Trauma-Informed Education
Attention and Learning

Inattentiveness and Hypervigilance in Students

Students who have experienced trauma may...
❖ Constantly look for and attend to perceived threats
❖ Rely on body language more than words, hence missing content

Ways to Create a Sense of Safety and Acceptance:

• Safety Through Physical Environment
  Harsh, rigid, and cluttered environments can overwhelm students and heighten hypervigilance. To prevent this, staff can:
  o Give students multiple options for seating
  o Soften lighting with lamps or scarves
  o Declutter classrooms

• Safety Through Voice, Facial Expression, and Movement
  For students who rely on body language, a harsh tone or stern face can register as a threat.
  o Staff should convey warmth, safety, and unconditional positive regard in their face and voice
  o Front office and parking lot greeters should be welcoming and give a warm first impression
  o To take care of others, staff must first take care of themselves. Staff should be supported by both school and district administration to practice wellness and discuss issues

• Safety Through Inclusion
  Negative, little, or no representation of a student’s identity in a classroom can cause a sense of shame or vulnerability or be perceived as a threat. Some ways staff can create a sense of safety and acceptance include:
  o Pronouncing names correctly, even if they have to ask to hear it multiple times
  o Study diverse content, such as books and examples used in class
    ▪ “Divya has $8 and each mango is $2. How many can she buy?”
  o Adding fields to make inclusive forms
    ▪ Multiple gender options
    ▪ Preferred names/pronunciation
    ▪ Preferred pronouns

Sequential Processing

Students who have experienced trauma may have a hard time...
❖ Following long lists
❖ Planning, hoping, and anticipating
❖ Managing time

Ways to Enhance Focus:

• Breaking Things Down
  o Break tasks down and illustrate
  o Check for understanding, teach-back
  o Collaborative work
  o Creative group forming