The Things They Carry

Poverty & Trauma

Bridget Kelly & Juliana Robinson

Introductions

Bridget Kelly - Behavior Analyst
Juliana Robinson - School Psychologist

Objectives:

- Identify signs of trauma

- Recognise that poverty can present as chronic trauma

- Understand the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)

- Understand the power of positive childhood experiences (PCEs)

- Learn simple strategies to implement in the classroom

Group Think:

"Textbook" Definition of Trauma

- Trauma is a deeply distressing or disturbing event
  - Causes significant emotional, psychological, and sometimes physical harm
- Can result from:
  - Witnessing or experiencing a life-threatening event
  - Interpersonal Violence
  - Loss of a loved one
  - Exposure to extreme stress

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Traumatic events that occur before a child reaches the age of 18.

- Abuse

- Neglect

- Mental illness in the household

- Substance Abuse

- Poverty

- Divorce

- Death

Trauma in Context

Adverse Childhood Experiences

maternal depression

emotional & sexual abuse

substance abuse

domestic violence

physical & emotional neglect

divorce

mental illness

incarceration

homelessness

Adverse Community Environments

poverty

discrimination

community disruption

lack of opportunity, economic mobility & social capital

violence

poor housing quality & affordability

The Pair of ACEs

Poverty Spotlight Montana 2024

FAMILY

Children in foster care:	**3,853**
Number of households with grandparents responsible for grandchildren under age 18	**16,858**
Percent of children in immigrant families:	**6%**
Percent of children living in single parent families:	**29%**
Teen birth rate per 1,000 population ages 15-19:	**21.2%**

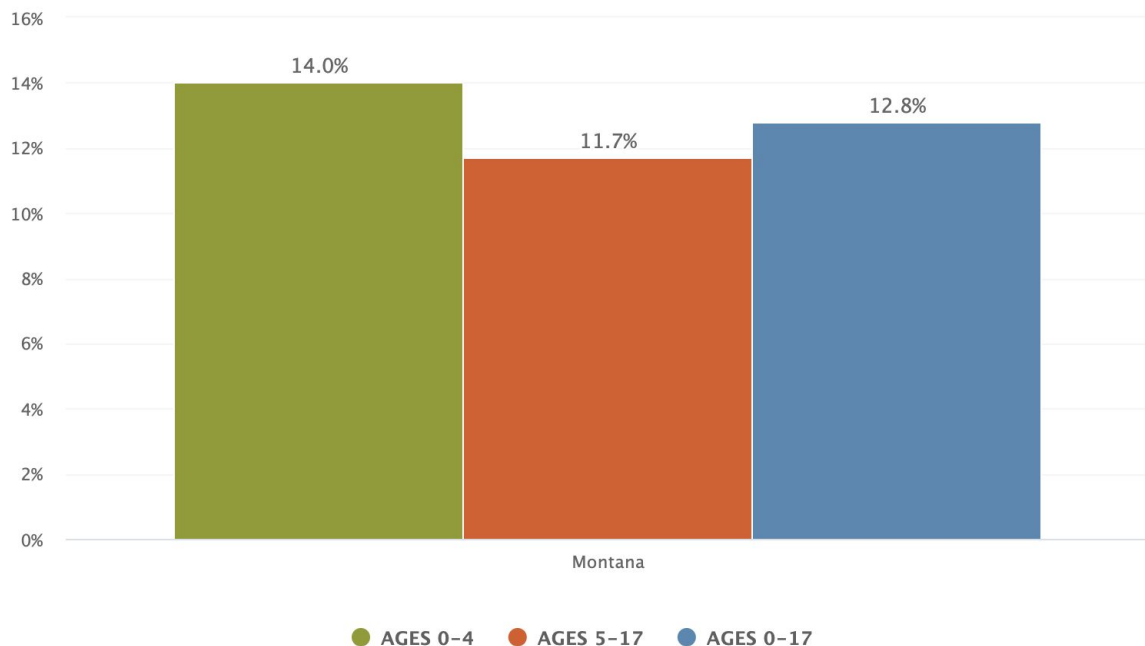|	
Child poverty rate:	**16.00%**
High school graduation rate:	**85.8%**
Number of children enrolled in Medicaid and CHIP:	**124,614**
Children receiving food stamps (SNAP):	**49,357**

Children in Poverty Montana (2023 Data)

Children are More Likely to Experience Poverty

16%

One in Six Children live below the poverty line.

Expressions of Poverty that Show up in a Classroom

- Acting out behaviors
    - Loud
    - Boisterous
- Withdrawal, attempting to disappear, being invisible
    - Hoodie pulled tight over head
    - Curled up
    - Head down on desk
    - Sitting quietly
- Chronic Absenteeism
- Chronic Health Issues

HOW POVERTY FEELS TO CHILDREN

WORRIED ABOUT PARENTS
UNHAPPY
FRUSTRATED
ANXIOUS

FEW OPPORTUNITIES
WORTHLESS
HOPELESS
SOCIAL INSECURITY

EXCLUDED
CONSTRAINED
CONFLICTED
EMBARRASSED

ASPIRATIONS
HOPES
AND
DREAMS
RESILIENCE

INSECURE, OVERCROWDED HOMES
NO PLACE FOR HOMEWORK OR PLAY

IMPORTANT
BULLIED & JUDGED
TEACHERS DON'T UNDERSTAND
NO SCHOOL TRIPS

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

- Theory that human behavior is driven by 5 categories of need
  - Physiological
  - Safety
  - Love & Belonging
  - Esteem
  - Self-Actualization
- Unmet Needs:
  - If someone's basic needs are not met they may struggle
    - Illness, Starvation, Death
    - Anxiety, Fear, Instability
    - Loneliness, Isolation, Instability
    - Low self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy

SELF-ACTUALIZATION

ESTEEM

LOVE AND BELONGING

SAFETY NEEDS

PHYSIOLOGICAL NEEDS

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

2X

- Students with high ACEs are TWO TIMES more likely to fail a grade in school.

- Score lower on standardized tests,

- Have higher rates of suspension or expulsion

- More likely to be placed in special education programs.

Impacts of Trauma in Early Childhood

- Communication

- Social-Emotional Regulation

- Relationships

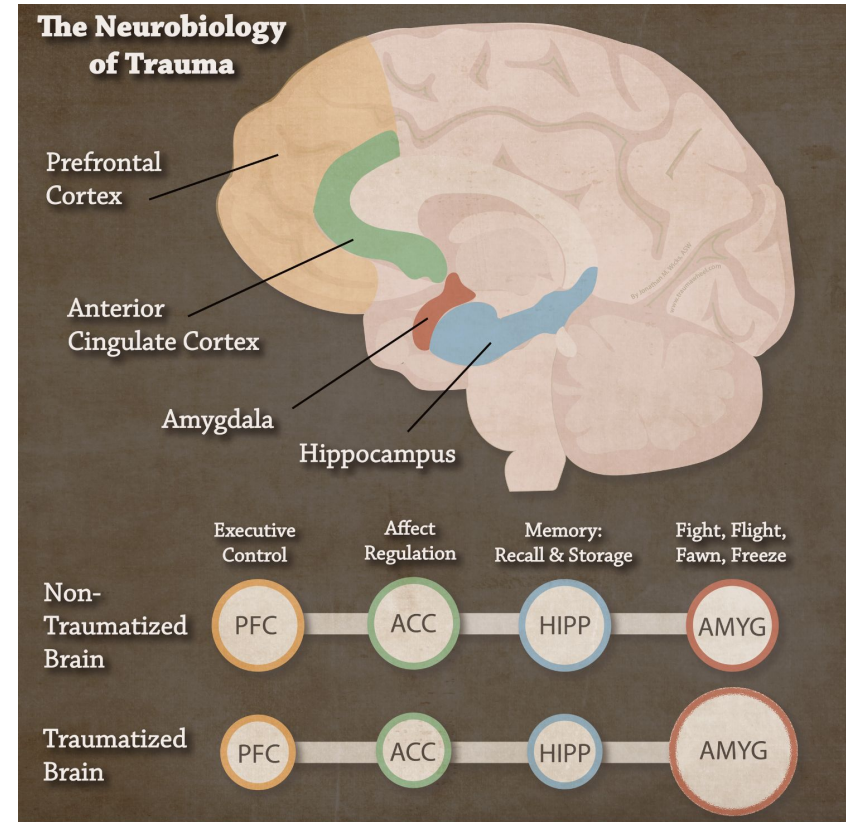- Withdrawal

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES INCLUDE:

- Physical Abuse
- Physical Neglect
- Household member who suffered from mental health issues
- Sexual Abuse
- Loss of a parent due to death, divorce, or adandonment
- Emotional Abuse
- Emotional Neglect
- Household member addicted to illegal drugs and/or alcohol
- Household member who was incarcerated
- Witnessing domestic violence against mother

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES HAVE BEEN LINKED TO:

- Risky Health Behaviors
- Chronic Health Conditions
- Low Life Potential
- Early Death

Trauma initiates the survival response.

The amygdala is the alarm system of the brain. Trauma can cause the amygdala to become overactive and cause a person to be overly stimulated with the feeling of danger, *even when they are in a safe space.*

The other areas of the brain that would typically help suppress these amygdala - driven feelings of danger have been shown to become less active after exposure to trauma, which can also be the cause of many of the distressing symptoms a person experiences after surviving a traumatic event.

The Neurobiology of Trauma

Prefrontal Cortex

Anterior Cingulate Cortex

Amygdala

Hippocampus

	Executive Control	Affect Regulation	Memory: Recall & Storage	Fight, Flight, Fawn, Freeze
Non-Traumatized Brain	PFC	ACC	HIPP	AMYG
Traumatized Brain	PFC	ACC	HIPP	AMYG

The Trauma Wheel

Jonathan M. Wicks, ASW
Creator.

Avoidance

Trauma can lead to the deliberate avoidance of things that represent or remind one of the traumatic event(s). These trauma reminders may be external cues like locations, smells, sounds, people - or - internal cues like distressing memories, sensations, thoughts, or feelings (17).

Hyperarousal

Hyperarousal occurs when a person's body suddenly kicks into high alert as a result of thinking about their trauma. Even though real danger may not be present, their body acts as if it is really in danger, causing lasting stress after the intial traumatic event (12).

Startle Response

Startle response is a biologically programmed sequence of movements to keep humans safe in the face of sudden danger. After a traumatic event or childhood maltreatment, a person may be startled more easily and/or the experience of being startled can be more distressing (13).

Intrusive Thoughts

Instrusive thoughts, including flasbacks, are threatening thoughts that historically occur without conscious or voluntary control. These mental experiences are capable of creating severe anxiety when they enter the mind. Triggers may be known or unknown, as intrusive thoughts can and often do occur without any warning (16).

Memory & Concentration

Physical and emotional trauma can directly affect memory and concentration. Some of this memory loss may be a temporary coping mechanism to deal with the trauma, while some of this memory loss may be the result of brain injury or severe psychological trauma (15).

Sleep Disturbances

Stress from a traumatic event can often lead to a variety of sleep problems. Neurochemicals remain present in the brain after the traumatic event and can interrupt a person's normal sleep cycle. The result can be insomnia, bad dreams, and daytime fatigue caused by sleep disturbance (14).

Student Communication of Needs via Behavior

Increase in …

- ❏ Threat Assessments
- ❏ Suicide Assessments
- ❏ FBAs
- ❏ 504s
- ❏ Special Education Services

Need for….

- ❏ Classroom Calming Areas
- ❏ Visual Schedules
- ❏ Alternate Learning spaces
- ❏ Additional Counselors
- ❏ Additional Paraeducators
- ❏ Outside Supports
- ❏ Educator Training

Youth Suicide

- Montana children died by suicide at a higher rate than all US children in the years 2013-2022
  - Nearly 3xs the national rate
- Child Suicide rate in Montana increased 67% from 2019/2020 to 20/21/2022
- Factors to think about:
  - Rural
    - Isolation
    - Access to mental health support
  - Trauma
  - Poverty

Table 1. Number of Children Ages 10-17 who Died by Suicide, Montana Resident, 2013-2022

Demographics*		Number	%	Risk Factors[†]	Number	%
All		137	100	Substance Abuse	46	35
Years:	2013-2014	22	16	Maltreatment	32	24
	2015-2016	27	20	Death of Friend or Family Member	30	23
	2017-2018	22	16	Talked about Suicide	39	30
	2019-2020	24	18	History of Prior Self-harm	26	20
	2021-2022	42	31	History of Running Away	13	10
Race:	AI/AN	29	21	Depression**	20	15
	All other Races	108	79	Other Mental Health Condition[¥]	22	17
Sex:	Male	94	69	Displayed Severe Emotional Distress	12	9
	Female	43	31	Behavioral Change	21	16
County:	Metropolitan	42	31	Crisis within 30 days of Death	21	16
	Micropolitan	30	22	**Protective Factors[†]**		
	Rural	65	47	Involved in Sports	18	14
Has a Disability[†]		56	42	Involved in Other Activities	16	12

* Data come from the Montana Office of Vital Records and include data collected on the death certificate.

† Data come from the CFRP and only includes deaths with a completed review at the time of this report. Total number of deaths used to calculate % for these measures was 132.

**Includes children who have been diagnosed by a professional with a depressive disorder.

¥Includes children who have been diagnosed by a professional with any of the following: anxiety, bipolar, eating disorder, substance use
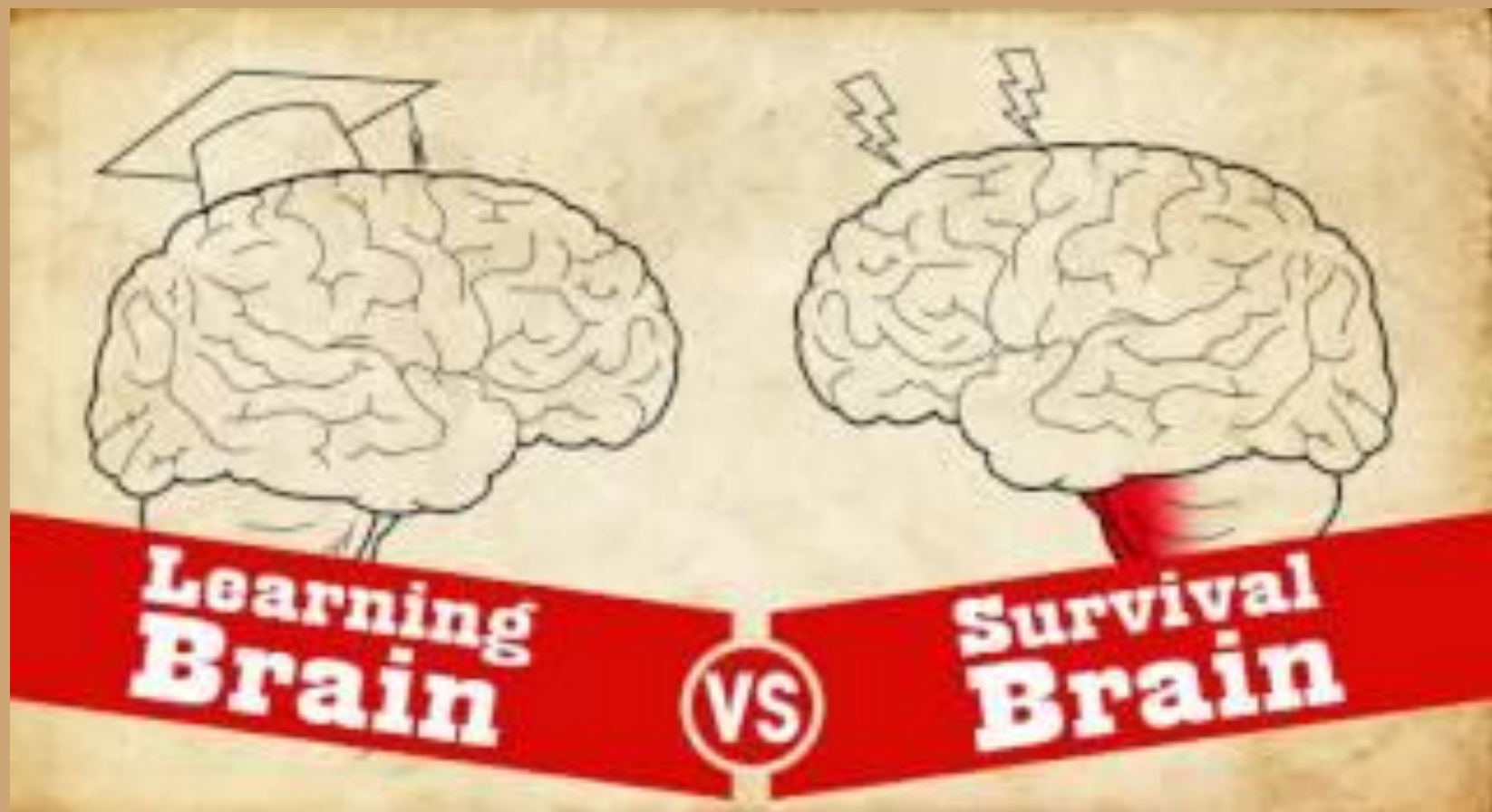
Positive Childhood Experiences

- Ability to talk with family about feelings

- Sense that family is supportive during difficult times

- Participation in COMMUNITY traditions

- Sense of belonging IN SCHOOL

- Feeling supported by FRIENDS

- Having two NON PARENT adults who show they care

- FEELING SAFE AND PROTECTED BY AN ADULT

The Role of Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs)

Positive Childhood Experiences, or PCEs, can significantly mitigate the impact of ACEs and trauma.

PCEs encompass nurturing relationships, supportive environments, and opportunities for skill-building.

PCEs equip children with the tools to cope with adversity and to thrive despite challenges.

% w Depression or Poor Mental Health
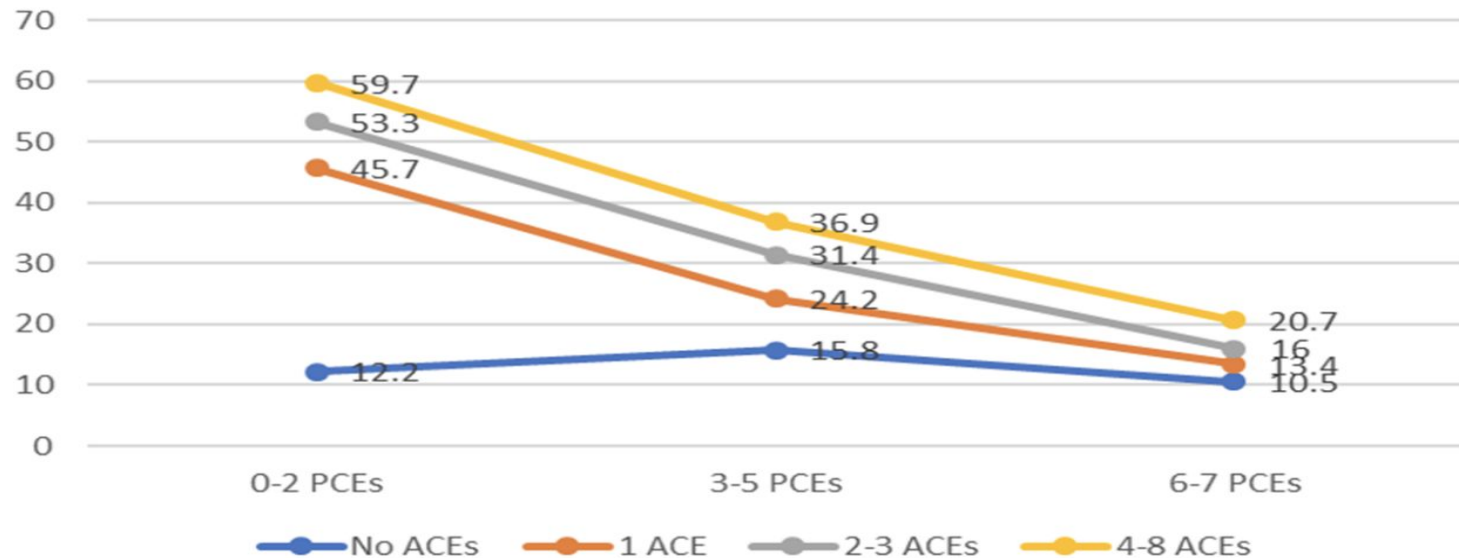
In summary:
⇒ Positive childhood experiences mitigate the effects of ACEs and buffer against toxic stress
⇒ Positive childhood experiences promote healing and recovery

Connecting with Your Students

- Meet them where they are
  - Get to know them
  - Recognise and build on their individual strengths
- Everyday is a new day
  - Give them (and you) a fresh start over and over and over…
- Kids can't learn if they don't feel safe
  - Provide consistent steady support and expectations
- Try a team approach
  - Same goals/Same light at the end of the tunnel
- Consider basic needs
  - Food/Snacks/Sleep/Clothes(PE shoes, Snow gear)/School Supplies
- Give yourself and your students grace
- Try to determine needs expressed
  - Use your resources to help with this
  - School Psychologist/Behavior Analyst/Teachers/School Nurse

Teachers as Agents of Change

- Foster Safety:
  - Safe and supportive classroom environment.
  - Consistency, Clear Expectations
  - Sense of physical and emotional safety.
- Build Relationships:
  - Positive teacher-student relationships.
  - Opportunities for trust to develop.
- Emphase Emotional Regulation:
  - Self regulation for behavior management *and* academic success.
- Encourage Flexibility:
  - Accommodate individual needs
- Promote Self-Care:
  - Promote Mindfulness
  - Meet Physical needs
- Collaborate:
  - Share insights with other teachers.
  - Allow space for frustrations and wins

Things that Make a Difference

- Expressive Writing

- Teach reading skills

- Build Vocabulary

- Teaching emotional skills

- Teaching empathy

- Setting goals

- Teaching Hope

The Three R's

Regulation

Relationship

Responsibility

Kristin K Souers and Pete Hall

Regulation to Meet Emotional and Physical Needs

Student:

- Struggles with transitions
- Fidgets constantly
- Shuts down in challenging situations
- Easily Triggered
- Reacts Emotionally
- Difficulty processing input

Teacher:

- Provide Sensory Tools
- Brain Breaks
- Sensory Regulation Area
- Provide Snacks/Water
- Structured Exercise Breaks
- Incorporate Movement
- Provide a Safe Storage Space
- Rest/Break Area

Build Relationship to Help Meet Relational Needs

Student:

- Struggles when you are not in close proximity
- Seeks you out, even outside of class
- Regulates better when close to you
- Dramatic mood swings
- Responds best to personal/individual acknowledgement

Teacher:

- Frequent check ins
- High fives, hugs, handshakes (cued off student)
- Connect/Huddle as a transition into learning
- Praise
- Repair
- Journal Prompts
- Team tables

Responsibility to Help Meet Control Needs

Student:

- Seeks control of situations
- Needs predictability in schedules and events
- Low self esteem
- Struggles with relationships
- Avoids task or situations perceived as difficult
- Looks to others to complete tasks

Teacher:

- Classroom Jobs
- Use Yet/And , FIrst/Then language
- Follow through and check in
- Choice (or assigned!) seating
- Clear choices
- Model and teach Grit
- Preview changes in routine
- Clear expectations

Easy Things To Do

- Structure and consistency of a classroom are conducive of creating a safe place
  - Maybe just add flexibility
  - Students are not the same as they were 10, 15 or 20 years ago
- Don't turn out lights
- Let them sleep
  - Doesn't have to be during academic tims
    - Art/Music/Recess
  - Let them know you know they are tired and that you don't want them to get behind and you will find time to let them rest
- Snack area/access to food
- Give them things (food, pencils)
- Empower students (ask what they like, give them jobs, give them a voice, control)
- Let them leave stuff at school (lost, used, sold)
- Safe place to shower, change, take care of self

Promoting PCEs in the Classroom

Fostering a Positive Classroom Atmosphere

- Foster a classroom environment that is welcoming, inclusive, and free from discrimination and bullying. A sense of belonging in school is one of the original 7 PCEs (PCEs | CEI (edimprovement.org)).
- Arrange desks and materials in a way that promotes collaboration and interaction among students.
- (Ideas to Consider (elementaryassessments.com))
- Use calming colors and decorations to create a pleasant learning atmosphere.
- Create designated quiet spaces where students can go to reflect and decompress when needed.
- Incorporate art projects and creative activities that focus on environmental themes.

https://www.pacesconnection.com/blog/creating-positive-childhood-environmental-experiences-in-the-classroom

Promoting PCE's the Classroom

Ensuring a Safe Physical & Built Environment

- Ensure that school buildings and classrooms are clean, well-maintained, and safe for students.
- Provide adequate lighting, ventilation, and comfortable seating arrangements.
- Promote cleanliness and hygiene throughout the school.
- Ensure school drinking water is free from contaminants, like lead, a well known neurotoxin. (Protecting kids from lead in school drinking water (pirg.org))
- Implement energy-efficient practices and technologies in school buildings.
- Promote eco-friendly transportation options, such as walking, biking, carpooling, or using public transportation.
- Create safe and accessible routes to school for pedestrians and cyclists.

https://www.pacesconnection.com/blog/creating-positive-childhood-environmental-experiences-in-the-classroom

Trauma-Informed Classroom Techniques

- Realizing:

  Realize the widespread impacts of childhood trauma—while also acknowledging the various paths of recovery.

- Recognizing:

  As an educator, learn to recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma within a child's development and within their family culture.

- Responding:

  Learn to integrate knowledge of trauma into your classroom policies.

- Resisting:

  Resist creating further traumatization by noticing and reducing any triggers for children in your classroom.

BE THE ONE

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Resources

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2013 Aha Process Inc.

Fostering Resilient Learners: Strategies for creating a trauma-sensitive classroom environment (ASCD, 2016)

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https://www.oneplaceonslow.org/blog/first-2000-days-series-creating-trauma-informed-classrooms-and-centers/

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https://spotlightonpoverty.org/states/montana/

NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION 1201 16th Street, N.W. • Washington, DC 20036 www.nea.org

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