulate
 - When students learn to self-regulate, classroom disturbances go down and academic scores go up.



Why Trauma Informed?

- Becoming trauma informed requires a shift in the educational paradigm of classroom management.
- It goes against what you have learned about students' behavioral challenges and classroom discipline approaches.
- It changes how policies are developed and implemented in schools when encountering traumatized students.
- It has a ripple effect across the school environment and culture. It involves administration, teachers, staff, students and families



Benefits of a trauma-informed school:

- Improved academic achievement and test scores..
- Improved teacher sense of satisfaction and safety in being a teacher. Improved retention of new teachers.
- Reduction of student behavioral outburst and referrals to the office.
- Reduction of stress for staff and students.
- Reduction in absences, detentions, and suspensions.
- Reduction in student bullying and harassment.

(Oehlberg, 2008)



Now that we know about
Trauma-Informed, what next?

Resilience is greater than ACEs

Resilience is Greater Than ACEs

Resilience is not inherently in children.

Parents, teachers, and caregivers can help children by...

- Gaining understanding of ACEs
- Creating environments where children feel safe emotionally and physically
- Helping children identify feelings and manage emotions
- Creating a safe physical and emotional environment at home, in school, and in neighborhoods



Critical steps to implementing trauma-informed instruction

- **Allow the student to de-escalate and regulate before solving the issue at hand.**
 - Problem solving cannot happen in the moment. Designate a quiet space a student can feel safe de-escalating.
 -
- **It's never about the current issue. It goes much deeper.**

What is driving the student's behavior.

 - Listen and value the student.



What's the real issue?

- **It's a brain issue, not a behavioral issue. My job is to help this student regulate, not simply behave. I**
 - Incorporate regulatory activities into the culture of the classroom and support students in their ability to learn how to self-regulate.
- **Discipline is to teach, not to punish.**
 - Discipline should happen through the context of relationship. Use consequences that keep students in school and foster the building of trust and safety.



Perspective Shift

Old

- He's so defiant
- She is choosing this behavior
- What's wrong with him?
- I don't need to call home, they won't help
- I won't tolerate disrespect



New

- He is lacking social skills
- She is reacting with adrenaline/survival skills
- What happened to him
- Calling home may help give more insight
- How can I help them learn respect

Punishment vs. Reforming Behaviors

Punitive

Focus on action:

- Verbal reprimand
- Lose recess
- No specials
- Seclusion from other kids
- Suspension

vs.

Trauma-Informed

Focus on behavior:

- Find out what is going on
- Allow student to take responsibility for actions
- Consequences that teach new patterns of behavior

Big Idea #1 Mindfulness

I do **remember**, but sometimes when I try to remember, I forget.

Winnie the Pooh



Adult self-awareness

- **Stay true to being a teacher**
 - Be available and accountable
- **Stay out of Oz**
 - A child creates a tornado - some disruption to the learning environment - and we get sucked in, too. Nothing good happens when the child and adult are both in the midst of chaos.
 - If it's predictable, it's preventable.
- **It's not about you**
 - Students' actions and behaviors are primarily driven by an unmet need - not a desire to push your buttons or make a kink in your day.



Big Idea #2 Relationships

The **relationships** we forge and maintain with others are essential to our collective and individual success.

Souers with Hall, 2016, p. 90



Relationship are key

- Attend to relationships
 - Instead of interacting, focus on connecting
- Control vs. Influence
 - We can only control ourselves. We can influence the beliefs, attitudes, behaviors and outcomes in our classroom



Big Idea #3 Belief

We have always held to the hope, the **belief**, the conviction that there is a better life, a better world, beyond the horizon.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Our **beliefs** influence our behaviors, actions, attitudes, choices and relationships.

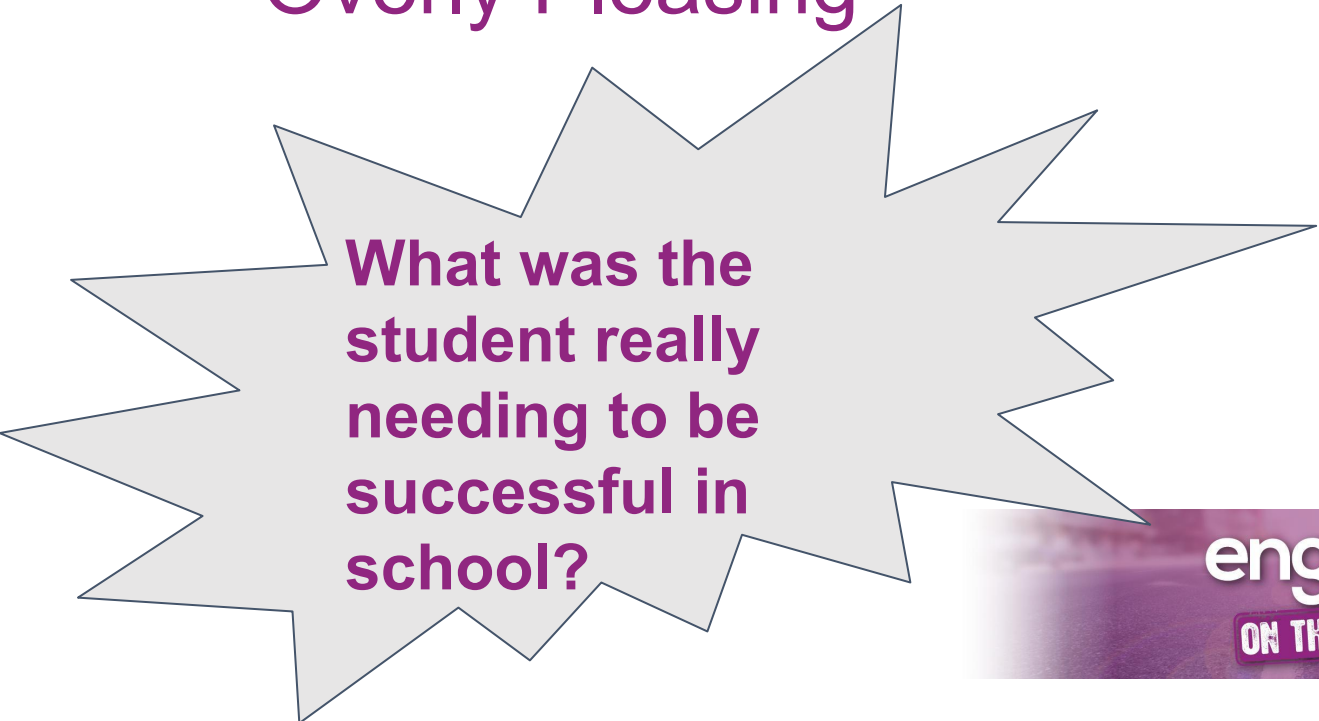
- Forever changed, NOT forever damaged
- It's okay to not be okay.
 - Teachers may need to help students understand their frustration by asking questions.
 - What's interfering with your success right now?
 - What are you struggling with today?



Think of a time when a student behaved in one of the following ways:

- Manipulative
- Bossy
- Dramatic
- Aggressive
- Clingy
- Attention-seeking
- Oppositional

- Distracted
- Disinterested
- Overly Pleasing



What was the student really needing to be successful in school?

Emotional needs:

The need to regulate feelings and responses



- Provide a break
- Give a “fidget” to let them cool off and refocus

Control needs:

The need to be in charge of one’s own situation(s)



- Give the student a job
- Provide some predictability and choice

Physical needs:

The need to eat, sleep, exercise and take care of the body



- snack or meal
- allow a student to rest. Consider schedule changes

Big Idea #4 Perspective

Distance not only gives nostalgia, but **perspective**, and maybe objectivity.

Robert Morgan



Grace - show others and yourself some

Grace

- I am doing my best to help this student. I am in need of some support to brainstorm options.
- Something is going on that is preventing this child from understanding the concept.
- We are going to work together to find a way to fix this problem.

vs.

Blame

- Nothing I do ever seems to work with this child.
- This child doesn't care or want to learn.
- You have until the count of five to ___ or ___ will happen.

Grace or Blame?

By **pulling the student aside** and **redirecting** them to the desired behavior, such as

- Asking a student to go back to the entrance and re-enter in a state that is expected.
- Asking the student to take a deep breath and to say what should have been done instead.

By **pulling the student aside** and **reprimanding** them by

- Writing their name on the board or clip down
- Removing them from the class

Praise and Kindness

Let's face it, we are in the business of helping and giving. When we share praise and kindness, we empower and strengthen relationships and our students' self-worth.

- Praise builds resilience. Children have to hear they can overcome to overcome.
- Praise doesn't make children stop trying. It encourages success.
- Praise growth, energy and flexibility. It helps develop self-concept.



In my classroom

- Managing Strong Emotions
 - “Smell the flowers, blow out a candle” or “Cool the soup”
 - Quiet corner
 - Magic mustache
- Exercising Working Memory
 - Teach children to play matching games
 - Verbal Memory games - “Going on Vacation” begin with 2-3 items to remember. As the year goes on, add longer series to remember.
 - Guess what is missing



In my classroom

- Sustained Attention
 - Play based environment and choice
- Sequencing Information
 - First/then charts
 - Beginning, Middle, End stories
- Cognitive Flexibility - transitions
 - Safe and predictable environment
 - Small steps
 - Offer to help

In my classroom

- Self-Regulation
 - Do-overs
 - Rehearsal
 - Role play
 - Puppets
 - Scripted stories
 - Visual cues
 - Ask for compromise

What about Time Out?

- Time outs may stop the inappropriate behavior for the moment and may give the adult a break from the child, but it does nothing to change the child from the inside out over the long term.
- The underlying message we want students to hear is that we will love them through their unlovely behavior.



Other things to consider

- Organization of time
 - Provide predictability
 - Provide visual cues
 - Allow child-directed activities
 - minimize the number of transitions
 - Outdoor play
- Managing transitions and routines
 - MODEL
 - Manage time to guide students through transitions



Daily Schedule

- Arrival in the morning
 - Be aware that environmental triggers may set a child off
 - Greet children as they arrive
 - Allow children time to “warm up” and feel comfortable
 - Acknowledge the child and family feelings if separation is hard
 - Try to avoid the hurry up/slow down rush
- Nap time - quiet time
 - They will miss them in college, but you can't make children fall asleep
 - If children need to nap, build in some down time
 - Morning sleepy children - consider your schedule to allow a few minutes of downtime



Daily Schedule

- Group Time
 - Spatial awareness
- Focus
 - Have a fidget or sensory object for student(s)
- Blurting out
 - Practice conversation skills
 - Answer tickets
 - Talking Stick
 - Thumbs up/down
 - Small individual answer boards



I've had some good luck with this

- List 3-6 ideas you've had success with in your classroom.



**Every day is a new day and
a fresh start.**

Thank you for each day you spend with
Oklahoma's children



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Have a great day!

