Trauma and the pandemic: Advocacy to help students re-engage in learning

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Many children have stressful experiences

More common than we imagine

- Natural disasters (earthquakes, hurricanes--Katrina, Haiti and Puerto Rico)
- Exposure to community violence
- Violence in the home or substance abuse in the home
- Being chronically bullied
- Experiencing periods of homelessness and serial foster care placements
- Fleeing war-torn countries
- Undergoing invasive medical procedures
- Living with a parent who has seen recent combat
Many students are having stressful experiences.

The pandemic?
Many students are having stressful experiences.

**Disconnection from School**

- Relationships with teachers
- Grief over lost and ill loved ones
- Food, job, housing insecurity
- Frustration with online learning
- Loss predictability
- Loss of structure
- Connections to friends
- Caring for siblings while trying to do homework
- Working jobs and no time to study
What is trauma?

Trauma is not an event itself, but rather a response to a stressful experience in which a person’s ability to cope is dramatically undermined.
Traumatic childhood experiences and the brain.

If youth stay in this survival mode, it is very hard to use their “learning” brain.

This can cause a flight, fight or freeze response: often called our “survival mode”

Brain functioning can be influenced by the environment

Traumatic experiences can arouse the brain’s limbic system the area that controls emotions.
Trauma can impact learning, behavior, and relationships at school.
Overcoming adversity

Safety

Connection to school

Relationships

Self-regulation

Academic and non academic success

Physical health and mental health

Research tells us these core values are critical for ALL students, including those who have been traumatized.
Building Trusted Connections
What is safe to share? Balancing Confidentiality Needs

Examples of questions:

- Who is the main point person in family for communicating with school? Would you like to name a back up person? Can student play a role in communicating with school? How? (e.g. Do they have their own cell phone? Does school have permission to use the student’s cell?)

- Who in the school do you and/or your student already have a strong relationship with?

- What time of day is most convenient to communicate with the school?

- Describe your family’s access to technology, and include if you are comfortable, any needs that are arising, such as devices, software, internet access, speed, etc. Does each student in the home have their own device?

- What is the most comfortable language for caregivers/adults to use in communicating with the school, and what is the most comfortable language for the student?

- Are there any family members who have disabilities that the family wants the school to know about?

- What is the caregiver’s preference for contacting the school? What is the caregiver’s preference for receiving communications from the school? Written? Verbal? Email? Phone? Zoom? Text? What is the student’s preference?

- How frequently would the family like to communicate with the teacher? How frequently would the family prefer to receive communications about school-wide matters?

- Are there any concerns related to your student’s remote learning plan?
Building trusted connections -
What feels comfortable to share?

Positive Relationships—adults and peers

Self-regulation

Academic and non academic success

Physical health and mental health
Discussion: things parents liked

What has worked?

• Alternate advisory
• Making schedule with parent that included getting up, brushing teeth, dressing and “going” to school
• Inviting families to be part of morning meetings and closing
• Bi-lingual paras present to translate for parents.
• Teacher adapted daily student schedules and with parents to include the child’s activities at home, like time to get out of bed, brush teeth, eat breakfast, get dressed, etc.
• A high school providing meetings three times a day for so parents/students can choose the time that works best for them to address questions as they arise.

What else?
Resources

https://www.massadvocates.org/tlpi