

Professional Development Activity on Trauma

This school crisis–related activity helps team members focus on one prevention and preparation aspect of crisis planning by addressing trauma, which can impede student learning. This activity builds on the notion that schools that are sensitive to trauma help support the highest levels of learning, and a “trauma-sensitive school is one where all students feel safe, welcomed, and supported and where addressing trauma’s impact on learning on a schoolwide basis is at the center of its educational mission” (Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative, 2016).

Time Frame

The team should allow thirty to forty-five minutes for this activity.

Materials

This activity requires, for every participant, a copy of the Trauma-Sensitive School Checklist (at <https://bit.ly/2STCq8b>; Lesley University Center for Special Education, 2012; Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative of Massachusetts Advocates for Children, 2012) and a pen or pencil.

Process

A participating team member should volunteer to serve as facilitator. The facilitator should take the following six steps.

1. Ask team members to complete the full checklist at <https://bit.ly/2STCq8b>.

The Trauma-Sensitive School Checklist addresses five components involved in creating a trauma-informed school: (1) schoolwide policies and practices, (2) classroom strategies and techniques, (3) collaborations and linkages with mental health, (4) family partnerships, and (5) community linkages. The checklist asks members to consider questions such as the following.

- Do educators consider trauma’s potential role in a student’s abilities?
- Do disciplinary policies require accountability while considering trauma’s potential role?
- Do staff have consistent support from a trauma expert?
- Do students have opportunities to learn social-emotional and executive function skills?
- Are activities predictable, as well as emotionally and physically safe?
- Can students choose from different learning modalities for instruction and assessment?
- Do mental health support policies detail procedures for family referrals?
- Can educators easily consult a mental health care provider regarding confidentiality issues?
- Does the school partner with local and state human service agencies?

Team members are asked to assess their school on each element according to the scale, which was and to note examples as appropriate.

1 = Element is not at all in place.

2 = Element is partially in place.

3 = Element is mostly in place.

4 = Element is fully in place.

2. Ask each team member to volunteer his or her answer to each element and any examples in practice. Other team members may ask questions for clarity but should judge no answer.
3. Ask team members if they struggled to answer any questions because of uncertainty or lack of understanding regarding the terminology used. Then, ask what the team needs to explore further.
4. Create an average score for each of the five components using the elements within each component. Discuss whether some components ranked higher than others did and why.
5. Restate the common areas of strength, challenge, or both that team members shared and how this information might help the team in the future.
6. Ask team members to decide on next steps.

Results

Participation in this activity strengthens capacity within the school to address trauma and improve student learning. This concept may familiarize some teams with trauma-sensitive schools and other teams with new and unfamiliar language.

Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative. (2016, July 13). Why a trauma sensitive school? Accessed at <https://traumasensitiveschools.org/why-trauma-sensitive-school> on March 21, 2018.