Managing Risk by Understanding Trauma

Why is it Important to Understand Trauma?

Childhood trauma affects one in every six people and poses one of the greatest public health concerns in the United States (Center for Youth Wellness, 2014). Furthermore, it affects everyone who is connected to that student who has been traumatized.

Research points to the importance of trauma-informed practices in alleviating the effects of trauma in youth. Research also provides evidence that outdoor education programs can take trauma-informed practices a step further in helping traumatized youth due to outdoor education programs' addition of nature and movement to aid in the healing process of traumatized youth.

Preparing for Course

Develop self-awareness of your own history and experiences with trauma as well as the ways in which your own identity and biases affect your interactions with students.

Increase your understanding of trauma-informed practices so that you can hold a space for all students to thrive on course.

Proactively anticipate and plan as much of the course flow and delivery as possible in advance to include all elements of trauma-informed practices.

For example...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Activity</th>
<th>Key Element Addressed</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
<th>Ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introductions</td>
<td>Build trust and feelings of safety early on and encourages peer support and collaboration</td>
<td>Select activities that allow students to get to know each other in a safe environment. Notice any individual and/or group dynamics already emerging.</td>
<td>• Go around question</td>
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<tr>
<td>Introduction/ Framing</td>
<td>Build instructor trustworthiness and transparency and sets the tone for creating a safe and inclusive space on course</td>
<td>Clearly outline group expectations and instructors' roles from the beginning and maintain consistency in setting limits and holding students to these expectations.</td>
<td>• Explain flow of the day</td>
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</tbody>
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Signs of Trauma

Instructors do not need to be trained clinical therapists or require disclosure of a student's trauma to facilitate a course that can promote growth and healing for all students. Instructors only need to be aware that students, regardless of the ways trauma can affect a student's participation on course, and how this can allow the instructors to facilitate a course on which all students can fully participate.

Not all students who demonstrate these signs have experienced trauma. Furthermore, there may be no signs exhibited at all from someone who has experienced trauma. Everyone is different, including how they respond to trauma.

Key Elements of Trauma-Informed Practice

Trauma-informed practices benefit all students, not just those who have been affected by trauma. These elements are necessary to foster an environment in which all students can participate and grow on course.

Engaging with Youth

The ABCS for cultivating a sense of safety:

- Authenticity
- Boundaries
- Structure
- Safety

Throughout course...

- Constantly check your own assumptions and biases
- Assess each student's individual strengths and needs and support each student individually
- Consider all barriers to student engagement and collaborate with students to overcome these barriers
- Role model and mentor students in healthy communication, boundaries and positive relationships
- Constantly work to build rapport with all students evenly
- Encourage students to share their voice; give students responsibilities; respect students' abilities to make decisions
- Develop a routine to provide students with some level of consistency and familiarity
- Maintain consistency and transparency
- Clearly communicate all transitions
- Collaborate with students on course structure and flow and include students in decision making processes
- Facilitate regular individual check-ins with youth
- Ensure that you are practicing self-care

Responding to a Student

The following considerations can assist instructors any time they notice any "signs of trauma", regardless if the behavior is a response to trauma or not.

- Instead of thinking "what is wrong with this student?" consider "what happened to this student?"
- Notice your own internal reactions
- Pay attention to the student's bodily responses and words
- Offer verbal support and grounding
- Remain present
- Continue to offer grounding and calming
- Strengthen empowerment and collaboration; encourage youth participation in the process
- Call in your co-instructor or any other member of your program's team to assist you

Key Points

Trauma is prevalent and can affect each student differently and throughout their life.

By working with students through a trauma-informed lens, you can make a huge difference in their life.

Practice self-care!

1. Increase your understanding of trauma-informed practices so that you can hold a space for all students to thrive on course.
2. Proactively anticipate and plan as much of the course flow and delivery as possible in advance to include all elements of trauma-informed practices.
3. Key Elements of Trauma-Informed Practice

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