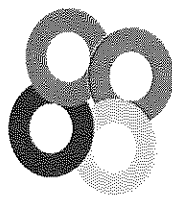


Secure Attachment and the Impact of Trauma in Schools:

Working with Students Exposed to Trauma



**School Culture &
Climate Initiative**
Supporting, Connecting and Empowering Schools



Positive Discipline in the School & Classroom

Facilitated By:

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13 Types of Traumatic Experiences:

<http://www.nctsn.org/trauma-types>

- **Community Violence:** Comes from personal conflicts between **people who are not family members.** Children may experience trauma as victims, witnesses, or perpetrators.
- **Complex Trauma:** Exposure to multiple or prolonged traumatic events. Typically, exposure involves the simultaneous or **sequential occurrence of child maltreatment—**

Including psychological maltreatment, neglect, physical, and sexual abuse, and domestic violence—**that is chronic, begins in early childhood, and occurs within the primary caregiving system.**

- **Domestic Violence:** Includes actual or threatened physical, or sexual violence or emotional abuse between adults in an intimate relationship.

Anywhere from 3 to 10 million children are exposed to domestic violence in the United States every year. Studies suggest that the **majority of children who are exposed to domestic violence are young-under the age of 8.**

- **Early Childhood Trauma:** Traumatic experiences that occur to children aged 0-6.
- **Medical Trauma:** Reactions that children/families may have to pain, injury, and serious illness; or to "invasive" medical procedures (can affect the mind as well as the body).
- **Natural Disasters:** Any natural catastrophe
- **Neglect:** Parent or caregiver does not give child the care he/she needs according to its age.
Neglect is the most common form of abuse reported to child welfare authorities.
- **Physical Abuse:** Causing/attempting to cause physical pain. Single act or several acts.
- **Refugee Trauma/Deportation:** Impact on many immigrant families and fear around deportation, regardless of immigration/citizenship status.
- **School Violence:** Includes student or teacher victimization, (very narrow to very broad)
- **Sexual Abuse:** Includes a wide range of sexual behaviors **between child and older person**
- **Terrorism:** Terrorism is defined in a variety of formal, legal ways, but the essential element is the intent to inflict psychological damage on an adversary.
- **Traumatic Grief:** Childhood traumatic grief may occur following a death of someone important to the child when **the child perceives** the experience as traumatic.

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Childhood Trauma

Affects



(At Least 1 in 4 Students)

In Every Single Classroom... Every Day...

Attachment
& Trauma
Network, Inc.



What Trauma is...

A psychologically distressing event outside the range of usual human experience. It involves a sense of intense fear, terror, and helplessness, and may lead to a variety of effects, depending on the child.

- Bruce Perry

Examples include child neglect, abuse, domestic violence, parental incarceration or abandonment, a family member's serious mental illness or substance abuse problem, highly conflicted divorce situations, as well as experiencing serious accidents, disasters, war, or acts of terrorism.

What Trauma Does to...*



The Body

Fight/flight/freeze reactions
Sensory/motor challenges
Unusual pain responses
Physical symptoms



Emotions

Hypervigilance
High distress
Self-regulation problems
Difficulty communicating feelings and needs
Possible dissociation



Actions

Poor impulsive control
Aggression/
dangerous actions
Oppositional behavior
Self harm
Overly compliant
Sleeping problems
Eating problems
Substance abuse

Trauma



No Signs

Some traumatized youth show little to no signs at school but may have difficulty at home in relationships with primary caregivers.



Relationships

General mistrust of others
Clingy/overly dependent
Withdrawn
Problems with peers
Overly helpful/solicitous of attention
May lack empathy



Self Concept

Low self-esteem
Toxic shame and guilt
Grandiose ideas/bragging
May blame others or self
Body image problems
Self-sabotaging behaviors



Thinking

Lack of curiosity
Learning/processing problems
Language development problems
Difficulty regulating attention
Executive functioning problems
Problems with planning and organization
Difficulty understanding cause and effect

What Trauma-Sensitive Schools Do...

Help Students

Feel safe Get regulated
Be connected Learn

They Benefit Everyone!

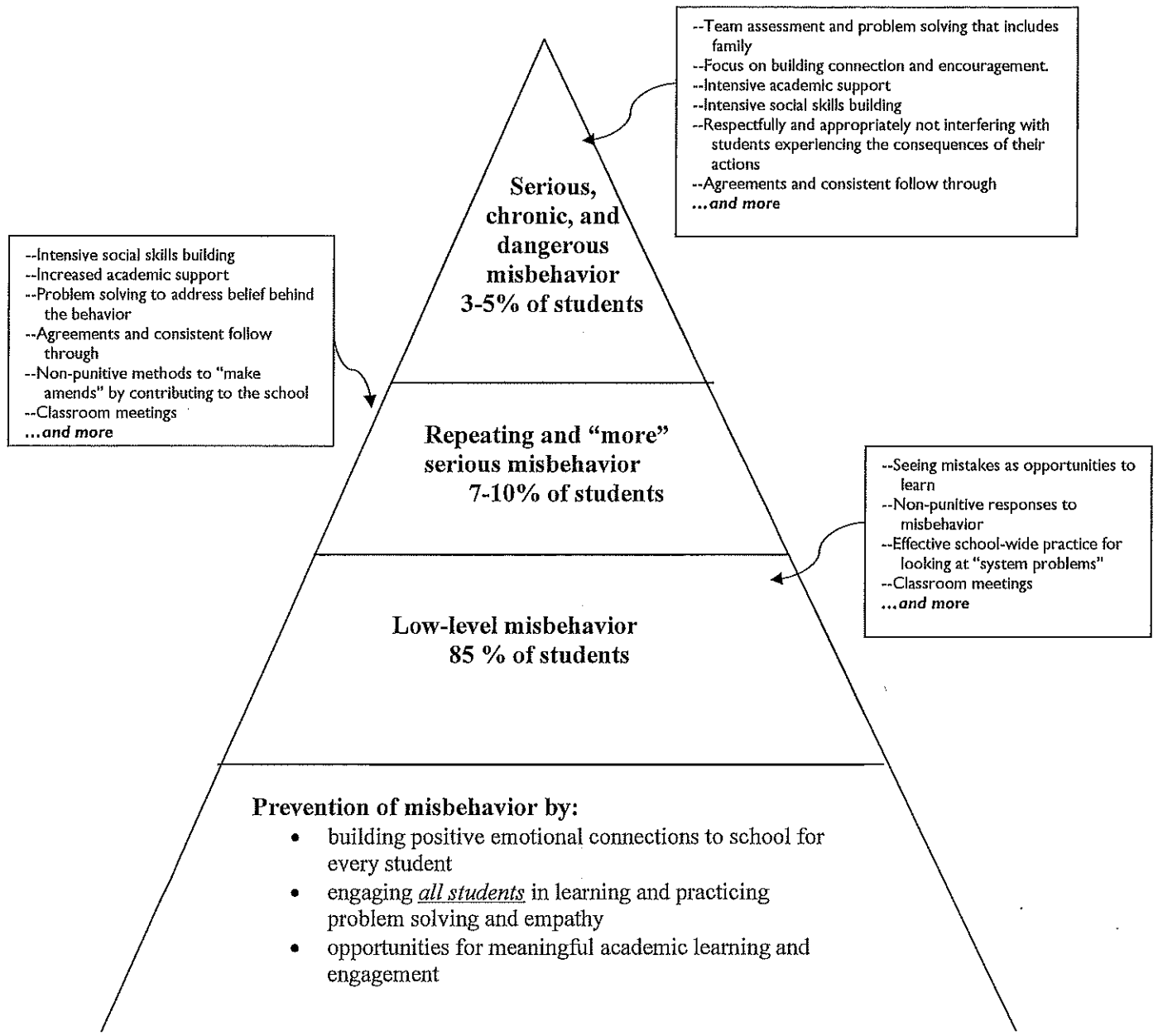
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The Scaffolded Approach to Discipline

From Preventing School Violence by Sugai, Horner & Walker, adapted by Jody McVittie

Solution-focused discipline speaks the same language as RTI (Response to Intervention) and MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Support)

School-wide discipline must address three levels of need



Respect throughout:

Respect for self: *What do I need?*

Respect for others: *What does this student need? What do other students need?*

Respect for the situation: *What does the situation demand?*

Rebuilding the Foundation for Students with Insecure Attachments or Trauma

Basic Trust

- Routines (including class/advisory meetings)
- Consistency and reliability in the relationship.
- Relationships based on dignity and respect (firm and kind)
- Listening to their story

Causal Thinking

- “What” and “how” questions
- Limited choices
- Focusing on solutions

Conscience Development

- “What” and “how” questions
- Class/Advisory meetings
- Gradual building of empathy (being listened to, feeling felt)
- Respecting differences (Activity: It’s A Jungle Out There)

Ability to Delay Gratification

- Routines & Consistency
- Relationships built on dignity and respect (firm and kind)
- Class/Advisory meetings – working with peers
- Mistakes are opportunities to learn

Identity Formation and Intellectual Potential

- Classroom jobs and responsibility
- Being able to contribute in meaningful ways
- Using “I” statements and learning language for emotions
- Opportunities to practice during play
- Learning how to make amends and fix mistakes instead of “paying for them”
- “It seems like you feel..... because...”

Relationship Skills and Socialization

- Adult relationships based on dignity and respect (firm and kind)
- Class/Advisory meetings
- Problem solving
- Wheel of choice
- Opportunities for play and practice and making mistakes
- Mistakes are opportunities to learn

Ability to Handle Stress, and Concentration

- De-escalation tools (modeled, taught, practices, expected)
- Teaching students about their own brain (brain in the palm of the hand)
- Using “I statements”
- Learning language for emotions
- Space for “chilling out” (Positive Time Out or Chill Down Time – CDT)
- Class/Advisory meeting to be heard and validated, to recognize that others have similar feelings.
- Mistakes are opportunities to learn

We learn best from those with whom we are in caring, mutually respectful relationships that promote independence. Such supportive relationships enable students from diverse backgrounds to feel comfortable bringing their personal experiences into the classroom, discover their common humanity and feel as though they are viewed as assets to the school community.

Learning First Alliance Every
Child Learning: Safe and
Supportive Schools

Working with Students Exposed to Trauma

Children exposed to trauma struggle to:

- Accurately perceive safety (they over perceive danger).
- Self-regulate (impacts attention, behavior, emotions).
- Hold a self-image that includes the belief that they matter (don't experience belonging and significance).
- Succeed academically and or socially at school.

What Trauma Can Look Like in the Classroom and School

Adapted from: *Helping Traumatized Children Learn*

Students exposed to trauma may:

- Disrupt the ability to process verbal information and use language to communicate. (May make it difficult to follow instructions.)
- Be less skilled in using language to forge social relationships and more skilled using language to build walls between themselves and those perceived to be dangerous or threatening.
- Have limited problem-solving skills.
- Struggle with sequential ordering and therefore not be able to organize (thoughts, feelings, if-then events, multi-step tasks) which in turn results in difficulty reading, writing and with critical thinking. Interfere with a student's understanding of behavior and consequences.
- Not have internalized cause and effect relationships. This means that they cannot easily predict events, sense their power over events or make meaning of "consequences."
- Struggle to see the world from the point of view of another.
- Struggle to focus and attend to what is happening in the classroom because their brains are preoccupied with ensuring safety /warding off danger.
- Struggle to self-regulate and recognize emotions. This results in poor impulse control, trouble reading social cues, and lack of a predictable sense of self. (Self-regulation is a predictor of academic success).
- Have low executive functions.
- Be slow to trust adults or peers.
- Struggle to engage with academic material effectively.
- Cope by re-enacting trauma through play or through their interactions with others. They may provoke teachers or other students in order to replay abusive situations.

The Student Intervention Team Meeting

For students who have experienced trauma

Thinking it through:

- How do you establish trust? (Who should be there? Who will be the advocate for the student? What kind of practice is necessary?)
- How do you establish safety? (What are the ground rules? How will the student always be supported?)
- What are the student's strengths?
- What doable piece of the challenge needs to be addressed?
- How can the student use his/her strengths to meet the challenge?
- How do you work with family/care givers to frame things in a helpful way – to invite them to see the student's best side?
- What is a reasonable amount of change to expect?
- What skills will be needed for the student to be successful?
- Who is going to be responsible? And for what?
- What is the follow through going to look like? (Who, when, how, next meeting?)

Positive Discipline in the School and Classroom

Leaders' Guide: Resources and Activities©

Positive Discipline Association www.PositiveDiscipline.org

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