

Fundamentals of Trauma-Informed Facilitation

Trauma is common.¹ Being aware of the different ways trauma may show up allows educators to respond in ways that avoid causing additional harm. There are strategies and skills facilitators can develop to be trauma-informed and create safer learning environments.

RATIONALE

How do we teach, and why do we teach that way?

- Many young people have experienced or observed violence and trauma. We must actively create lessons that avoid inadvertently retraumatizing or triggering youth with these experiences.
- Many adults have also experienced trauma. Being aware of which situations may trigger a personal response helps educators be prepared to respond in the moment to create a safe environment for all learners.
- Trauma informed facilitation benefits all learners, not only those who have experienced trauma.
- When teaching sex ed, it's important to prepare for and recognize which topics or activities could elicit trauma-responses from learners.
- Recognizing the multiple ways individuals demonstrate trauma responses can help us be prepared to tend to the needs of learners and to the needs of the group/agenda.

TALKING POINTS & STRATEGIES

What do we say?

- At the beginning of the session, let learners know you are a mandatory reporter, or you may need to share certain disclosures with a mandatory reporter.
- Establish and utilize group agreements, including confidentiality, respect for others, and speaking from your own experience.
- Sex ed is a sensitive topic. Let participants know that everyone's experiences are different, and based on individual experiences the topic being discussed could elicit a strong response.
- Let learners know they should take care of themselves, and discuss self-care strategies they can use in the moment as needed.
- When the facilitator recognizes a learner exhibiting a trauma response, they should:
 - Care for themselves: take a deep breath and ground themselves before responding
 - Care for the individual: respond with compassion and validation, and offer support
 - Care for group: acknowledge the impact on the group, provide a grounding exercise, refer back to group agreements, and offer learners additional resources
 - Care for the agenda: gently transition back to the lesson

KNOW THE FACTS

FACT: Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years). They can have long-term negative impacts on health, opportunity and well-being. They are common, and some groups experience them more than others.²

¹ More than 65% of young people experience at least one traumatic event by age 16.

<https://www.samhsa.gov/child-trauma/understanding-child-trauma>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/aces/about/index.html>

KNOW THE FACTS (continued)

FACT: A trauma response is an indication of an unmet need for safety, agency, dignity or connection.

FACT: Trauma responses vary widely and can look very different from one person to another, although they may have experienced a similar traumatic experience

FACT: Mandatory reporting laws vary from state to state, and sometimes county to county. It's important to know your specific mandatory reporting laws.

COMMON SCENARIO & SAMPLE RESPONSE

You're working with a group of teens, brainstorming the reasons people might have sex, and one participant offers "sexual assault" as a reason. Another participant bursts into tears.

Here's an example of how you could respond using the Circles of Care Model:

- Care for yourself:
 - Take a deep breath to ground yourself.
- Care for the participant:
 - "I can see this is really upsetting for you and that's a normal response. Do you want to grab a tissue or talk to the guidance counselor?"
 - After class check in on the learner to see how you can best support them.
- Care for the group:
 - "Let's take a collective breath together and remember our group agreements about confidentiality and respect. You're right - some teens have experienced non-consensual sex, and that's never okay. It's normal that this is bringing up feelings in the group – everyone should have agency and be able to decide what they do and don't want to happen. Not everyone has had the opportunity to choose if they wanted to have sex. It is unacceptable to force someone to have sex without their consent, and it's never the fault of the person who was assaulted."
- Care for the agenda:
 - "Today we are here to do a session about birth control. It's important everyone gets this information before our next topic, so I'm going to steer us back to our topic. But I want you all to know that I am always happy to chat afterwards and share additional resources. Will that work for us?"

Language reframe examples

- <https://www.etr.org/ebi/assets/File/Supporting-a-trauma-informed-approach.pdf>
- <https://traumainformedoregon.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Guide-toTrauma-Informed-Sex-Education.pdf>

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