Building a Trauma-Informed Classroom Community

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Today’s Objectives

• What the data says about the youth mental health crisis facing educators
• Why prioritizing students’ physical and emotional safety and well-being matters
• Techniques to empower students, manage behavior, and build a strong classroom community
What is trauma?

• An emotional response to a distressing or disturbing event that overwhelms the individual’s ability to cope
• Big ‘T’ trauma and little ‘t’ trauma
• Trauma-informed classrooms lead to better outcomes for all students
What traumas are youth facing?

• COVID-19
  • Fear and confusion
  • Grief
  • Increased rates of abuse
  • Increased rates of substance use in the home

• Racial injustice

• School fears
MHA Screening (www.mhascreening.org): Over 10 Million Completed Screens

MHA Screening reflects the experiences of a help-seeking population that accesses mental health screening through www.mhascreening.org. We do not reach the entire population; therefore our numbers are likely to underreport the actual experiences of the population.
Throughout the pandemic, youth ages 11-17 were more likely than any other age group to score for moderate to severe symptoms of anxiety and depression.
What the Data Tells Us  
March 2020 – June 2021

• Anxiety Screen: 83% of 11-17-year-olds scored for moderate to severe anxiety
• Depression Screen: over 90% of 11-17-year-olds scored for moderate to severe depression
Anxiety & Depression Among 11-17 Year Olds

- Anxiety
- Depression
Suicidal Ideation Among 11-17 Year Olds

Thoughts that you would be better off dead, or of hurting yourself (more than half or nearly every day)
Conduct Measures
March 2020 – June 2021

Have trouble with teacher
- 41.6% sometimes
- 16.6% often

Are irritable, angry
- 35.9% sometimes
- 60.8% often

Do not listen to rules
- 50.9% sometimes
- 17.6% often
## Main Factors Contributing to Youth Mental Health Challenges Right Now

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Respondents</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness or isolation</td>
<td>100,947</td>
<td>69.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social life or relationships</td>
<td>88,488</td>
<td>61.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties at school (academics, learning)</td>
<td>62,549</td>
<td>43.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past trauma</td>
<td>57,668</td>
<td>40.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coronavirus</td>
<td>31,339</td>
<td>21.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current events (news, politics, etc.)</td>
<td>26,946</td>
<td>19.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grief or loss of someone or something</td>
<td>25,694</td>
<td>18.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family’s financial problems</td>
<td>18,631</td>
<td>13.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being bullied</td>
<td>13,591</td>
<td>9.73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=147,461, scoring positive or moderate to severe May 2020 – June 2021, “Choose up to 3”
What Youth Are Saying

“academic expectations and pressure are too much”

“being trans and queer in an unsupportive household”

“I feel captive because of my toxic household. I want to escape so bad”

“days get longer, life gets more and more boring everyday... I just don’t know what to do”

“I cause problems for no reason and do reckless things”
What We’re Hearing From Parents

• 37% of parents who took the Parent Screen reported seeing conduct problems “often” in their child
• Social anxiety
• Separation anxiety
• Isolation
How does this play into the classroom?

• Basic needs *have* to be met before learning can occur
• Supportive space for healing and resiliency
Feeling Safe and Secure Matters

- Positive, stable relationships with adults can help child brain development
- For social-emotional development
- For academic performance
Building the Base

Show them how to be safe:

- Mask wearing
- Hand washing
- Distancing
- Bathroom procedures
- Other changes due to COVID

Help them feel safe:

- Schedule
- Consistency
- Calm
- We’re in this together
Relationships Matter

• Connect with families and students
• Developing trust
• Feeling valued
• Empowering students
• Dealing with discipline
Connecting with Students and Families

- Communicate early and often
- Positive connections
- Go out of your way
Value and Trust: Getting to Know Your Students

• Why? The more you know the better you can tailor conversations, interactions, and lessons to show you value them
• Get-to-know-you activities
• Time and space to share
• Peer support and encouragement
• Share about yourself
• Promote cultural awareness
Empower Students

- Let them make decisions
- Give them responsibility
- Give them choices
- Follow their lead
Positive Behavior
Teachers

• Remain calm
• Have a process
• Rally your team
• Follow through
Students

- Take a break
- Talk it through
- Find a strategy/solution
- Right your wrongs
Additional Resources

2021 Back to School Toolkit: *Facing Fears, Supporting Students*

- [https://mhanational.org/backtoschool](https://mhanational.org/backtoschool)

MHA Screening in Schools

- [https://screening.mhanational.org/mental-health-screening-in-schools](https://screening.mhanational.org/mental-health-screening-in-schools)
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