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# Childhood Trauma: What Is It, And How To Help Our Students Heal

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#### CHILDHOOD TRAUMA: WHAT IT IS, AND HOW TO HELP OUR STUDENTS HEAL

By

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

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In order to fulfill the requirements for the Master's in Education program, the research question I chose to answer was how can teachers and support staff address childhood trauma in the elementary classroom and larger elementary school environment?

Due to a lack of information and professional development in this area, I chose to complete a Capstone Project, developing a staff training that will be given three times during the academic year. The project consists of Powerpoints, surveys, handouts, and speakers from outside out school community. The intended audience for this presentation is the school and support staff of an urban elementary school. The project is formatted in a user-friendly way:

Presentation #1: Survey leading up to the presentation. Presentation consisting of an intro to childhood trauma, it's definitions, and what specific traumas students have experienced in this school. There will be a note-taking handout for teachers and support staff to use.

Presentation #2: Classroom and school-wide strategies teachers and support staff can incorporate in order to create a trauma-informed school and classroom. There will be an opportunity to create some hands-on calming strategies as well.

Presentation #3: Community resources that are available to teachers and support staff.

There is also a post-survey given to teachers. The pre- and post-surveys are designed to give me feedback in order to understand if I have answered my Capstone question.

# CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

Presentation 1: Definition, and building-specific experiences.

# WHAT IS CHILDHOOD TRAUMA?

CHILDHOOD TRAUMA IS A SUDDEN OR UNEXPECTED EVENT THAT THREATENS A CHILD'S LIFE OR BODY, AND GIVES THE CHILD FEELINGS

OF INTENSE TERROR, HORROR OR HELPLESSNESS. A FEW EXAMPLES OF CHILDHOOD TRAUMA ARE: CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE, PHYSICAL

DOMESTIC ABUSE, NEGLECT, NATURAL DISASTERS, MAN-MADE DISASTERS, AND LIFE-THREATENING ILLNESS. ADDITIONAL

EXAMPLES TO WHAT CONSTITUTES CHILDHOOD TRAUMA: PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, AND SEXUAL ABUSE, AS WELL AS PHYSICAL AND

EMOTIONAL NEGLECT, PARENT MENTAL ILLNESS, PARENTAL SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND DEPENDENCE, AND PARENTAL SEPARATION AND

DIYORCE.

## REPERCUSSIONS

HIGHER RISK OF DEVELOPING ANY NUMBER OF MENTAL HEALTH, PHYSICAL, AND/OR BEHAVIORAL DIFFICULTIES.

NEUROPHYSIOLOGICAL STRESS RESPONSE THAT CAN INTERFERE WITH A CHILD'S ABILITY TO REGULATE THEIR
EMOTIONS AND BEHAVIOR BY THEMSELVES CHILDREN ARE ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE TO TRAUMA BECAUSE THEIR
BRAINS ARE STILL DEVELOPING.

PARTICULARLY TOXIC FOR CHILDREN.

## REPERCUSSIONS

ADAPTATION TO TRAUMA MEANS THAT CHILDREN ARE PREPARED TO FIGHT, FLEE,

OR DISSOCIATE FROM TRAUMATIC MEMORIES AND/OR HIGH-STRESS SITUATION. THIS

TENDS TO RESULT IN VIOLENT OUTBURSTS, FLEEING THE SITUATION, AND LACK OF

ENGAGEMENT.

# SITE-SPECIFIC TRAUMA

ABUSE

NEGLECT

HOUSING INSECURITY

DIVORCE

# CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

### Classroom strategies

# STRATEGIES:

IN A CLASSROOM SETTING, TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES INCLUDE BOTH SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL

DEVELOPMENT, AND PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS.

TRAUMA-INFORMED CLASSROOMS ARE ONES THAT PROVIDE A SAFE, NURTURING, AND CONSISTENT

ENVIRONMENT WHILE GIVING CHILDREN CONTROL OVER SOME ASPECT OF THEIR SCHOOL DAY.

SOS AS A WAY TO TEACH CHILDREN TO COPE WITH TRAUMA REMINDERS:

STOP STOP YOUR BODY AND TAKE DEEP BREATHS

ORIENT LOOK AROUND AND NOTICE YOUR SURROUNDINGS

SEEK HELP USE A GROUNDING TECHNIQUE TO HELP CALM DOWN

# STRATEGIES

BREATHING TECHNIQUES, EXERCISE, MEDITATION, AND MINDFULNESS ARE OTHER

TOOLS THAT CAN BE USED AND TAUGHT IN A TRAUMA-INFORMED CLASSROOM.

INCORPORATING POSITIVE SELF-TALK AND A GROWTH MINDSET ARE OTHER VALUABLE

TOOLS TO PUT IN PLACE IN THE TRAUMA-INFORMED CLASSROOM.

# STRATEGIES

STOMPING FEET

ROCKING IN GLIDER

BREATHING TECHNIQUES

MUSIC

CLAPPING HANDS

WALKING/RUNNING

JUMPING ROPE

STRETCHING

TOSSING BALL (LARGE)

DRUMMING

COLD/HOT DRINK

SHAKING OUT FEET/HANDS

PETTING/HOLDING A PET

HUMMING

LOOKING AT FISH IN A TANK

BLOWING BUBBLES

PLAYING WITH A FAVORITE TOY

# MINDFULNESS

MINDFULNESS IS "A MENTAL STATE ACHIEVED BY FOCUSING ONE'S AWARENESS ON THE PRESENT MOMENT, WHILE CALMLY

ACKNOWLEDGING AND ACCEPTING ONE'S FEELINGS, THOUGHTS, AND BODILY SENSATIONS, USED AS A THERAPEUTIC TECHNIQUE

MINDFULNESS CAN PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN HEALTH, MENTAL WELL-BEING, COMPETENCE, AND SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S

ABILITY TO COPE WITH DAILY STRESSES AND CHALLENGES. THIS IS ESPECIALLY ESSENTIAL IN A TRAUMA-INFORMED CLASSROOM, AS

CHILDREN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED TRAUMA TEND TO REACT STRONGER TO STRESS AND UNEXPECTED CHANGES. THOSE THINGS CAN

BE TRIGGERS

## GROWTH-MINDSET

CREATING A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT BASED IN GROWTH MINDSET GIVES CHILDREN AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN TO WORK THROUGH FRUSTRATION IN ORDER TO BUILD STRONG WORK HABITS THAT WILL LEAD TO ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND SUCCESS. GROWTH MINDSET IN A TRAUMA-INFORMED CLASSROOM GIVES STUDENTS AN OPPORTUNITY TO SEE THEIR SITUATION AS EVER-CHANGING VERSUS FIXED, AND GIVES THEM AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN STRATEGIES TO COPE AND WORK THROUGH DIFFICULTY TO FIND SUCCESS.

# COMMUNITY RESOURCES

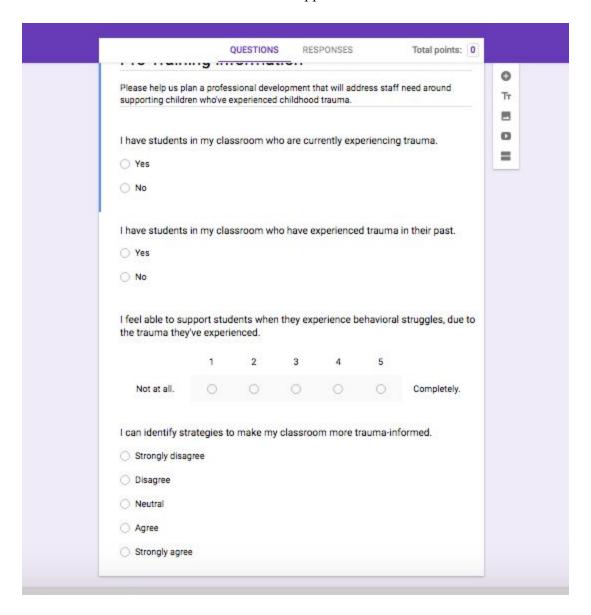
- -WILDER FOUNDATION
- -WOMEN'S ADVOCATES
- -REGIONS HOSPITAL-PEDIATRIC TRAUMA UNIT
- -LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES OF MINNESOTA
- -MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION FOR CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH
- -NATIONAL CHILD TRAUMATIC STRESS NETWORK

# VICARIOUS TRAUMA

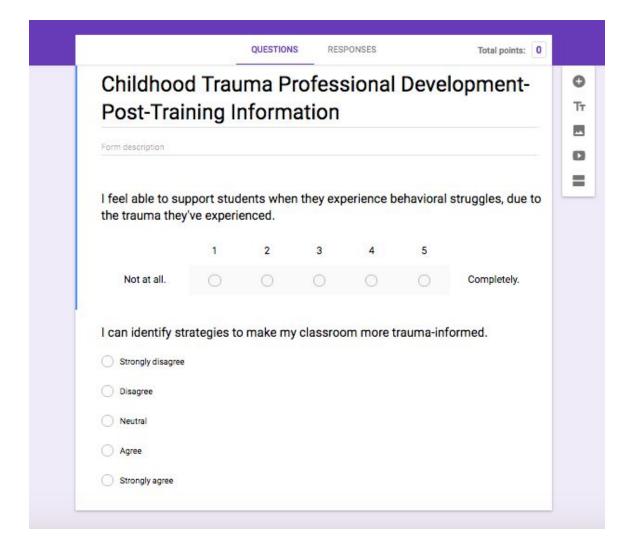
VICARIOUS TRAUMA, WHICH AT TIMES IS CALLED COMPASSION FATIGUE, IS A TERM THAT IS ASSOCIATED WITH CARING FOR THOSE WHO
HAVE EXPERIENCED TRAUMA. IT IS BELIEVED THAT TEACHERS EXPERIENCE THIS BECAUSE OF THEY WORK THEY DO. VICARIOUS TRAUMA IS THE
EMOTIONAL RESIDUE LEFT OVER WHEN WORKING WITH A POPULATION THAT HAS EXPERIENCED TRAUMA, AND HELPING THOSE CHILDREN WORK
THROUGH THEIR PAIN, FEAR, AND TERRO. TYPICALLY, VICARIOUS TRAUMA HAS A SIMILAR EFFECT ON TEACHER'S BRAINS AS IT DOES ON STUDENT'S
BRAINS: THE BRAIN EMITS A FEAR RESPONSE, WHICH RELEASES CORTISOL AND ADRENALINE. THIS CAUSES AN INCREASED HEART RATE, BLOOD
PRESSURE, RESPIRATION, AND RELEASES A FLOOD OF EMOTIONS. THIS BIOLOGICAL RESPONSE ALSO MANIFESTS PHYSICAL AND MENTAL SYMPTOMS
AS WELL. DESPITE THIS, TEACHERS ARE NOT TAUGHT HOW TO ADDRESS HOW TRAUMA AFFECTS THEIR PERSONAL LIVES.

# COMMUNITY RESOURCES

#### Appendix B



#### Appendix C



## Appendix D

## Childhood Trauma Training - Session #1

New Learning	
Trew Bearing	
Ozzatiana	
Questions	
Resources	
What I Need Next	

#### Appendix E

#### Community Resources Contact Sheet

Wilder Foundation 451 Lexington Avenue South Saint Paul, MN 55104

Women's Advocates 588 Grand Avenue Saint Paul, MN 55102

Regions Hospital 640 Jackson Street Saint Paul, MN 55101

Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota 2485 Como Avenue Saint Paul, MN 55108

Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health 23 Empire Drive, Suit 1000 Saint Paul, MN 55103

National Child Traumatic Stress Network https://www.nctsn.org/

Take-away links for teachers to revisit as needed:

#### **Creating Trauma-Sensitive Schools to Improve Learning**

Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS): <a href="http://rti.dpi.wi.gov/rti\_pbis">http://rti.dpi.wi.gov/rti\_pbis</a>

Creating Trauma-Sensitive Schools to Improve Learning:

http://sspw.dpi.wi.gov/sspw\_mhtrauma

Integrating mindfulness into school: http://www.mindfulschools.org/resources/room-to-breathe/

Calmer Classrooms: A Guide to Working with Traumatized Children:

http://www.ocsc.vic.gov.au/downloads/calmer\_classrooms.pdf

Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators:

http://www.nctsnet.org/nctsn\_assets/pdfs/Child\_Trauma\_Toolkit\_Final.pdf

Creating Sanctuary in Schools:

http://www.sanctuaryweb.com/Documents/Sanctuary%20in%20the%20School.pdf

Helping Traumatized Children Learn: <a href="http://www.massadvocates.org/download-book.php">http://www.massadvocates.org/download-book.php</a>

The Heart of Learning and Teaching Compassion, Resiliency and Academic Success:

http://k12.wa.us/CompassionateSchools/HeartofLearning.aspx

#### Websites for educators

The Impact of Trauma on Learning: <a href="http://www.sch-psych.net/archives/001169.php">http://www.sch-psych.net/archives/001169.php</a>

The Language of Trauma and Loss: http://westernreservepublicmedia.org/trauma/

National Child Traumatic Stress Network: http://www.nctsn.org

School Mental Health Project: <a href="http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/">http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/</a>

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