

Trauma - Creating a Supportive Classroom

Trauma can change the way a child experiences the world. Sometimes this can result in a student who feels unsafe, powerless, and ashamed, and these feelings often come out in challenging behavior in the classroom. When we create environments that support students better by incorporating the principles of trauma-informed care, we can help change the way a student feels at church and this can make all the difference.

Trauma-Informed Care

Trauma-Informed Care is an approach to working with people that understands that most people have been through trauma. Therefore, creating environments that are supportive for them is important. Trauma-Informed Care is based on five principles: Safety, Choice, Collaboration, Trustworthiness and Empowerment. When we incorporate these principles into our classroom environments, we can help people feel safer, more empowered, and accepted just as they are.

UNSAFE to SAFE

Trauma makes people feel unsafe. Make your classroom feel safer by incorporating elements of safety and trustworthiness.

- Make sure safety protocols are in place and followed.
- Promote trauma awareness by hosting a Trauma-Informed Care Training at your church. Check out traumainformedchurches.org or lostsparrows.org for more information.
- Create a predictable classroom by making expectations clear and preparing students for transitions between activities.
- Train your volunteers how to handle challenging behavior or other issues with compassion and consistency, so that students can trust that they will be safe if they have a problem.

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POWERLESS to EMPOWERED

Trauma makes people feel powerless. Create an empowering environment by giving choices, collaborating and empowering students.

- If a student is struggling with an activity, offer two acceptable choices for how they can handle it. For example you could say, “Would you like to join the group or sit at the table and draw quietly?” Then respect the student’s choice and give praise for cooperation.
- If a student is struggling try collaborating by asking “What would make this better for you?” Then listen and see if there are ways to adapt things that work for everyone.
- Find out what a student is good at, then look for ways for them to use their strengths in class.

ASHAMED to ACCEPTED

Trauma often makes people feel ashamed. Make students feel accepted by showing them that they can trust that they will be safe to be themselves.

- Give each student a warm greeting whenever they come to class. Some students don’t always receive this, but all students need this.
- Take time to get to know and really listen to your students. Modeling what healthy relationships can look like is more important for many students that you may realize.
- Even when a student is having challenging behavior, always approach with empathy and respect. Treat your student the way you would want to be treated if you were struggling.
- Remind them that Jesus loves them and your church does too!

Incorporating the principles of Trauma-Informed Care into your classroom will not erase the impact of trauma, but it can reduce some trauma triggers. This can help your class feel like a safe place to learn about Christ. And helping students build a relationship with Christ will change the way they experience the world too.

What you do matters!