Addressing Childhood Trauma: The Critical Role of Teachers

August 28, 2019
62% of Coloradans have experienced at least one adverse childhood event

25% have experienced three or more
Trauma is a public health issue

WHAT ARE ACES?
AND HOW DO THEY RELATE TO TOXIC STRESS?

“ACEs” stands for “Adverse Childhood Experiences.” These experiences can include things like physical and emotional abuse, neglect, caregiver mental illness, and household violence.

The more ACEs a child experiences, the more likely he or she is to suffer from things like heart disease and diabetes, poor academic achievement, and substance abuse later in life.

-Center for Developing Child, Harvard University
Learning Objectives

1. Apply a public health lens to the issue of childhood trauma
2. Explain the critical role of teachers in addressing childhood trauma
3. Describe how teacher preparation programs can prepare their students to implement trauma-informed practices
National Mental Health Innovation Center
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS

Resilient Futures

Metropolitan State University of Denver
Unaddressed trauma can hurt academic performance

- More days of school absence
- Problems with attention skills, abstract reasoning, long-term memory for verbal information, and reading ability
- Difficulties in self-regulation
- Lower GPA; Higher risk of school drop-out
The impact of trauma exposure on learning

Many of the behavioral symptoms that we see in youth are a **direct result** of coping with adverse experiences.

What we often label as “abnormal” or “dysfunctional” behaviors are really **misapplied survival skills**.
Why schools?

Schools Can Provide Protective Factors

Positive Impact of One Caring Adult

Positive Impact of a Safe Environment
Thinking upstream...
Metropolitan State University of Denver – School of Education
MSU Components of Implementation

- Pre-service teacher workshops
- Mentor teacher training
- Certificate in TIPs
- Curriculum
- Faculty
- Masters in TIPs
Pre-service Teacher Workshops

• Implementation of Resilient Futures program

• Opt-in sessions for pre-service teachers in their student teaching or residency years
  • Theory
  • Real world classroom application
Faculty

• Brief introduction to Resilient Futures Trauma Informed Practices (TIP)

• Joining Pre-service teacher trainings

• Guidance in assessing current curriculum
• Ofelia Schepers, PhD & Kathryn Young, PhD
  • Review of all syllabi for areas of SOE
  • Identify areas where TIP would integrate seamlessly into current curriculum
  • Provide support for professors and instructors to implement TIP into their curriculum
Next Steps

• Mentor teacher training
• Research
• Strategically include TIP in curriculum
• Certificate in TIP
• Creation of Master’s in TIP
National Mental Health Innovation Center Evaluation
Purpose

• Conduct small qualitative study at ethnically diverse elementary school in Colorado

• Explore teachers’ retrospective views of HEARTS and using TIPs over last three years of implementation

• Explore implications for integrating TIPs into pre-service education
Evaluation Questions

• How do teachers describe their mindset shift from “What’s wrong with you?” to “What happened to you?”

• What barriers do teachers express in shifting their mindset?

• What elements of the HEARTS intervention are critical?
Methods

• 24, semi-structured, one-hour interviews
• Teachers, school administrators and staff, Resilient Futures consultants
• 20-minute brief classroom observation for context

Limitations:
• Single school, no comparison group
• Single, retrospective interviews
• Recall bias, social desirability bias
Findings: TIPs are new

• For the majority of teachers, HEARTS was their first exposure to TIPs

• Overwhelmingly, teachers report that information on TIPs, self-care and burnout prevention was not available in their pre-service education
Findings: Mindset shift

• The majority of teachers tell us they experienced a mindset shift:
  • Understanding how trauma impacts brain, learning, and behavior
  • Not to take a child’s behavior personally
  • Recognizing how teachers show up in the classroom affects kids
  • Deeper understanding of how escalation affects the classroom dynamic
  • Using appropriate, less punitive consequences
“Before, I would’ve ... ‘Oh, my gosh. Shouldn't he get a write-up or shouldn’t he like — how are we handling this?’ Because I just thought it was never going to end and now I know it’s not going to end, but there’s different ways to approach it. My mindset of what is right and wrong, what consequences are, ways to connect with them and to go about it, what are successful days, what a non-successful day is, is very different than I would say even three years ago.”
Findings: Barriers to mindset shift

• Several teachers, however, tell us they did not shift their mindset

• Most common barriers to mindset shift:
  • Perception that being strict is better practice
  • TIPs are too individualized
  • TIPs are ‘one more thing’ and take more time than they have to give
  • This is a new, different way of managing behavior
Implications for pre-service

• Teachers tell us:
  • They are working with children with a range of trauma histories they are not prepared to handle, and need additional supports and strategies in the classroom. This is critical work.

  • Because trauma-informed work is not black and white, is individualized to each student, and takes time and practice, it would be valuable to begin learning and practicing during pre-service education, before stepping into the classroom.
Bringing it all together

• When children experience trauma it can affect how they show up in the classroom and perform academically

• Many teachers feel unprepared to address trauma in their students and are asking to learn these skills before they enter the classroom

• We want to learn how implementing TIPs into pre-service education can have a significant, positive impact on teacher and student well-being
THANK YOU!!