

Hamline University DigitalCommons@Hamline

School of Education Student Capstone Projects

School of Education

Spring 2019

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

Melissa C. Andretta

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse_cp



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Andretta, Melissa C., "Childhood Trauma: What Is It, And How To Help Our Students Heal" (2019). *School of Education Student Capstone Projects*. 287.

https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse_cp/287

This Capstone Project is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Education at DigitalCommons@Hamline. It has been accepted for inclusion in School of Education Student Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Hamline. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@hamline.edu, wstraub01@hamline.edu, modea02@hamline.edu.

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

By

Melissa C. Andretta

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

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

May 2019

Primary Advisor: Evan Matson

Capstone Project Facilitator: Kelly Killorn-Moravec

Content Expert: Teresa Chavez

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 DIVORCE.

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 THE 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 TERROR. 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

QUESTIONS RESPONSES Total points: 0

Please help us plan a professional development that will address staff need around supporting children who've experienced childhood trauma.

I have students in my classroom who are currently experiencing trauma.

Yes

No

I have students in my classroom who have experienced trauma in their past.

Yes

No

I feel able to support students when they experience behavioral struggles, due to the trauma they've experienced.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all. Completely.

I can identify strategies to make my classroom more trauma-informed.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

Appendix C

QUESTIONS RESPONSES Total points: 0

Childhood Trauma Professional Development- Post-Training Information

Form description

I feel able to support students when they experience behavioral struggles, due to the trauma they've experienced.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all. Completely.

I can identify strategies to make my classroom more trauma-informed.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

Appendix D

Childhood Trauma Training - Session #1

New Learning	
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): http://rti.dpi.wi.gov/rti_pbis

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.nctsn.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: <http://www.massadvocates.org/download-book.php>

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: <http://www.sch-psych.net/archives/001169.php>

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

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

School Mental Health Project: <http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>

Reference List for Project

- Alisic, E. (2012). Teachers' perspectives on providing support to children after trauma: A qualitative study. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 27(1), 51–59.
- Aspelmeier, J.E, Elliott, A.N., & Smith, C.H. (2007). Childhood sexual abuse, attachment, and trauma symptoms in college females: The moderating role of attachment, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 31(5), 549-566.
- Bandura, A. (1989). Social cognitive theory. *Annals of child development: Six theories of child development*. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Baum, N. L., Rotter, B., Reidler, E., & Brom, D. (2009). Building resilience in schools in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 2(1), 62–70.
- Berry, M., & Barth, R. (1989). Behavior problems of children adopted when older. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 11, 221-238.
- Bowlby J. (1969). *Attachment. Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Loss*. New York: Basic Books.
- Child Advocates Casa of Silicon Valley (n.d.) Retrieved from:
<https://www.bemyadvocate.org/filelibrary/Trauma%20Informed%20Children's%20Activities.pdf>
- Ciuffetelli Parker, D., Grenville, H., & Flessa, F. (2011). Case studies of school community and climate: Success narratives of schools in challenging circumstances. *School Community Journal*, 21(1), 129–150. Retrieved from
<http://www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org/SCJ.aspx>

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014). *Essential for childhood: Steps to create safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Violence Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- Cook, A., Spinazzola, J., & Ford, J. (2005). Complex trauma in children and adolescents. *Psychiatric annals*, 35(5), 390-398.
- Copeland, W., Keeler, G., Angold, A., & Costello, J. (2007). Traumatic events and posttraumatic stress in childhood. *American Medical Association*, 67, 677–584.
- D. Salter Ainsworth, Mary. (1989). Attachments beyond infancy. *The American Psychologist*, 44, 709-16.
- Denny, L. & Randazzo, T. (2017). *Fostering the trauma informed classroom: Understanding trauma, the brain, and best strategies and interventions for responsive classrooms*. Retrieved from:
<https://www.wcris.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Fostering-the-Trauma-Informed-Classroom-Handouts.pdf>
- Dweck, C.S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York: Random House.
- Ellis, A. (1991). *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy*. New York: Carol.
- Ellis, A. (1993). Reflections on rational-emotive therapy. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 61, 199-201.
- Ellis, A & Dryden, W. (1997). *The practice of rational emotive behavior therapy*. New

York City: Springer.

- Figley, C.R. (1995). *Compassion fatigue: Coping with secondary traumatic stress disorder in those who treat the traumatized*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Frazier, K. (2014). *Encyclopedia of human services and diversity: Childhood trauma*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Garbarino, J. (2005). Lost boys: Why our sons turn violent and how we can save them. *Pediatric Child Health, 10*(8), 447–450.
- Garret, K. (2014). Childhood trauma and its effects on health and learning. *Education Digest, 79*(6), pages 4-14.
- Gershoff, E. T., Aber, J. L., Raver, C. C., & Lennon, M. C. (2007). Income is not enough: Incorporating material hardship into models of income associations with parenting and child development. *Child Development, 78*(1), 70–95.
- Gillies D., Taylor F., Gray C., O'Brien L., & D'Abrew N. (2013). Psychological therapies for the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder in children and adolescents. *Evidence-Based Child Health. 8*(3), 1004–1116.
- Howe, T. (2005). *Child abuse and neglect: Attachment, development and intervention*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jaycox, L. H., Kataoka, S. H., Stein, B. D., Langley, A. K., & Wong, M. (2012).

Cognitive behavior interventions for trauma in schools. *Journal of Applied School Psychology, 28*, 239–255.

Jensen, E. (2009). *Teaching with poverty in mind*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Ko, S. J., Ford, J. D., Kassam-Adams, N., Berkowitz, S. J., Wilson, C., & Wong, M.

(2008). Creating trauma-informed systems: Child welfare, education, first responders, health care, and juvenile justice. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 39*(4), 396–404.

Kuyken, W., Weare, K., Ukoumunne, O. C., Vicary, R., Motton, N., Burnett, R., &

Huppert, F. (2013). Effectiveness of the mindfulness in schools program:

Non-randomised controlled feasibility study. *British Journal of Psychiatry, 203*(2), 126–131.

Lieberman, A.F., Chu, A., Van Horn, P., et al. (2011). Trauma in early childhood:

Empirical evidence and clinical implications. *Development and Psychopathology, 23*(2), 397-410.

Lieberman (2004). National scientific council on the developing child.

Maynard, B. R., Solis, M., & Miller, V. (2015). Mindfulness-based interventions for

improving academic achievement, behavior and socio-emotional functioning of primary and secondary students: A systematic review. Retrieved from:

<http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/lib/project/342/>.

Mindfulness. (n.d.) In *Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary*. Retrieved from

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mindfulness>

Minero, E. (2017). When students are traumatized, teachers are too. Retrieved from:

- <https://www.edutopia.org/article/when-students-are-traumatized-teachers-are-too>
- Prather, W., & Golden, J. A. (2009). A behavioral perspective of childhood trauma and attachment issues: Toward alternative treatment approaches for children with a history of abuse. *International Journal of Behavioral Consultation and Therapy*, 5(1), 56-74.
- Schofield, G. & Beck, M. (2015). Promoting attachment and resilience: a guide for foster carers and adopters on using the secure base model. London: BAAF.
- Skiba, R. J., Chung, C., Trachok, M., Baker, T. L., Sheya, A., & Hughes, R. L. (2014). Parsing disciplinary disproportionality: Contributions of infraction, student, and school characteristics to out-of-school suspension and expulsion. *American Educational Research Journal*. Advance online publication. doi:10.3102/0002831214541670
- Schonert-Reichl, K. A., Oberle, E., Lawlor, M. S., Abbott, D., Thomson, K., Oberlander, T. F., & Diamond, A. (2015). Enhancing cognitive and social–emotional development through a simple-to-administer mindfulness-based school program for elementary school children: A randomized controlled trial. *Developmental Psychology*, 51(1), 52–66.
- Shonkoff, J., Garner, A., Siegel, B., Dobbins, M., Earls, M., McGuinn, L., Pascoe, J., & Wood, D. (2012). The lifelong effects of early childhood adversity and toxic stress. *American Academy of Pediatrics*, 129 (1), 224-231.
- Sroufe, L.A., Egeland, B., & Carlson, E.A. (1999) One social world. *Minnesota Symposia on Child Psychology*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Van der Kolk, B.A. (2005). Editorial introduction: Child abuse & victimization. *Psychiatric Annals*, 35, 374-378.

Weed Phifer, L. & Hull, R. (2016) Helping students heal: Observations of trauma-informed practices in the school. *School Mental Health* (8) 201-205.