



Training Module: Trauma-Informed Best Practices

Goal

Once educators understand the breadth and depth of the effects of trauma on the lives of students, they understand the need for trauma-informed support practices. These practices are honed specifically to address the way people affected by trauma react to learning.

This module focuses on right-brain and left-brain functions as they relate to traumatized (or re-traumatized) students. The right brain is responsible for emotions and sending and receiving non-verbal communication—including facial expressions, tone of voice, and physical gestures. It also specializes in understanding the “big picture” of an experience, including feelings, images, and personal memories. The left brain is responsible for the functions needed to learn and analyze. It is logical, literal, prefers words to gestures, and is linear. It specializes in understanding cause and effect, labeling, and clarifying language.

This knowledge of right- and left-brain activity applies to trauma-informed care in that educators must understand that a person affected by trauma initially reacts and operates from the right brain. They are often not able to think logically and understand consequences. In addition, the younger the brain, the more the right brain dominates. Research has shown that brain development does not stop until age 25, meaning that all of the primary and secondary student population is still developing the ability to understand and apply logic and reason.

With a focus on mental health and wellness, school staff should have basic knowledge about how a nurturing relationship and environment can improve the extent and strength of connections in a student’s brain, leading to a greater ability to overcome. This module introduces evidence-based supports and practices including Connect and Redirect, SIFTing, Co-Regulation, HEAL, Building Self-Awareness, and Creating Safe Spaces.

Objectives

- Understand right- and left-brain functions and their relation to trauma.
- Learn evidence-based strategies for trauma-informed support for young adults.
- Explore strategies for students who may be seeking help, either from their personal support systems or from qualified professionals.



What to Know Before Presenting the Trauma-Informed Best Practices PowerPoint

1. Introduce right- and left-brain functions.

The strategies shared are based on research by experts like Dr. Dan Siegel, whose work can be further studied in books including *The Whole-Brain Child*. The strategies learned by educators are intended to be taught to students, to help them learn better and, in turn, lead happier and healthier lives.

2. Identify when to address emotions and when to use logic.

The immediate aftermath of a traumatic event is not the time to talk about cause and effect. It is imperative to understand why and how to address the emotions resulting from the trauma. The ability to empathize without judgment is an important skill to learn and practice.

3. Discuss the different strategies presented.

- a. Connect and Redirect is connecting first to the emotions to allow the student to calm down before the educator discusses logic and cause/effect.
- b. SIFTing means intentionally taking a moment to consciously calm the brain's instinctual reaction.
- c. Co-Regulation is the process, based on mirror neurons, between an adult and student to encourage self-regulation in the student.
- d. HEAL is a strategy to change the brain from reactive to responsive.
- e. Building Self-Awareness focuses on being in the now as a way to calm thoughts and feelings when experiencing adversity.
- f. Creating Safe Spaces by producing a place free of bias, conflict, criticism, or potentially threatening actions, ideas, or conversations.

4. Stress that it is good to seek help.

Students can seek support from family, a trusted friend or mentor, or a mental health professional. It is important to identify people to whom students can reach out to help with the support they need.



The messages in the Trauma-Informed Best Practices PowerPoint emphasize the following points:

- **Young people are right-brain dominant.**
 - Understanding the brain development in a typical student is an important step in offering the support and assistance they need to address the effects of trauma in their lives.
- **Learn to respond instead of react.**
 - It is important to take a moment to consciously calm the brain's instinctual reaction. With practice, one may train the brain to pause and allow the rational brain (frontal lobe) to give guidance to the emotional brain (limbic system).
- **Learn the difference between self-regulation and co-regulation.**
 - Self-regulation is the ability to manage thoughts and feelings to enable actions that are necessary to succeed in education and life.
 - Co-regulation is a process between an adult and student to encourage self-regulation in the student. It is based on the concept of mirror neurons.
- **Focus on the benefit of empathy over sympathy.**
 - Connections make a difference in improving outcomes for students who experience an adverse event. Learn to take the perspective of the student without making judgments or assumptions.
- **Become more self-aware.**
 - Self-affirmation, breathing exercises, and other grounding techniques assist students in being "in the moment". This allows room to challenge unhealthy thoughts.
- **Offer a safe space.**
 - Be a place free of bias, conflict, criticism, or potentially threatening actions, ideas, or conversations by creating ground rules to foster a caring culture.
- **Know when to seek help.**
 - Stress that it is important to seek help when necessary. Discuss the ways that family, friends, mentors, and trusted professionals can offer support.