



CREATING TRAUMA-SENSITIVE AND CULTURALLY-RESPONSIVE CLASSROOMS

TRAUMA-SENSITIVE CLASSROOMS

“A trauma-sensitive school is a safe and respectful environment that enables students to build caring relationships with adults and peers, self-regulate their emotions and behaviors, and succeed academically, while supporting their physical health and well-being” (Lesley University 2012).¹

Helping Traumatized Children Learn is a comprehensive resource developed by Massachusetts Advocates for Children: Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative in collaboration with Harvard Law School and the Task Force on Children Affected by Domestic Violence. This free resource helps school leaders better understand how to create trauma-sensitive schools. Beginning on page 47, the text includes a flexible framework to help schools develop trauma-sensitive structures. Beginning on page 53, it is suggested that teachers should be trained in the following:

- Helping children regulate emotions in order to master social and academic skills
- Maintaining high academic standards
- Helping children feel safe
- Managing behavior and setting limits
- Reducing bullying and harassment
- Helping children have a sense of agency
- Building on strengths
- Understanding the connection between behavior and emotion
- Avoiding labels

Beginning on page 61, there are tips for educators regarding academic instruction for students who experience trauma. Tips include:

- Discovering each student’s area of competence so that each student has a chance to share success
- Providing predictability and established routines
- Assigning academic work that is consistent with students who have not experienced trauma
- Providing positive behavioral supports
- Using multiple ways to present information
- Helping students process information
- Helping students learn how to identify and articulate emotions

¹ Lesley University Center for Special Education and Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative of Massachusetts Advocates for Children and the Legal Services Center of Harvard Law School. (2012). Trauma-sensitive school checklist. Retrieved from <http://sspw.dpi.wi.gov/files/sspw/pdf/mhtraumachecklist.pdf>

Visit http://www.massadvocates.org/documents/HTCL_9-09.pdf to obtain a free downloadable copy of the resource.

As referenced in the accompanying staff self-care tool, *The Heart of Learning and Teaching: Compassion, Resiliency, and Academic Success* is a great resource for trauma-informed practices. In chapter 3, there are 6 instruction practices for creating trauma-sensitive classrooms. These instructional tips include:

- Always empower, never disempower
- Provide unconditional positive regard
- Maintain high expectations
- Check Assumptions, Observe, and Question
- Be a relationship coach
- Provide guided opportunities for helpful participation

Visit <http://www.k12.wa.us/compassionateschools/pubdocs/theheartoflearningandteaching.pdf> to obtain a free copy of the downloadable resource.

TRAUMA-SENSITIVE SCHOOL CHECKLIST

Schools can visit <http://sspw.dpi.wi.gov/files/sspw/pdf/mhtraumachecklist.pdf> to evaluate their current school practices and decide priority areas to create effective, trauma-sensitive schools.

CULTURALLY-RESPONSIVE CLASSROOMS

A positive classroom environment is instrumental to ensure all students can engage in learning. In addition to trauma-sensitive classrooms, teachers should create culturally-responsive classrooms to ensure: students feel safe and welcome; students can actively partake in academic content; and students can think critically about the world around them.

Tips for creating a culturally-responsive classroom:

- Teachers should frequently examine their social-location and biases to challenge their own stereotypes and assumptions about their students.
- Teachers should create classroom community environments where all students feel safe and welcome, including LGBT and culturally and linguistically diverse students.
- Students should have multiple opportunities to share about and reflect on their own culture and life experiences.
- Teachers should use a variety of curriculum materials that reflect multiple cultures and points of view.
- Teachers should involve parents, family, and community members in classroom lessons.
- Teachers should empower students to be agents of change as suggested in the Colorado Legacy Foundation's Transforming School Climate Toolkit. For example, Rangeview High School has created a Multicultural Studies Class that formed out of the Diversity Student Alliance (DSA) club. This class has not only fostered a profound impact on the students taking the elective course, but it also has incredible school-wide reach. The students host school-wide Diversity Days throughout the school year where DSA students teach lessons to other classrooms about a range of topics, some of which include: poverty, homelessness, individual rights, sexual biases, inequality, and inclusion. To learn more, visit <http://coloradoedinitiative.org/resources/transforming-school-climate/>.