CULTURALLY SENSITIVE TRAUMA RESPONSE IN SCHOOLS

Tori Stone, PhD, LPC
Associate Professor & Clinical Coordinator,
George Mason University
vstone@gmu.edu
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO PROVIDE A CULTURALLY SENSITIVE TRAUMA RESPONSE IN SCHOOLS?
The Brain, Stress and Trauma

**Amygdala**
- Anger/Anxiety
- Learns by associations
- Constant stress causes growth
- Brains are social - anxiety can be contagious

**Prefrontal Cortex (PFC)**
- Planning, judgement, impulse control, decision making
- Empathy
- Learning & connections

**Autonomic Nervous System (ANS)**
- Ventral vagal: Safety and connection
  - Social, engaged, connected
- Sympathetic response: protection through movement
  - Fight, flight
- Dorsal: Neuroception of life threat
  - Immobilization, shut down

**Hippocampus**
- Keeper of memories & facts
- No access to the PFC, no learning or storage
- Upset kids need to settle
Autonomic Nervous System

**VENTRAL**
Safe & Social
Feeling secure and connected to people around you

**SYMPATHETIC**
Mobilized for fight or flight
Feeling stressed or agitated

**DORSAL**
Shutdown
Feeling disconnected or numb

*Adapted from *The Polyvagal Theory in Therapy* by Deb Dana*
Consider ACFs

- Emotional/physical/sexual abuse
- Emotional or physical neglect
- Violence in the home
- Substance abuse in the home
- Mental illness in the home
- Parental separation or divorce
- Incarcerated household member
- Bullying (by another child or adult)
- Witness to violence outside of home
- Witness to sibling abuse
- Racism, sexism, any other form of discrimination
- Homelessness
- Natural disasters/war
IMPLICATIONS OF ACES

• Behavioral disruption
• Toxic stress
• Inattention
• Mental health issues
• Substance abuse/smoking
• Sexual acting out behaviors
• Intimate partner violence
• Suicide attempts/suicide
• Myriad chronic health conditions
Trauma Busters

- Having resilient caregivers
- Securely attached relationships
- Available, healthy nervous systems to model regulation and to co-regulate with
- Social connections
- Getting basic needs met
- Caregivers who understand development
- Building social and emotional skills
The Teacher/Parent as an Emotional Base

- A student’s perception of a positive connection to a teacher combined with high expectations is the STRONGEST predictor of academic growth.
- Supportive, kind, connected adults engender a zest for learning.
- Students need the opportunity to return to the secure adult.

Bigger, Stronger, Wiser, Kind and Emotionally in Control
There are Boats All Around...
References & Resources


References & Resources


Wilson, R. & Lyons, L. (2013) Anxious Kids, Anxious Parents: 7 Ways to Stop the Worry Cycle and Raise Courageous and Independent Children. HCI.