Trauma-Informed Education

The Assumption of Danger

Common triggers for students who have experienced developmental trauma:

- Perception of a lack of power
- Unexpected change/transitions
- Feeling shame
- Feeling vulnerable or frightened
- Feeling threatened or attacked
- Intimacy or positive attention

Ways to Create a Sense of Safety:

- **Describe rather than evaluate**
  
  Positive attention can sometimes feel threatening or disingenuous to students. Describe what the student has done that is good and let them evaluate themselves. This can give a student a sense of power in a situation and allow them to understand what they can do to succeed again. Describing is also a best practice for promoting a growth mindset, which is part of building resilience.

- **Respect students’ privacy and dignity**
  
  To prevent feelings such as shame, or a sense of being threatened or attacked, correct behaviors in a way that does not humiliate the student. Do not bring attention to the correction. This can look like silently putting a hand on the student’s desk to show only them that you are noticing their behavior or quietly discussing the behavior with a student while the rest of the class is engaged with something. Correcting away from the attention of others is less likely to cause the student to escalate.

  Discipline is about teaching, not punishment. You can help students understand the effects of their choices on themselves and others without creating the feeling within them that they are bad.

- **Transitions**
  
  Give students ample warning of transitions before they happen. Announce the transition 10, 5, and 1 minute beforehand to prevent surprises and give students a chance to self-regulate if they have a strong reaction to the next activity.

  Teach behavioral expectations for the new activity before the transition. For example, before going into the hallway, discuss which voice level is appropriate, perhaps using a chart. This explanation gives students a template on how to behave and gives them the power to confidently do what is expected of them.