

# Trauma-Sensitive Teachers

## TRAUMA SENSITIVE TOOL

### Traumaversaries & Loss

As you heard in the video, there is so much Loss & Grief in students who've been impacted by trauma's history. Understanding and knowing how loss and grief will impact your students is so important in understanding them. Truly grasping that students who've been impacted by trauma have experienced a multitude of losses in their short life time, which have altered their growth and development, is crucial. Simply put, grief ravages our bodies, and our bodies remember. Often students who've been impacted by trauma may not remember the specific events causing the loss or trauma, however their bodies will remember the feelings associated with that loss, and they will typically remember those feelings around the anniversary of that traumatic event. We call these traumaversaries, the time that their own survival was in question. As teachers, it is important to understand that every day there are students in classes managing grief.

#### Tool

An Emotional Check-In will help you grasp and begin to see patterns of emotional ebbs and flows. Attached is an example of an emotional check in calendar. The idea is to have your students fill in the 'face' by coloring in their current emotional state every morning. It should be easy to access, such as on the front of a morning work binder, taped on their desk, etc. The point is that it's easy to access, part of their morning routine, and easy for you to simply walk by and be able to take inventory on how your students are feeling coming into class each morning. This piece of information will be huge for you, as you will know who will need a little extra attention to start off their day to feel safe and continue to learn throughout the day, hopefully avoiding further triggers if their emotional needs are not met first thing. As well, as the months go along, you will be able to see if a student is having a hard time emotionally by the patterns being shown on the page. If multiple days are looking tough, it's a great time to reach out to the parents and find out if the kiddo is experiencing a traumaversary spike.

#### What do we look out for?

A student who may be regressing, much like the student in the video who was highly fluent in math, but could not even do the most basic math problem when triggered during the time of his traumaversary. The student may experience increased hyperactivity, dysregulation, aggression, anxiety, stress. You may see task refusal, repetitive behaviors, self-soothing tactics, self-sabotage, or self-abuse. There may be hoarding, stealing, or refusal. You will most likely not recognize the student, and question what has gone array. Your student is overwhelmed, stressed, and scared. You will also notice that your students' emotional calendar will look like continuous days of low/sad behavior.

## What do we do?

We need to be intentional and mindful. Children who have a history of trauma communicate through behavior. We need to give them the tools they need to fill their currently empty tool box. You have been learning how trauma affects the brain development, and what tools to put into place to help your students feel safe. These routines are so important all the time, especially when triggered by a traumaversary. Building that relationship and helping your students feel safe is the **ONLY** way they will be successful. So, when you see signs of continued triggers, their emotional calendar is showing multiple sad days you need to:

# 01

### ASK

Reach out to parents and ask them if they are aware of any traumaversaries and keep track of them. Ask previous teachers if there were specific times of the year your student was more dysregulated than usual.

\*Knowing any and all possible traumaversary dates for your students will give you a great insight as to when they might become triggered, giving you time to get ahead of the game, and put in extra supports.

# 02

### ANTICIPATE

Regression will often accompany a trigger. Whether in their academics, but most definitely in their emotional age. You may even see older students act like an infant or toddler.

# 03

### EMPOWER

Meet them where they are at. If their academics have regressed, give them tasks where they can be successful, ones that meet sensory needs. If their emotional age has dropped, meet them there. Give them jobs that they can be successful at. Empower them and help them feel safe.

# 04

### CHANGE IT UP

Holidays are a huge trigger for students who've been impacted by trauma. Mother's Day is typically the hardest. Use a different lens when thinking about holidays!

Use the emotional tracking tool as part of your first thing in the morning routine: ex: come into school, hand up coat and backpack, go to desk and fill in the morning emotions. Of course, the pre-teaching you have done about emotions will be helpful as you begin to implement this tool. Reminding each student that everyone comes into class feeling different every morning. As students are filling out their sheets, walk through the classroom keeping close eye on your students who are feeling upset in the morning and putting in place the tools that you know work for them (calm corner, food, keeping them close, sensory items, quiet time, etc.).

As you gather this data for the remainder of this school year, it will be great information to share with future teachers, and parents to pass along as a tool to help track the emotional state of all your students, especially your trauma impacted students.

### **Secondary Tool**

We know that some students may refuse to engage in such a tool. The thought of sitting and coloring in emotions might not resonate with all kiddos. If this is the case, get your parents involved in tracking their student's morning emotional state and you can keep track on the emotional calendar for them, until they feel safe enough to engage in the task on their own. Some ideas are:

- Using the same color coding as on the calendar, have parents text, email, or message you using a class communication app, the color that represents their student that morning. This will give you an immediate knowledge of what emotion will be walking through the door.
- Cut out of construction paper the colors represented on your calendar, attach a ring and put them in your student's backpack. Have the parent flip the color, according to their emotional state, to the top of the stack and put it back in your student's backpack. They can even have the appropriate color sticking out of the backpack if possible.

This may seem overwhelming at first, but as it becomes part of your student's daily routine, it will be a simple, yet impactful tool for you and your students. Being able to identify early on in your day that a student may be triggered will give you a head start on meeting them where they are at. And in the long run build a knowledge base on possible traumaversary times and discover and understand that during these times your student will potentially look and act completely different, but when supported appropriately will come back around that much quicker.