

Six Principles of Interacting with Students Impacted by Trauma



1. Always empower, never disempower

- Students affected by trauma compete with teachers for power
- Controlling their environment is the way to stay safe
- The more helpless and dependent they feel, the worse their behavior will become

DO THIS:

- ✓ Avoid power struggles at all cost
- ✓ Use discipline that does not resemble the trauma
- ✓ Stay away from public shaming
- ✓ Use consistent, respectful and non-violent language

2. Provide Unconditional Positive Regard

- Traumatic events make it difficult for children to trust
- Unconditional Positive Regard serves to combat children's belief that adults are dangerous

DO THIS:

- ✓ Provide genuine respect
- ✓ Show sustained kindness despite responses
- ✓ Act with empathy and not sympathy

3. Maintain High Expectations

- Lowering expectations sends messages such as "You are too damaged to behave" or "You are different so I am giving up on you"
- These messages can increase children's feelings of powerlessness

DO THIS:

- ✓ Use consistent expectations and limits to send students the message that they are worthy

- ✓ Teach students the reasoning behind rules that are in place for their safety and well-being
- ✓ Create limits that are immediate, related, age-appropriate and proportional
- ✓ Deliver limits in calm and respectful voice

4. Check Assumptions, Observe, and Question

- Abuse is not specific to any one ethnicity, income, gender, religion, or ability
- Trauma is an individual response- the impact of trauma looks different in every person

DO THIS:

- ✓ Identify your own assumptions
- ✓ Catch yourself and make an observation instead
- ✓ Ask questions: Be willing to listen to the response

5. Be a Relationship Coach

- Relationships established with and among students influence the tone and demeanor in classrooms

DO THIS:

- ✓ Take every opportunity to teach students relationship skills
- ✓ Relationships help students feel safe and supported, so they can put more energy in to learning
- ✓ By being a relationships coach, teachers can help students mend perceptions of community and friends

6. Provide Guided Opportunities for Helpful Participation

- When students contribute they improve feelings of self-worth, strengthen resiliency, and feel like they belong
- Belonging provides opportunities to be heard, make choices, have responsibility, and engage in problem solving

DO THIS:

- ✓ Carefully plan, model, and observe ongoing interactions among students
- ✓ Be there, show you care, and help students find answers to questions