Using the Nurtured Heart Approach® as a Trauma-Informed Practice in Schools

Christine Abrahams, Ed.D., LPC, LMHC, NCC, ACS
Home Education School Counselor, Lee County
Fort Myers, Florida
OBJECTIVES

- Explain the signs of trauma
- Explain why conventional methods of managing children of trauma often fail despite the best of intentions
- Shift a challenging child to using his or her intensity in successful ways, even if the child is diagnosed with ADHD, ODD or exhibits other difficult behavior.
- Apply the core methodologies of the Nurtured Heart Approach to build Inner Wealth™ in all children and create a richer and safer school environment.
WHAT IS TRAUMA?

• Trauma is the response to a deeply distressing or disturbing event that overwhelms an individual’s ability to cope, causes feelings of helplessness, diminishes their sense of self and their ability to feel a full range of emotions and experiences.

• Some examples:
  • Experiencing violence, physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect
  • Witnessing violence in the home or community
  • Having a family member attempt or die by suicide
HOW DOES TRAUMA MANIFEST IN CHILDREN?

• ADHD symptoms
• Need for control and safety
• Disruptive and confrontational behavior
• Power struggles with teachers
• Depression
• Withdrawal
• Lack of self-esteem
• Desire for deep connection but fearful of it
HOW ARE THESE BEHAVIORS INTERPRETED BY EDUCATORS?

• Student:
  • Is choosing to “act out” to get out of class
  • Has ODD or ADHD
  • Wants negative attention
  • Is being manipulative
  • Is being disrespectful on purpose
  • Doesn’t want to learn
HOW EDUCATORS RESPOND?

• Punishment
  • Removal from class
  • Detention
  • Suspension

• Evaluate student for special education
REFRAMING NEGATIVE BEHAVIORS

• Instead of lazy, lacking skills
• Instead of choosing to act out, trying to connect
• Instead of ODD/ADHD, student’s trauma was triggered
HOW SHOULD EDUCATORS RESPOND IN A TRAUMA-INFORMED WAY?

• Create opportunities for connection
• Make the classroom a safe space
• Build confidence in the child
• Approach the student from a place of curiosity about the behavior
NEUROPATHWAYS AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

NHA takes advantage of the optimal learning brain state by tapping into neuropathways that are related to success and feeling good.

- Compliment/energize triggers serotonin – feel good transmitter
- Similar to video game – pleasure/reward pathways
- Recognition does the same thing – serenity, peace, happiness, open to learning.
- Helpful in creating connection and a safe space for children
WHAT IS THE NHA?

• The 3 Stands™
  1. Absolutely No!
  2. Absolutely Yes!
  3. Absolutely Clear!
CHOOSING MORE ENERGY

• Students of trauma want deep connection but are afraid of it.
• “Acting out” or “Pressing our buttons” could be the only way they know how to connect
• Adults respond by becoming emotionally activated
• Students expect anger which reinforces their poor sense of self
STAND 1
I REFUSE TO ENERGIZE NEGATIVITY. I WILL NOT REWARD NEGATIVITY WITH MY ENERGY, CONNECTION, OR RELATIONSHIP.

• Changes can’t begin without the child perceiving that the old pattern of response—connection, energy and relationship for negativity – is no longer available
• Adults need to be intentional about watching where their energy is flowing
• Stand 1 must be applied to the adult’s self-talk as well
STAND 2
I RELENTLESSLY CREATE AND ENERGIZE POSITIVITY AND SUCCESS. I ENERGIZE AND NURTURE FIRSTHAND EXPERIENCES OF SUCCESS

• Children need to be recognized for what they are doing right
• Stronger, more specific positives need to be used to articulate what they are doing right in the moment
  • Positives need to navigate around defenses
  • Positives need to be felt and digested
  • Positives help build a child’s inner wealth
CHOOSING WHAT NOT TO ENERGIZE
VIDEO GAME THEORY

• Kids who cannot focus on homework can play a video game with mastery and accomplishment
• In the video game, life truly makes sense & follows logic that is very different than at home and school
• Video games compel kids to successfulness
VIDEO GAMES – CLEAR AND PREDICTABLE

• Incentives are strong and predictable.
• Confronts a child with their success – score, bells and whistles.
• Rules are clear and predictable.
• Delivers a consequence – always.
• In a moment, the child is back in the game and is inspired not to break the rules again.
ENERGIZING SUCCESS
NHA RECOGNITIONS

• What do you see?
• What is happening?
• What is not happening?
• What does it say about who they are as a person growing into their greatness?
STAND 3: ABSOLUTELY CLEAR
I SET AND ENFORCE CLEAR LIMITS AND CLEAR CONSEQUENCES IN AN UN-ENERGIZED WAY. I WILL ALWAYS PROVIDE A TRUE CONSEQUENCE.

• The video game delivers clarity, always plays hard ball with the rules and always delivers the consequence each and every time – consistency and reliability.

• Here are the rules and here’s what happens when you choose to break a rule
PERFECTION IS NOT REQUIRED

• Broken rules simply result in consequences that now lead to getting back on track.
• Always doable
• No big deal
YOU AND RESETS

- Think of a moment when you were really escalated…
- What helps you to reset yourself?
- What doesn’t help you reset?
- You can model your reset strategies for students
RESETS: THE KEY TO CONSEQUENCES

- Adult uses a key word like “Reset” or “Pause.”
- Adult unplugs his energy from the child and turns away.
- In moments, the adult turns back and acknowledges child for achieving their consequence.
- Adult now focuses on success—acknowledges rules not broken. (“Now, you are not swearing at me…”)
THE DANCE OF THE RESET
AN EXAMPLE OF HOW NHA BUILDS INNER WEALTH IN CHILDREN OF TRAUMA
HOW CAN COUNSELORS USE THE NURTURED HEART APPROACH?

• When meeting with students, look for and point out their greatness.
• Continually use the approach with your students who have experienced trauma.
• In groups with students of trauma, end every session with an energizing circle.
• In groups with students of trauma, teach them the 3 Stands and have them practice.
QUESTIONS?