Trauma Informed Culturally Responsive PBIS

Oakland Unified School District
Behavioral Health Unit
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Trauma

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.

Joyce Dorado, Ph.D (2013) Child and Adolescent Services, UCSF/SFGH
Trauma and Resilience: An Adolescent Provider Toolkit; Adolescent Health Working Group 2013
Chronic Trauma

Exposure to violence:

- Domestic
- Gang, community
- Abuse, neglect
- Drugs
- War
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
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
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.
**Survival Response:**

**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 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?”
School-wide programs aligned with trauma informed care in schools:

- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
- Restorative Justice
- Mindfulness Practices
- Comprehensive School Based Health Centers