

Trauma and Cognitive Function: The Power of Calm

Over the past presentations we have learned:

1. The Effects of Adverse Child Experiences

“Adverse Childhood Experiences are the main determinate of the health and welfare of a nation.” Dr. Vincent Felitti

I would add:

Adverse childhood experiences are a significant determinate of the cognitive functioning and educational attainment of a student.

ACEs affect the architecture of the brain and nervous systems.

Overly-connected limbic system creates a highly reactive and highly emotional student.

Affects:

- emotion regulation
- concentration
- mind-body illnesses
- emotion reserves of the student
- resiliency

It's why many students are on medications.

ACEs affect the self-image and self-perception of the student

Attachment and trust

Systems of meaning (moral clarity)

Self-efficacy (Do I have the power to make a change in my life?)

Hopelessness

Emotional impotence

2. Affirmation & Empathy

Affirmation- the gift of “normal.” I agree that you have been affected by what has happened. It is not just in your head. **I don't judge you.**

Empathy- **I understand and connect with your feelings.**

3. Anger is often the result of having our **patterns and habits threatened**
5 Threats
Physical - Self-image - Belief - Power - Goal

When a student gets angry, seek to understand how he has been threatened.

The Overview of what we have learned:

Stress has affected many of our students
Many are disconnected and hyper-vigilant

It often affects their cognitive functions

Flexibility- ability to switch to appropriate mental mode
(stuck in their patterns and habits)

Theory of mind- insight into other people's world

Problem solving- defining problems and generating solutions

Working memory- capacity to hold and manipulate information

Emotion regulation- keep emotions in appropriate boundaries

Inhibition- ability to restrain one's words and actions

The Insight: Teachers are to be calm and connected.

Maintaining a calm atmosphere prevents or deescalates stressful situations

Maintaining a calm demeanor:

provides a new social model for students

enables students to become more cognitive

The Application: The 4 R's of Trauma-Sensitive Learning Environment

Rest- Relationships- Reassurance- Routine

Rest- (a calm- non-threatening environment in class, school, and at home)

I remember in 7th grade in the cafeteria, the snarkey putdowns and emotional warfare.

Teachers- it is not your place nor is it in the interest of your student's self-image for you to engage them in a war of cut-downs, insults and snarkey comments.

It is your duty to interact in a respectful, non-threatening way to provide them with a the opportunity to engage an adult in a thoughtful, responsive manner, rather than an emotional, reactive manner.

Relationships- “Every positive interaction with a caring adult provides a standard for a child to measure their life by.” Dr. Bruce Perry

Relationships are the key to cognitive, social, and emotional learning.

Tell me how relationships are key to:

emotion regulation

learned appropriateness

theory of mind

inhibition (appropriate words and actions)

problem solving

flexibility

Reassurance- (Affirmation, not judged or criticized)

The Gift of being “normal”

Routine- Often highly-stressed students don't cope well with unexpected activities. They also don't cope well with **unexpected or unusual changes** in a **teacher's behavior** or **routine**

Have known and consistent standards of classroom management and routine.

Make good transitions from one activity to another.

Some students will misbehave because they understand what will happen to them.

Their punishment provides a manner of control and comfort because

“The devil you know is better than the devil you don't know.”

Group Discussion

How do relationships improve or affect a person's emotion regulation?

What can I do to improve a student's emotion regulation?

Group Discussion

How do relationships improve or affect a person's learned appropriateness?

What can I do to improve a student's learned appropriateness?

Group Discussion

How do relationships improve or affect a person's theory of mind?

What can I do to improve a student's theory of mind?

Group Discussion

How do relationships improve or affect a person's problem solving?

What can I do to improve a student's problem solving?

Group Discussion

How do relationships improve or affect a person's inhibition (using appropriate words and actions)?

What can I do to improve a student's inhibition?

Group Discussion

How do relationships improve or affect a person's flexibility?

What can I do to improve a student's flexibility?
