

A photograph of a classroom where a teacher and several students are wearing face masks. The teacher is leaning over a desk, assisting a young girl who is also wearing a mask. Other students in the background are also wearing masks and working at their desks. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a window in the background.

USING TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE TO BREATHE NEW LIFE INTO CLASSROOMS

By Keesha Kerns and Jillian Ardley

Experienced teachers are seeking ways to handle their own personal challenges and pain during the coronavirus pandemic. But before they can alleviate new teachers' anxieties, they must first grasp the information and apply it for themselves. This is similar to what you hear from flight attendants about oxygen masks: "Please place the mask over your own mouth and nose before assisting others." This pandemic can literally take your breath away as well as your life; therefore, taking the time to become familiar with the terms *trauma* and *trauma-informed care*, and learning how to deal with it in the pandemic-influenced classroom, is pertinent for all teachers.

More than 2 million Americans have tested positive for the COVID-19 virus. Those who tested positive include children who are now part of this global trauma. Many of these children will be expected to return to educational settings during the pandemic. Subsequently, teachers who are affected by this trauma as well must return to the profession with effective approaches for educating traumatized P-12 students.

Trauma-Informed Care Approach

Trauma-informed care is defined as practices that promote a culture of safety, empowerment, and healing (Kimberg & Wheeler, 2019). The trauma-informed care approach focuses on safety and empowerment to decrease the feelings of powerlessness related to traumatic experiences. Such an approach increases feelings of strength, ability, management, and boundaries, thus creating a safe atmosphere to foster healing. In a safe atmosphere of trauma-informed care, one can cope with the discomfort or distress associated with the trauma. This approach aims to reduce anxiety and complex emotions while developing healthy coping strategies to healing.

These tips can assist experienced and new teachers' transition to the pandemic-influenced classroom using the trauma-informed care approach.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the six principles that guide the trauma-informed care approach are:

1. Safety,
2. Trustworthiness and transparency,
3. Peer support,
4. Collaboration and mutuality,
5. Empowerment and choice, and
6. Cultural, historical, and gender issues.

See the Resources section for details on these principles.

Tips for the Pandemic-Influenced Classroom

New teachers, as well as those who mentor them, need practical strategies during a pandemic.

These tips can assist experienced and new teachers' transition to the pandemic-influenced classroom using the trauma-informed care approach (Kerns & Ardley, 2020).

- A trauma-informed approach requires constant attention, caring awareness, sensitivity, and possibly a cultural change at the school level.
- Teachers showing empathy build trustworthiness with students.
- Mentors can encourage new teachers to be creative in connecting with students during pandemic challenges.
- Teachers need to help other students, faculty, and staff feel they are in a safe environment in the school during pandemic times.
- In times of trauma, the stories and lived experiences of students, faculty, and staff can promote recovery and healing.
- Mentors can help new teachers transition from traditional teaching methods to appropriate pandemic teaching methods.
- Teachers showing compassion can be a therapeutic agent in the healing process of a student and is especially effective from the mentor to a new teacher.
- Teachers using one or more of the SAMSHA trauma-informed approaches can reduce anxiety within students, faculty, and staff in traumatic times.

- Mentors can model self-care behavior, especially when trauma is involved.

Concluding Thoughts

The term "new normal" is being used globally among many concerned individuals. This is no different for experienced teachers than for new teachers; each wants to know what the future will hold for them and the students they serve. By understanding the nature of trauma and knowing how to effectively relate to others through trauma-informed care, teachers can breathe new life into their classroom during a pandemic. 🍏

References

- Kerns, K., & Ardley, J. (2020, June 4). Trauma in today's school climate [webinar]. In *Virginia Department of Education 2019-2020 Norfolk State University Clinical Faculty Grant Webinar Series*. Retrieved from <https://www.nsu.edu/ocess/forms>
- Kimberg, L., & Wheeler, M. (2019). Trauma and trauma-informed care. In M. R. Gerber (Ed.), *Trauma-informed care health care approaches: A guide for primary care* (pp. 25-56). Boston University School of Medicine Veteran Affairs.
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2014). *SAMHSA's concept of trauma and guidance for a trauma-informed approach*. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4884. Rockville, MD: SAMHSA. Retrieved from https://ncsacw.samhsa.gov/userfiles/files/SAMHSA_Trauma.pdf

Resources

6 Guiding Principles to a Trauma-Informed Approach
bit.ly/TraumApproach

SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach
bit.ly/ConTrauma

How Childhood Trauma Affects Health Across a Lifetime
bit.ly/ChildTraum



The Teacher Advocate online:
Live links and downloadable articles available at bit.ly/TAF20v28



Dr. Kerns is the Community Counseling Program Coordinator and an Assistant Professor at Norfolk State University teaching both community and school counseling courses. She is a licensed professional counselor, national certified counselor, and licensed professional school counselor.

Dr. Ardley is the Director of Clinical Experiences and Student Services and Associate Professor at Norfolk State University. She collaborates with public school divisions and the Virginia Department of Education to design and implement effective trainings for P-12 faculty and teacher candidates