

Learning Services Spring 2018 Newsletter

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OUR ROLE AS EDUCATORS

“Caring adults are perhaps the most important thing in a child’s world.

Nothing beats the feeling that a teacher knows you, likes you and cares about what happens to you.

It inspires trust, confidence and courage in children.”

-The International Resilience Project

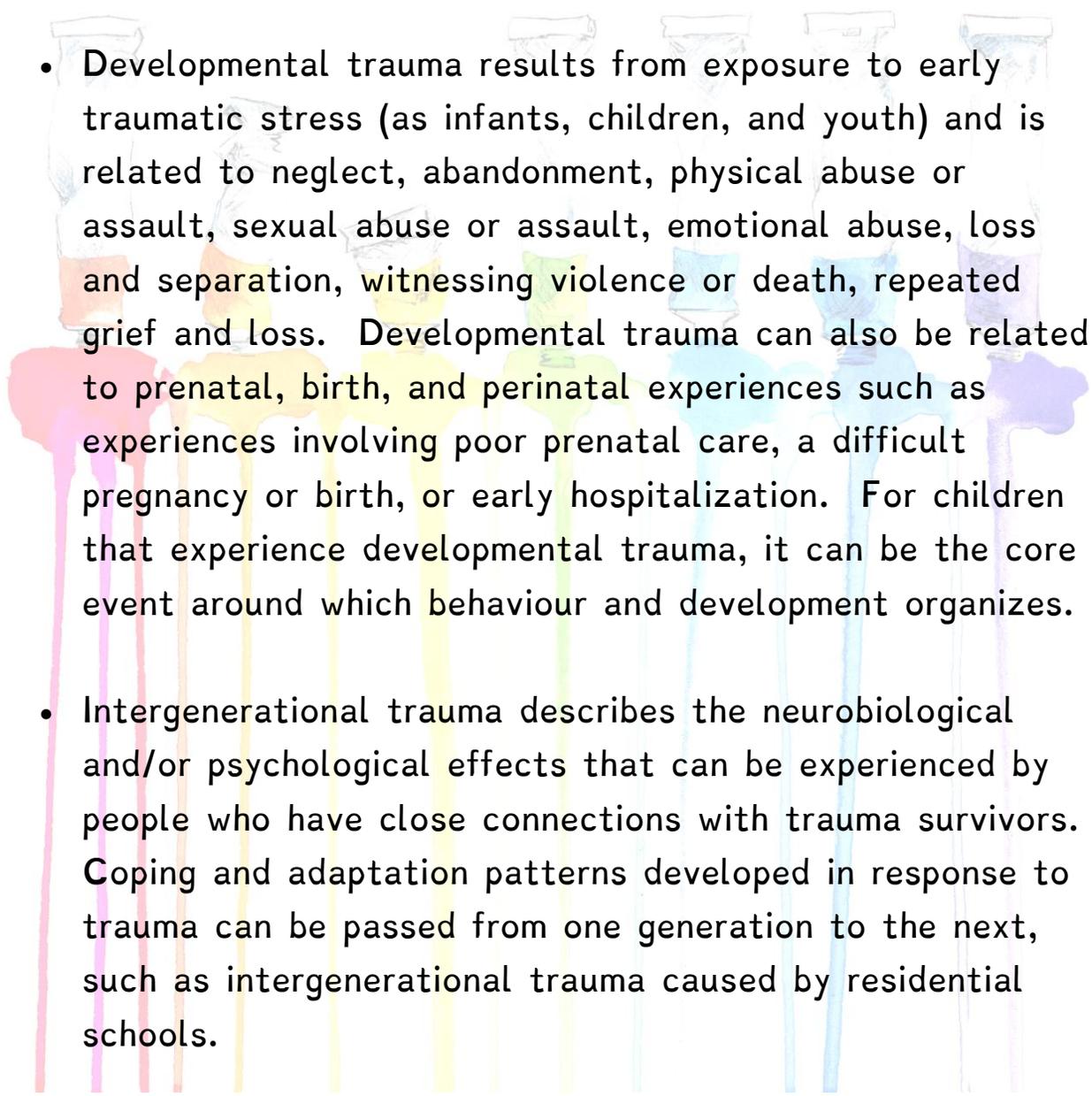
Students & Stress, Anxiety, & Trauma

Everyone experiences stress, even children! In the right amount, stress can be a positive influence on motivation and creativity – but too much stress, or the wrong type of stress, can dramatically affect learning and social development. Of particular concern are anxiety and traumatic stress.

Anxiety is stress experienced even in the absence of a stressor. With anxiety, fear overcomes all other emotions, accompanied by worry and apprehension. Common types of anxiety in children include separation anxiety: when children are worried about being separated from caregivers; and social anxiety: when children are excessively self-conscious, making it difficult for them to participate in class and socialize with peers.

Traumatic stress is stress caused by exposure to a traumatic event. A traumatic event is a frightening, dangerous, or violent event that poses a threat to a child's life or bodily integrity. Witnessing a traumatic event that threatens life or physical security of a loved one can also be traumatic. This is particularly important for young children as their sense of safety depends on the perceived safety of their attachment figures.

Two types of trauma particularly relevant to children and youth are developmental and intergenerational trauma:

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- A faint, colorful illustration of several children in the background, rendered in a sketchy style with various colors like pink, yellow, blue, and purple.
- Developmental trauma results from exposure to early traumatic stress (as infants, children, and youth) and is related to neglect, abandonment, physical abuse or assault, sexual abuse or assault, emotional abuse, loss and separation, witnessing violence or death, repeated grief and loss. Developmental trauma can also be related to prenatal, birth, and perinatal experiences such as experiences involving poor prenatal care, a difficult pregnancy or birth, or early hospitalization. For children that experience developmental trauma, it can be the core event around which behaviour and development organizes.
 - Intergenerational trauma describes the neurobiological and/or psychological effects that can be experienced by people who have close connections with trauma survivors. Coping and adaptation patterns developed in response to trauma can be passed from one generation to the next, such as intergenerational trauma caused by residential schools.

Unfortunately, many people often mistake the symptoms of unmanaged stress. Children may be reprimanded by adults for actions that are really stress reactions, rather than intentional misbehaviour or poor cognitive ability.

When stress levels are too high, it can interfere with a student's health, their ability to focus and think, and make it more difficult for students to get along with others – which is why it is so important for educators to recognize signs of stress:

Body	Mind	Feelings/Emotions	Behaviours
Tense muscles, headaches, stomach-aches, disturbed sleep, skin rash, rapid heartbeat, fatigue, being hot or cold	Poor concentration, forgetfulness, difficulty problem solving, being easily distracted, confusion, being irrational	Fear, anxiety, frustration, sadness, anger, being overwhelmed, panic, irritability, being overly sensitive, hopelessness, feeling threatened	Poor listening, whining, crying, nail biting, thumb sucking, daydreaming, fighting with others, being overly cautious withdrawing, eating more or less than usual, difficulty calming down

*not a comprehensive list

Tips for Your Toolbox

We hope that you're reminded of the wonderful ways you are already supporting students and gain a new idea or two!

Addressing students stress can have multiple benefits, including enhanced learning outcomes for students, a positive and calm classroom environment, and innovative ways of addressing required curriculum.

- *Form positive, nurturing, and specific relationships with individual students.* Even if a student's home environment is less than optimal, a teacher can provide a positive, stabilizing presence.
- *Teach students to recognize the symptoms of stress and the changes they feel in themselves.* Help them understand that tense muscles, headaches, rapid heartbeat, etc. can be signs of stress.
- *Model and teach stress reduction and self-regulation strategies.* Practice breathing and relaxation techniques regularly in your classroom.
- *Establish routine to create consistency and predictability.* Do things at the same time and in the same way as often as possible. Inform students of any changes and how and why things will change.

References & Resources

Calmer classrooms: A guide to working with traumatised children. Retrieved from <https://www.communities.qld.gov.au/resources/childsafety/foster-care/calmer-classrooms.pdf>

Healing families, helping systems: A trauma-informed practice guide for working with children, youth and families. Retrieved from https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/child-teen-mental-health/trauma-informed_practice_guide.pdf

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