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Trauma-Sensitivity:
What Works with Kids?

NYS-TEACHS December Workshops

Children's Health Fund

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Making a difference for 30 years

Our mobile medical programs have provided more than **3.6 million** health encounters with kids and families to date.

Healthy and Ready to Learn Pilot Program

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- School-based model

- Healthy and Ready to Learn Team

Full-time site manager ⟷ **Full-time mental health clinician**

Our Elementary Schools

PS 36 – The Margaret Douglas School (West Harlem, Manhattan)
Enrollment: 362
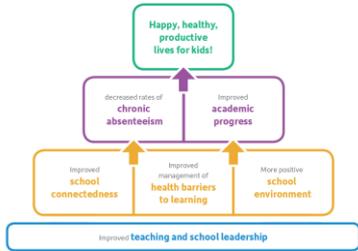Economic Need Index*: 82%
Chronic Absence: 43.0%
STH: ~18.8%

PS 49 – Willis Avenue School (Mott Haven, South Bronx)
Enrollment: 609
Economic Need Index*: 92%
Chronic Absence: 28.1%
STH: ~28.4%

2016-17 SY – School Snapshots   *As defined by NYC Department of Education

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Goals

Happy, healthy, productive lives for kids!

decreased rates of **chronic absenteeism**   Improved **academic progress**

Improved **school connectedness**   Improved management of **health barriers to learning**   More positive **school environment**

Improved **teaching and school leadership**

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Intervene on Health Barriers to Learning

- Poorly controlled asthma
- Vision problems
- Hearing problems
- Dental pain
- Behavioral and emotional health problems
- Hunger

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Our Approach

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TIER THREE

TOP PRIORITY

TIER TWO

AT-RISK OR TARGETED GROUPS

TIER ONE

WHOLE SCHOOL

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Our Approach

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- Strengths-based
- Love and Support
- Collaborative
- Whole Family
- Data-driven/Continuous Improvement
- Cultural Relevance
- Restorative Justice
- Trauma-informed

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Our Approach

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- Strengths-based
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- Cultural Relevance
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- **Trauma-informed**

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Opening Reflection

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Trauma

Jot down words or thoughts that come to mind when you think of trauma.

Objectives

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1. Discuss ways that trauma affects the brain, body, and behavior.

2. Demonstrate ability to use trauma-sensitive strategies.

3. Participate in self-reflection to identify triggers and discuss coping practices.

Reminders: Self-care and Locus of Control are important in any helping profession!

Emerging Information

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- Trauma is an extensive topic of discussion across academic settings.
- Research continues to provide new information, recommendations, and best-practices for effective treatment.
- Becoming trauma sensitive simply requires a willingness to incorporate a framework of strategies into the good work you already do.

Child Safety Reminder
(Active vs Past Trauma)

- Safety is always the first priority when working with children.

- There is an important difference between past trauma and current trauma

- Current or emerging trauma = immediate action must be taken to ensure safety!

Safety Safety Safety!

What is trauma?

- Everyone experiences **stress**. It is the level, frequency, and duration of stress that impacts a person's ability to develop and function normally.

- **Trauma** is more than a negative or stressful experience. It encompasses feelings of **helplessness** and **terror** and has a severe and long-lasting impact.

Positive Stress

Tolerable Stress

Toxic Stress
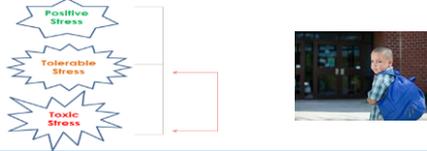
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Chronically stressful or traumatic experiences can include:

- Emotional Abuse
- Physical Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Neglect
- Exposure to Substance Abuse

- Exposure to Mental Illness
- Exposure to Domestic Violence
- Incarcerated Parent
- Divorce or Parental Abandonment
- Death of a Relative

Thinking Question

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In a typical classroom of 30 kids, **how many** students do you think have been exposed to an ACE?

Thinking Question

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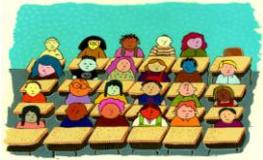
In a classroom of 30 kids, **6 students** on average have experienced an ACE.

25% of children experience at least 1 traumatic event by age 4.

Thinking Question

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In a classroom of 30 kids, in **the communities we work with**, **25 students** on average have experienced an ACE.

83% of inner city youth report experiencing one or more traumatic events.

Foundation : Brain, Body, and Behavior

Snapshot: Trauma has major impact on brain systems and connections, due to the brain's *intrusive* preoccupation with perceived threats. The impact is both *immediate* and *long-lasting*, and *can be permanent* if left untreated.

Common trauma-related deficiencies seen in students:

Academic
- Gain attention and remain attentive
- Order thoughts and follow steps
- Comprehension and use of critical thinking
- Ability to retain information and put it into practice

Social-Emotional
- Emotional self-regulation
- Disrupted attachment
- Cognitive delays
- Overwhelming feels of frustration or anxiety

Foundation : Brain, Body, and Behavior

When the brain perceives a threat, it automatically sends signals to other parts of the body, creating the Fight/Flight/Freeze responses and behaviors.

Trigger is the term for events that precede a trauma response. Triggers vary and are different for each child, but there are common trauma related triggers and warning signs that adults can observe in children.

Trigger ⟹ 🧠 ⟹ Fight/Flight/Freeze Response

A Body's Reaction to Stress:
FIGHT, FLIGHT, or FREEZE

TRIGGERS (Threat-cue):
Reactions don't happen for "no reason." Something has set off that reaction such as:
- Not being listened to or tone of voice
- Loud noises or yelling
- A certain smell
- People being too close
- Perceived invasion of privacy (e.g. desk check)
- Criticism (even constructive)
- Time of day or year
- Particular activities
- Essays about summer activities
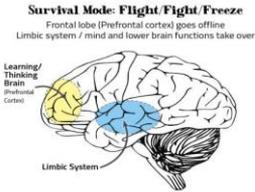- Painting a picture of family or home

TRIGGER WARNINGS:
There are often signs of distress that may signal the proximity of a trigger including:
- Restlessness/Agitation/Pacing
- Shortness of breath / pounding heart
- Sweating
- Clenching teeth or fists
- Hand wringing
- Bouncing legs
- Shaking/Rocking
- Crying
- Giggling at inappropriate times
- Singing or yelling
- Swearing / Aggressive language

The Impact of Chronic Stress and Trauma

A student cannot reason with you while experiencing Flight/Fight/Freeze. They must first return to a baseline of feeling safe and unthreatened.

Survival Mode: Flight/Fight/Freeze
Frontal lobe (Prefrontal cortex) goes offline
Limbic system / mind and lower brain functions take over

Learning/
Thinking
Brain
(Prefrontal
Cortex)

Limbic System

Foundation : Brain, Body, and Behavior

Think about what causes you to become overwhelmed or stressed out, as an adult. Are there warning signs others could observe that indicate you are too stressed? What are the ways you or any adult copes with stress?

In comparison, what are 3 triggers or warning signs that you have seen with children you've worked with?

Foundation : Brain, Body, and Behavior

- The good news—children are **resilient**!

- Neurological research has discovered that **neuroplasticity** can help children overcome the affects of trauma exposure.

Trauma-Sensitive Approaches Overview

- Take the Time to Earn a Child's Trust
- Practice Radical Calmness
- Listen and use active listening
- Be aware of Body Language
- Know Your Own Triggers
- Be mindful that Physical Space and Touching can be triggering.
- Boundaries, Boundaries, Boundaries!

Our Approach

TIER THREE

TOP PRIORITY

TIER TWO

AT-RISK OR TARGETED GROUPS

TIER ONE

WHOLE SCHOOL

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Strategies and Actions

The matrix offers suggestions for becoming more trauma-sensitive as an individual and as a community.

Matrix of School Success Framework Strategies

Next Up:
Applying the strategies

Essential Element	Strategy	Related Action
CREATING A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT	Empathy	- Actively Listen - Normalize the experience - Minimize self-blame - Avoid giving advice
	Strengths-based approach	- Deliberately point out actions and characteristics that are positive, unique, or valuable - Guide a student towards recognizing and using his or her strengths. - Redirect a challenging behavior by focusing on what you know the student can do well
	Predictability	- Be clear about expectations - Follow through - Keep a consistent routine - Talk through changes
	Prevention rather than punishment	- Help the student identify triggers and create appropriate coping plans - Teach or demonstrate what "should" be done

Creating a Supportive School Environment

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Strategy: Empathy

Video – "Empathy is feeling *with* people" - Brene Brown

Related Actions:
1. Actively Listening
   –**Example: Low and Slow**
2. Normalize the experience
3. Minimize self-blame for student
4. Avoid giving advice

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Strategy: Empathy
"Empathy is feeling *with* people" - Brene Brown

Scenario:
A student who is usually in high spirits comes to class clearly upset. After you ask, she reveals that over the weekend her mother went into the hospital for rehab and will be away from home for an unknown period of time. This morning her dad told her "everything will be fine" and to "try to have a good day".

Question: What might a more empathetic response sound like?

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Strategy: Strengths Based Approach

Related Actions:
1. Deliberately point out actions and characteristics that are positive, unique, or valuable
2. Guide student towards using their strengths
3. Redirect a challenging behavior by focusing on what you know the student can do well.
   –**Example: Positive Framing**

Creating a Supportive School Environment

Strategy: Strengths Based Approach

Scenario: Student is quick to become argumentative and refuses to begin a required project after it's introduced. Student folds arms, and states that they are stubborn and no-one will get them to do anything they don't want to do.

Question: What might a strengths based approach entail here?

Creating a Supportive School Environment

Strategy: Predictability

Related Actions:
1. Be clear about expectations
   –**Example: What to Do**
2. Follow through
3. Keep a consistent routine
4. Talk through changes

Creating a Supportive School Environment

Strategy: Predictability

Scenario: A chronically disorganized student becomes hyper, worried, and distracting to other students by interrupting your instruction to repeatedly ask about changes in the class' schedule due to an upcoming field trip.

Question: What predictability related strategies might help this student feel safe and supported through this change of routine? If the student requires 1:1 attention to calm down, what might you say if this was your student?

Creating a Supportive
School Environment

Strategy: Prevention
  (rather than punishment)

Related Actions:
  1. Help the student identify triggers and create appropriate coping plan
  2. Teach or demonstrate what "should" be done, through personal modeling.
     –**Example: Attention Continuum**

Creating a Supportive
School Environment

Strategy: Prevention
(rather than punishment)

Scenario: Everyday your class after lunch is a huge challenge. Many students are hyperactive and it takes 15 minutes to settle the class down, and throughout the period, students ask to use the bathroom repeatedly, or call out to ask for water. Calling home, giving detention or extra homework hasn't worked.

Question: What type of proactive or preventative approach could benefit the class(and you)?

Summary

- We've defined trauma, discussed the prevalence of trauma exposure (ACEs), and explored how trauma impacts the brain, body, and behavior.
- Through self-reflection we've acknowledged that stressors for children and adults are not all that different, and that as adults we have established coping skills that children exposed to trauma struggle to gain.
- We've reviewed general best practices and delved into sample scenarios to demonstrate how to build a supportive school environment.

Trauma Informed Strategies

People are motivated by the positive far more than the negative. Seeking enjoyment and happiness will spur stronger action than seeking to avoid punishment.

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Lessons Learned

- The issues are complex.
- Collaboration is key.
- School connectedness goes a long way.
- Never assume.

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Healthy and Ready to Learn Resource and Training Center*

Goal: Bring our tools/resources as well as other relevant resources to more schools

Audience: Families and Educators

- Website - www.hrl.nyc
- On-site Training
- Technical Assistance

*Funded by New York City Council

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Healthy and Ready to Learn Resource and Training Center

Using a computer, tablet, or phone, visit:

www.hrl.nyc

Stay in touch!

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Questions, Comments?

THANK YOU!