



Module Summary

In this module, teachers will:

- Describe the role of schools and teachers in supporting trauma-exposed youth.
- Identify and describe strategies for providing behavioral support to traumatized students.
- Identify and describe strategies for providing academic support to traumatized students.

Module activities:

This module contains strategies for supporting trauma-exposed students, as well as examples of what these strategies could look like in action. In the resource section, the user has the option of exploring two true-life case studies and/or watching experts in the field discuss support strategies in greater detail.

**For information on how exposure to trauma can impact a child's learning and behavior, visit the linked module Understanding the Impact of Trauma on Students.*



Key Takeaways

Essential knowledge:

- Protective factors are conditions that increase the likelihood a child will recover from a traumatic event (or events) without suffering long-term harm. Three of the strongest protective factors against trauma are (Anthony, Alter, & Jenson, 2009; Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010; Cole et al., 2005):
 - A strong, positive relationship with an adult
 - Good cognitive skills
 - The ability to self-regulate emotions and behavior
- Traumatized children experience the world differently than their non-traumatized peers. Their most challenging behaviors are often linked to extreme feelings of vulnerability (Cole et al., 2005).
- Responding to traumatized children with anger or punishment can create the following cycle:
 - Trauma causes child to develop the belief that the world is dangerous and unpredictable.
 - Child behaves in ways that demonstrate this belief.
 - Adults respond with anger and punishment.
 - Child's beliefs are confirmed; cycle repeats itself.

Essential skills:

- Strategies for providing behavioral support to traumatized students (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015; Cole et al., 2005; Dwyer et al., 2012):
 - Create a sense of predictability through the use of clear and consistent routines.
 - Help students identify and process feelings; teach and model language for expressing emotions.
 - Learn about students' triggers (i.e. reminders of a traumatic event). Anticipate situations that may be difficult for a student and provide accommodations.
 - Teach students about the rules of the school/class, the benefits of following them, and set firm limits on misbehavior.
 - Give students meaningful choices that can help them build a sense of autonomy.
- Strategies for providing cognitive or academic support to traumatized students (Cole et al., 2005; Engebreston & Weiss, 2015; Medley, 2012; National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2007):
 - Maintain high academic standards; don't lower the level of academic rigor to make work "easier" for students.
 - Teach reading, writing, and vocabulary skills that students can use to make sense of their experience and manage their emotions.
 - Identify and focus on students' strengths in order to build their self-efficacy.

- Present information both verbally and nonverbally.
- Create space in the curriculum to explore and discuss trauma-related topics.

Essential mindset:

- If we relate to traumatized children with compassion and care, they can begin to heal.
- Strong, positive relationships with adults can act as a powerful protective factor against trauma.
- It is not necessary to know that a child has a trauma history or PTSD diagnosis to create a trauma-sensitive classroom in which all students are responded to with care, compassion, and support.

 **The Skill in Action**

Here are some things you might observe in a trauma-sensitive classroom:

- The teacher has clear procedures and routines, and all students know what they are.
- The teacher previews transitions or deviations from the routine before they occur.
- The teacher proactively builds positive relationships with all students in the class.
- The teacher allows students to make meaningful choices.
- The teacher values the presence of each student in the classroom, and this comes through in his or her interactions with them.
- The teacher uses logical consequences to address misbehavior, not punishments that are intended to cause pain or humiliate the child.
- The teacher does not engage in power struggles with students; he or she looks for ways to de-escalate confrontations and help emotional students calm themselves and self-soothe.
- The teacher operates with an understanding of different students' needs and provides accommodations accordingly (e.g. re-explaining directions if needed, previewing an event before it occurs)
- The classroom operates with norms for democratic participation; students are able to express and share ideas, perspectives, and feelings in respectful ways.
- Students treat one another with empathy, and offer one another encouragement and support.

 **Questions for Discussion**

The following is a list of suggested questions for engaging in a reflective dialogue with the teacher, either before or after he or she attempts to implement the skill.

- What are some protective factors against trauma?
- Why is it important to treat students with compassion?
- How can you create a trauma-sensitive classroom, even if you don't know the specific trauma histories of your students?
- What are some ways in which you can provide behavioral support to traumatized students?
- What are some ways in which you can provide academic support to traumatized students?
- Which of these supports could be beneficial to all students – not just the ones with trauma histories?
- What questions do you have? What do you still want to learn more about?

 **Standards**

InTASC: 3(n) The teacher is committed to working with learners, colleagues, families, and communities to establish positive and supportive learning environments.