



# Classroom Triage for Crisis Situations

# Student Profile

- YP who refuses to work, who causes problems for their peers, physically and verbally aggressive and very disrespectful

- Is this YP distressed or deliberately defiant?

# How we respond

- Raising our voices
- Demanding eye contact
- Requesting reasons and apologies
- Removal from activity, class or school
- Isolate them, give them detention

- These actions reinforce their beliefs that they are unwanted, that they will always be rejected and that people are cruel and uncaring
- Time in/ not time out

- When behaviour management practices are implemented in this context they are most likely to fail. Without significant work on relationships, rewards will be seen as manipulation and punishments as cruel. Withdrawal from class, detention, suspension or expulsion can reinforce the maladaptive and negative world views of YP

- Traumatized YP do not respond to the standard and traditional ways schools try to manage their behaviour.

# Traumatized children

- Cannot remove their “trauma glasses” as they go between home and school
- Their mission is to avoid perceived danger and pain



# Trauma Impacted Youth Can have difficulty with

- Managing “big” emotions
- Chronic irritability/anxiety that interferes with problem solving
- Empathy
- Expressing concerns/needs in words
- Taking into account the wider context of a situation
- Appreciating how one’s behaviour impacts other people
- Working in groups/connecting with others

# Poor attachment

- Anxious
- Fearful
- Unsafe
- Unprotected
- Unsupported
- Alone
- Trouble with relationships
- Difficulty with self-regulation

- Becomes stressed very quickly
- Impulsive
- Aggressive
- Poor self-worth

# Trauma Triggers

- Activate the “survival brain,” causing YP to react as though a previous traumatic event is happening Common Triggers include:
- Unpredictability (e.g. a fire drill)
- Sensory overload
- Feeling vulnerable or frustrated

Confrontation Trauma and Resilience: An Adolescent Provider Toolkit; Adolescent Health Working Group 2011

# Key to working with traumatised children

- Relationships
- Teachers need to be available, wise, strong, kind and resilient

# A trauma informed approach

- Shifts from a model that asks, “What is wrong with you?” to one that asks, “What happened to you?”

# Crisis management

- Proactive
- Reactive
- Reparative

# Proactive/Planning for challenging incidents

- Observation to recognise signs of arousal- rabbit in headlights look, turn red and clench fists, breathe more rapidly, begin moving (body getting ready to run or react, bursting into tears)
- Look for anxiety, triggers
- Provide a safe place to retreat to



# No surprises

- Create calm predictable transitions

# Positive reinforcement not criticism

- Nurture

# Reactive

- Have a safety plan for each YP
- Plan should document what is happening physiologically to YP and what types of behaviour to expect
- Plan should also articulate the responsibilities of particular adults

# Reactive

- During dysregulation YP's brain stem will be doing most of the work fight or flight
- Student has virtually no conscious control and will be unable to engage in logical/rational discussion.
- Expect bad language and physical outbursts
- Encourage YP to go to safe place and give them time to calm
- Leave YP alone under watchful eyes or allow only those who have established rapport with YP engage at this time.

# Reactive

- Focus is on physiological repair
- Body needs time to regulate, the YP has had severely disorganised brain activity/cocktail of hormones raging through system.

# Reparative

- Inclusive teaching
- Rebuilding and repair of relationships
- Punitive /Exclusive actions could further exacerbate the relational and emotional concerns for student
- Opportunity for learning rather than opportunity for punishment

# Reparative

- Staff need to remain calm. You are the means through which YP will co-regulate ( similar to how a toddler needs a parent to help them calm down after a severe tantrum)
- Use a quiet and calm voice
- Caring look on your face
- Remember what the student has been through in their lives

# Reparative

- Consequences – make them fitting for the level of aggression
- Encourage YP to reflect on event and the consequences that have arisen



# Reparative

- Assist the YP to understand what happened.
- Comment on YP's strong feelings and how difficult such events are
- Ask the YP to reflect on what was happening for them before and after
- Welcome YP back

# References

- *Calmer Classrooms*  
A guide to working with traumatised children  
Child Safety Commissioner 2007
- Howard, Judith A Dr; *Distressed or Deliberately Defiant?*  
Managing challenging student behaviour due to trauma and disorganised attachment  
Australian Academic Press 2013
- Berry Street Childhood Institute <http://www.childhoodinstitute.org.au/>
- Bruce Perry [childtrauma.org/](http://childtrauma.org/)