TRAUMA INFORMED CLASSROOMS FOR ELL STUDENTS
An experience (or extreme threat) of physical or psychological harm or the severe withholding of resources for healthy development

• Trauma can be terrifying or painful. It can provoke intense fear, helplessness or horror.

• Trauma overwhelms our capacity to regulate internal states. In a traumatic experience we cannot process or integrate what is happening.
Types of Trauma

- Acute Trauma
- Chronic Trauma in country of origin
- Complex Trauma
- Vicarious or Secondary Trauma
- Trauma of acculturation
  - Adolescent culture here vs in home country
  - Victimization
  - Fear and inhibited help seeking
  - Economic/emotional/social situation
  - Role change in a new country
- PTSD – what is it?
PTSD: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- Exposure to actual or threat of death, serious injury, or sexual violence.
- Symptoms may include: repetitive play (children), recurrent dreams, flashbacks, distress at exposure to cues recalling the event, hyperarousal, avoidance of stimuli associated with the event, negatively altered cognitions, depressive symptoms, anxiety, depersonalization/derealization.

DSM-5: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – Fifth Edition
American Psychiatric Association
Survival Brain vs. Learning Brain

- We all have normal alarm systems in our brain/body that let us know when we are under threat and mobilize us to fight, flee (flight) or freeze in the face of a threat.

- When youth experience continuous threats/trauma, the brain/body is put into a chronic state of fear, activating the “survival brain” (mid/lower areas of the brain).

Trauma and Resilience: An Adolescent Provider Toolkit; Adolescent Health Working Group 2013
Key Insight:

- Because of constant exposure to violence and trauma, children and youth can become locked into a permanent state of Fight/Flight.

- This makes these children and youth react to normal experiences as if they were life and death threats.

- This is not a rational/cognitive process. It is wired into their physiological response.
Trauma Impacted Youth

May have difficulty with:

- Managing “big” emotions
- Chronic irritability/anxiety that interferes with problem solving
- Empathy
- Expressing concerns/needs in words
- Taking into account the wider context of a situation
- Appreciating how one’s behavior impacts other people
- Working in groups/connecting with others

The Sanctuary Model: Designing and Implementing Trauma-Informed School Based Programs, The Sanctuary Institute
Survival Response:
Fight, Flight or Freeze

**Fight:** Youth struggle to regain or hold onto power, especially when feeling coerced.
- Youth often mislabeled as “non-compliant” or “combative”.

**Flight:** Youth disengages or runs away and “checks out” emotionally.
- Youth often mislabeled as “uncooperative” or “resistant”

**Freeze:** Youth gives in to those in positions of power; does not, or is unable to “speak up.”
- Youth often mislabeled as “passive” or “unmotivated”

Trauma and Resilience: An Adolescent Provider Toolkit; Adolescent Health Working Group 2013
Trauma Triggers

Common Triggers include:

• Unpredictability
• Sudden changes/transitions
• Loss of control
• Sensory overload
• Feeling vulnerable
• Confrontation

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The Trauma Informed Approach At School:

• Recognizes and understands that certain behaviors are related to traumatic experience and uses this recognition and understanding to drive a new set of practices at school with young people who exhibit these sets of behaviors.

• Shifts from a model that asks, “What is wrong with you?” to one that asks, “What happened to you?” and “How can I shift the school environment and classroom practices to respond more effectively to your needs?”
Fostering Resiliency: 6 Core Strengths for Healthy Development

1. Attachment: making relationships
2. Self regulation: containing impulses
3. Affiliation: being part of a group
4. Attunement: being aware of others
5. Tolerance: accepting differences
6. Respect: Finding value in differences

Bruce Perry, M.D., Ph.D.
Changing Behavior & Fostering Learning

- Routines – create safety and predictability. Help regulate nervous system.
- Rituals – are routines with meaning. Create feelings of belonging and connection.
- Regulation - the ability to monitor and control our behavior, emotions, or thoughts, altering them based upon what the situation demands.
- Relationships – the key to learning! Connection, affection, attunement, interaction, and respect.
School-wide programs aligned with trauma informed care in schools:

- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
- Restorative Justice
- Mindfulness Practices
- Skills Streaming
- Comprehensive School Based Health Centers
- Referrals to Community Based Services