Intro:

Let's take a look at some trauma-informed practices and suggested teaching tools to position your classroom as trauma-informed.

Trauma Trauma-Informed Teaching Approach

Trauma-informed teaching is not about diagnosing or treating

We wear many hats, but we are not clinically trained mental health professionals.

To have a trauma-informed lens, we must acknowledge that toxic stress is real and impacts students' ability to engage with the materials, learn, and retain information.

This may manifest in ways that first appear as the student being disorganized or not trying hard enough. However, a trauma-informed approach to teaching suggests that when a student is struggling with completing basic tasks, being motivated to study or attend classes, prioritizing assignments, managing time effectively, and persevering through challenges, it is essential to consider the underlying issues, which may be related to trauma.

Trauma-informed teaching is NOT a free-for-all, where there are no rules. In fact, the opposite is true; it is essential to provide students with structure and consistency, which can reduce stress by removing uncertainty.

Trauma-informed teaching does NOT mean educators lower academic expectations. Again, the opposite is true. A trauma-informed lens provides us with the space to challenge students academically and help them reach their full potential, allowing them to relax into learning.

It is important to remember that trauma-informed education is not about pathologizing students. It is about recognizing that when a student experiences trauma, it affects how they show up in your classroom.

Instead of asking what is wrong with this student when they are struggling, start thinking about what has happened to this student that is impacting their ability to thrive.

Teaching Tools-

What can we do as teachers? See behaviors as survival strategies not willful disobedience

For Older students

Make your first interaction with students a welcoming one.

- Consider adding a statement in your syllabus that lets them know that you care about their learning and about their health, safety, and well-being.

Create consistency and routine

- Put an outline or agenda on the board daily

Be flexible when needed

- Allow students to request extensions or resubmissions when they are facing extenuating circumstances
- Give students a voice and a choice in their learning with assessments or projects

Be transparent

- What is your expectation for classroom behavior or your classroom norms?
    - Can students step out of the room without asking for a break?
    - Can they bring food to class?
    - Can they put their head down when they are overstimulated or tired?

Be intentional about student well-being

- Incorporate well-being breaks into your class time (stretching, deep breathing, gratitude)

Be relational

- Learn and use your students' preferred names
- Listen with your eyes

Create a safe space

- Let students know where they can go for a break or to regulate their emotions

For Younger students

- Allow water and snacks
- Build in movement breaks
- Be mindful of sensory needs
- Greet students daily
- Be mindful of your tone
- Be intentional with your praise
- Ask check-in questions to the class

- Establish routines for a predictable environment
- Give students a voice and choice in their learning
- Teach and practice dysregulating skills and self-regulation skills
- Practice labeling emotions and how to handle them
- PLAY- to disarm the fear response in kids!

In summary-

Trauma-informed education, while it may be a current buzzword, is not merely a passing trend. It is about wanting to disrupt educational systems that too often prioritize knowing over caring, competition over collaboration, intervention over prevention, and individuals over community. It is about restoration and healing past injustices at the individual and community levels. It is about revealing our humanity to our students, showing them that we are on their side, that we have their backs, that we see them, and that they matter.