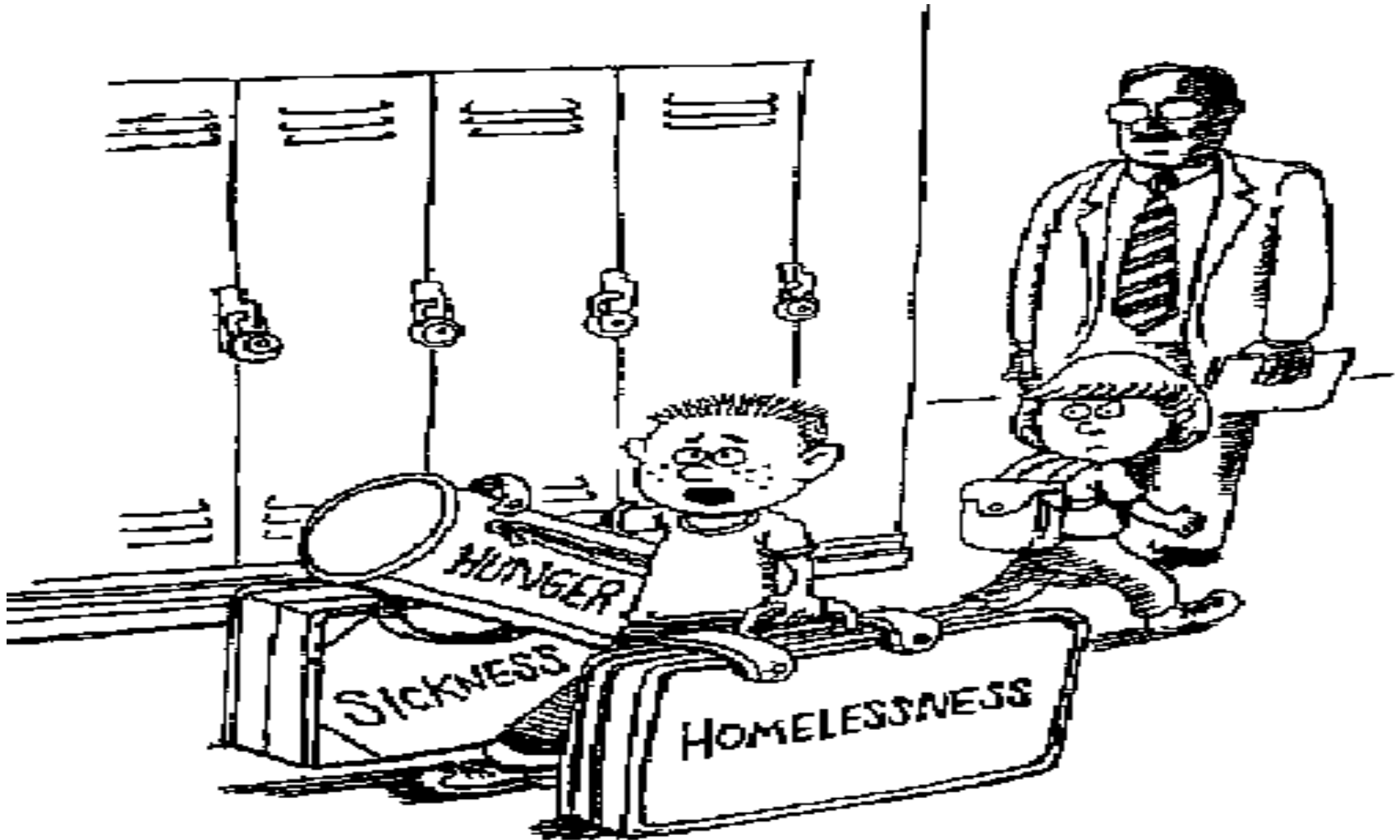


Impact of Trauma On Learning and School

2015

A Little Baggage



Definition of Trauma

- Event
 - Actual or extreme threat of physical or psychological harm or the withholding of material or relational resources essential to healthy development. It can be a single event or repeated events
- Experience
 - How the person assigns labels or meaning to the event, depends on the perception of the individual
- Effects
 - Result of the person's experience of the event. This can include neurological, physical, emotional or cognitive effects

Trauma

- Private events - Sexual, physical abuse
 - Secrecy
 - Power Imbalance
 - Raging Hopelessness
 - Sense of Isolation
 - Sense of Irretrievable Loss
 - Emotional and physical reaction, fight or flight
- Public events - natural disasters, car accidents, war, crime victimization
 - Can be a shared experience
 - No judgment attached
 - Sense of Helplessness
 - Forces beyond control
 - Sense of Irretrievable Loss
 - Emotional and physical reaction



Impact of Trauma



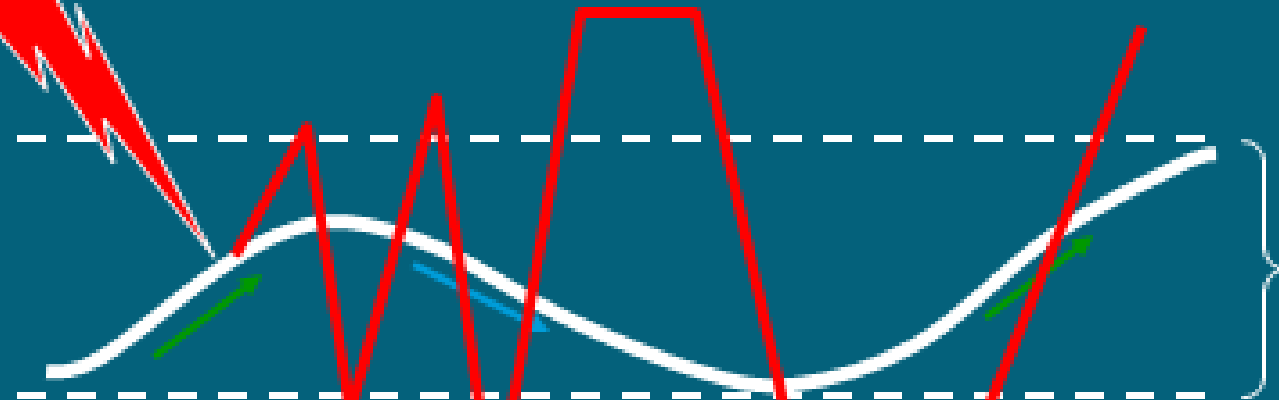
Strong and prolonged activation of the body's stress management systems in the absence of the buffering protection of adult support, disrupts brain architecture and leads to stress management systems that respond at relatively lower thresholds, thereby increasing the risk of stress-related physical and mental illness

Trauma impacts on nervous system

**Traumatic
Event!**

**Stuck on "High"
Hyper-arousal**

Hyperactivity
Hypervigilance
Mania
Anxiety & Panic
Rage



Depression
Disconnection
Exhaustion/Fatigue
Numbness

**Stuck on "Low"
Hypo-arousal**

Normal Range
Window of Tolerance

How Trauma Impacts Learning

- Toxic stress releases EXCESS cortisol which has a negative effect on the brain particularly the hippocampus
- The hippocampus is involved with memories. A damaged hippocampus impairs the ability to form new memories, required for learning particularly verbal learning
- Trauma also impacts **sustained and focused** attention



Studies Show...

- That children who have been abused are more likely
 - to be in special education,
 - have below grade-level achievement test scores,
 - have poor work habits, and
 - Are 2.5 times more likely to fail a grade.

Shonk, S.M., and Cicchetti, D. (2001)



Impact on Learning



Language and Communication Skills

- Traumatic experiences can disrupt the ability of children to learn and process verbal information and use language as a vehicle for communication.
 - **Learning and retrieving new verbal information**
 - **Social and emotional communication**
 - **Problem solving and analysis**

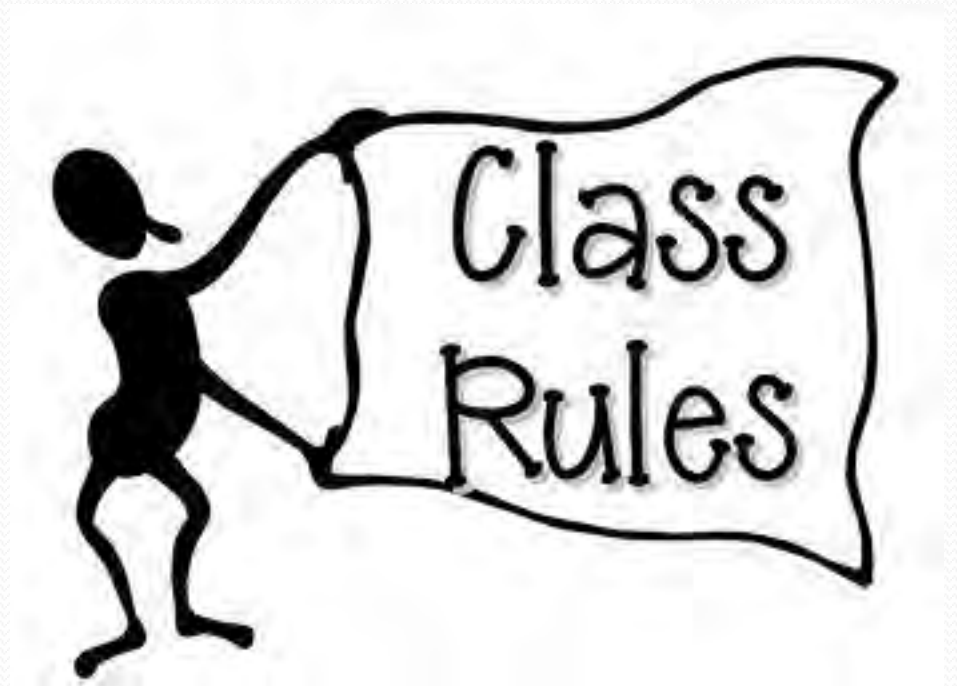
Impact on Learning

- Organizing Narrative Material
- Cause-and-Effect Relationships
- Taking Another's Perspective
- Attentiveness to Classroom Tasks
- Regulating Emotions
- Executive Functions
- Engaging in the Curriculum



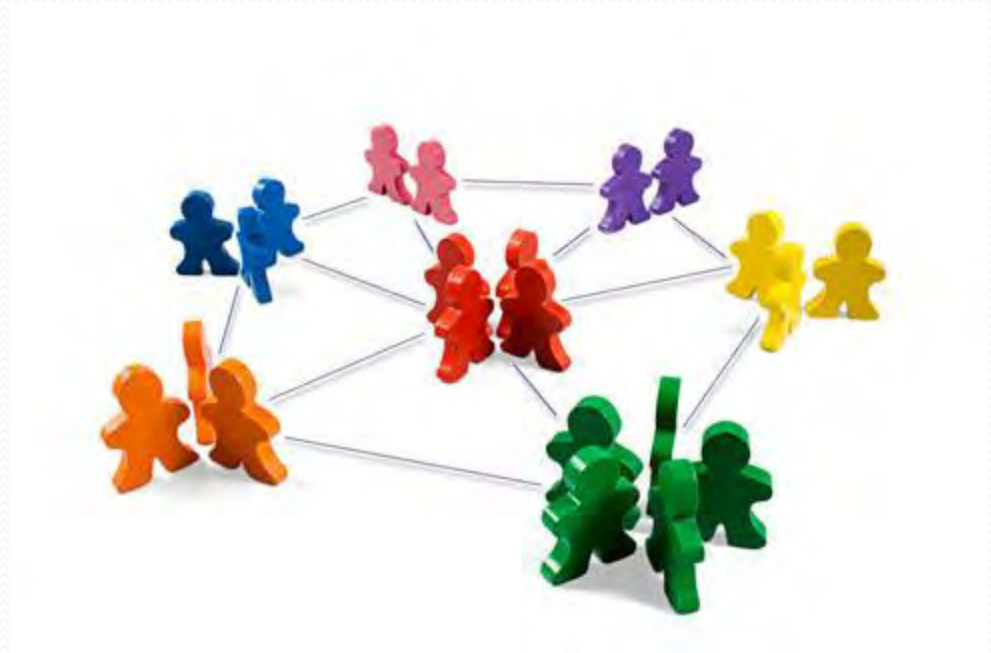
Impact on Classroom Behavior

- Reactivity and Impulsivity
- Aggression
- Defiance
- Withdrawal
- Perfectionism



Impact on Relationships

- School Personnel
- Peers



Changing the Question

- What is wrong with you?
 - I am aggressive
 - I am depressed
 - I am an alcoholic
- What happened to you?
 - I am a survivor of trauma



Responding to People with Trauma

- We may unintentionally trigger someone's trauma response
- Need to re-conceptualize individuals' responses from intentional to being a physiologically based response
- Organizations' policies and environments may also retrigger trauma



The Core Principles

- Safety: Ensuring physical and emotional safety
- Trustworthiness: Maximizing trustworthiness, making tasks clear, and maintaining appropriate boundaries
- Choice: Prioritizing developmentally appropriate choice and control for children, youth, families and adults
- Collaboration: Maximizing collaboration and sharing of power with children, youth, families, and adults
- Empowerment: Prioritizing child, youth, family and adult empowerment and skill-building

Trauma Sensitive Schools



- A shared understanding among all
- The school supports all children to feel safe physically, socially, emotionally, and academically.
- The school addresses students needs in holistic ways, taking into account their relationships, self-regulation, academic competence, and physical and emotional well-being.
- The school explicitly connects students to the school community and provides multiple opportunities to practice newly developing skills.

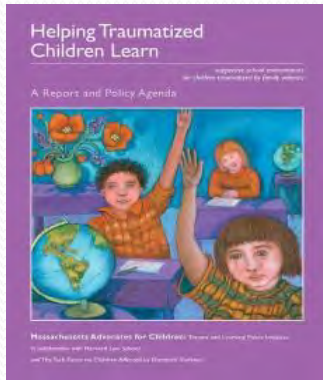
Practices For Building Trauma Sensitivity

- Identify and share interests.
- Use a morning meeting to create a predictable and consistent environment for learning.
- Create a classroom "calming area."
- Use a "hot spot" map to ensure safety.
- Plan and set priorities for improvement.
 - Trauma Sensitive School Checklist (Leslie University and Massachusetts Advocates for Children)

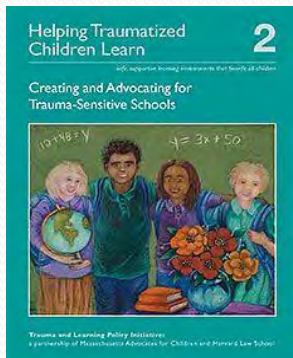


Helping Traumatized Children Learn

Helping Traumatized Children Learn



Creating and Advocating for Trauma-Sensitive Schools



The Flexible Framework

1. Leadership
2. Professional Development
3. Access to Resources and Services
4. Academic and Nonacademic Strategies
5. Policies and Protocols
6. Collaboration with Families

The Flexible Framework: Making School Environments Trauma-Sensitive

Helping Traumatized Children Learn

**Massachusetts Advocates for Children: Trauma and
Learning Policy Initiative**

*In collaboration with Harvard Law School
and The Task Force on Children Affected by Domestic Violence*

Factors Common to Competent Children

- A strong parent-child relationship, or, when such a relationship is not available, a surrogate caregiving figure who serves a mentoring role;
- Good cognitive skills, which predict academic success and lead to rule-abiding behavior; and
- The ability to self-regulate attention, emotions, and behaviors.



Creating a Trauma Sensitive School

- School-wide Infrastructure and Culture
- Staff Training
- Academic Instruction for Traumatized Children
- Linking with Mental Health Professionals
- School Policies, Procedures, and Protocols
- Nonacademic Strategies



Resources

- Helping Traumatized Children Learn
<http://traumasensitiveschools.org>
- Resilience Trumps Aces
<http://www.resiliencetrumpsaces.org/>
- National Child Trauma Stress Network
<http://learn.nctsn.org/>
- MO Dept. of Mental Health
<http://dmh.mo.gov/trauma/>