

The School Counselor and Trauma-Informed Practice

(Adopted 2016; Revised 2022)

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.

The Rationale

Schools are increasingly recognizing the lasting negative impacts on children exposed to traumatic events (Davis, et al., 2022). Exposure to trauma by children, either as direct victims or as a witness, can lead to social/emotional harm that manifests in negative ways in schools, including low academic performance, maladaptive behavior, lack of attention and focus, and increased absenteeism and dropout rates (Rumsey & Milsom, 2019). Trauma-informed school counseling programs paired with a multitiered system of supports and a preventative focus can improve student outcomes. (Davis, et al., 2022; Martinez et al., 2020; and Rumsey & Milsom, 2019). The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2014) 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 provide the support and resources these students need. 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
- increase and maintain knowledge of current best practices to avoid re-traumatizing students
- create connected communities and positive school climates that are trauma-sensitive to keep students healthy, in school and involved in positive social networks
- support the implementation of effective academic and behavioral practices, such as positive behavioral interventions and supports, restorative approaches to discipline and social/emotional learning
- promote safe, stable and nurturing relationships.
- 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 et al., 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.

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