

The School Counselor and Trauma-Informed Practice

(Adopted, 2016)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

School counselors understand the impact adverse childhood experiences have on students' academic achievement and social/emotional development. School counselors strive to identify, support and promote the success of students who have experienced trauma through the implementation of a data-informed school counseling program.

The Rationale

Forty-six million children witness violence, crime, physical and psychological abuse every year in the United States (Listenbee et al., 2012). Research has shown trauma significantly increases the risk of mental health problems, difficulties with social relationships and behavior, physical illness and poor school performance (Gerrity & Folcarelli, 2008). Student academic performance can be compromised by lack of attention, focus, processing new material and an increase in absenteeism, all of which can result from trauma. Establishing a supportive, positive school environment decreases these effects (Doll, 2010). Positive school environments have been linked to increased academic achievement and improved social/emotional coping skills, such as reducing bullying, harassment and excessive disciplinary problems. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration describes four characteristics of a trauma-informed program or system:

- realizes the impact of trauma and understands the potential for recovery
- recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in system members
- responds by integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures and practices
- actively resists re-traumatization

The School Counselor's Role

School counselors can be key players in promoting a trauma-sensitive environment at their schools. They are in a unique position to identify students affected by traumatic events and can provide the support and resources these students need. Certified school counselors implementing a data-informed school counseling program addressing academic, career and social/emotional development can have a positive impact at all levels of education. In an effort to promote student's physical, emotional and mental health and to create conditions allowing students to thrive and succeed, school counselors:

- recognize the signs of trauma in students
- understand traumas need not predict individual failure if sufficient focus on resilience and strengths is present
- avoid practices that may re-traumatize students
- create connected communities and positive school climates that are trauma-sensitive to keep students healthy and in school and involved in positive social networks
- implement effective academic and behavioral practices, such as positive behavioral interventions and supports and social and emotional learning
- promote safe, stable and nurturing relationships. Research shows this is critical in helping students succeed even in the face of deprivation and adversity (The Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act of 2015).
- provide community resource information to students and families dealing with trauma
- educate staff on the effects of trauma and how to refer students to the school counselor
- collaborate with community resources to provide support for students
- promote a trauma-sensitive framework for policies, procedures and behaviors to entire staff
- recognize the role technology can play in magnifying trauma incidents for students

Summary

A trauma-sensitive school is one in which all students feel safe, welcomed and supported (Cole, Eisner, Gregory, & Ristuccia, 2013). School counselors, collaborating with school staff and community partners, can help transform the school into a safe, supportive, trauma-sensitive learning environment for all students. School counselors advocate for policies and procedures focused on the trauma-sensitive framework and the establishment of a safe school climate for all students.

References

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