



Trauma and Resilience-Informed Distance Learning Planning

Suggestions for Administrators & Coaches working with Teachers on Distance Learning

1. Start with Teacher Wellness First

We are in unprecedented times, and teachers are being asked to learn an entirely new way of teaching, while also ensuring the well-being of their students as they continue to learn and grow. **Being trauma- and resilience-informed in the education sector means starting with the adults, by paying attention to and supporting teacher wellness.** The trauma and stress that everyone is experiencing impacts the brain, moving it from the “thinking brain” to the “survival brain” and affecting higher order functions, like organization, memory, and planning. It is different for every educator, but they are all affected in their own way. It’s important to ask each educator how they are and what they need, not just for lesson planning but for their own wellness. As administrators and coaches, we must hold ongoing space for teacher questions and requests – related to both teaching plans and overall support needs - and support teachers to be reflective about their own emotional and mental state. We need to validate, express compassion and be supportive.

Modify Expectations

A major area of support for educators is around expectations. As the Compassion Resilience Toolkit (link below) says, *“Our worlds have been turned upside down by the closures and social distancing that are necessary to prevent the spread of COVID-19. During this unusual time in our lives, when so much has changed, our expectations for ourselves and our families need to adjust too.”* **A trauma lens includes giving educators permission to modify expectations – for themselves, their students and families.** It also means that people in leadership need to adjust their expectations. Distance learning through the end of the year will not be education as usual since everything is online. This is new for everyone and we are ALL figuring it out as we go. It is important to recognize this change, remind ourselves about it and adjust expectations without blame. **New expectations for teachers and students should take into account access to technology, comfort with technology, level of support (from administration, co-teachers, parents), distractions and other demands in the home and previous exposure to trauma, as well as current situations that may make this unpredictable situation even harder for many.** Here are some questions to consider:

- For leadership:
What is realistic and possible for teachers to do given the current situation? There are major shifts happening away from compliance and towards engagement and relationships, e.g. districts have gone to pass/fail for this semester, the UC/CSU system will not require SATs for admission, instructional minutes have not been mandated. What can you take off teachers’ plates that would allow them to engage students in creative ways?
- For teachers:
What is realistic and possible for your students? For their families? If you shift priorities from new content to keeping them engaged in learning and connected to their school



community, what does that do to your lessons? Now would be a great time to have students generate topics to explore, if possible.

What are realistic expectations for yourself? Given whatever demands you are juggling (supporting your own children, caring for family, learning new technology and strategies, managing your own emotions), what can you achieve and sustain for the next two months? Be compassionate with yourself and set healthy boundaries.

Resources:

- Teaching through a Pandemic - <https://www.edutopia.org/article/teaching-through-pandemic-mindset-moment>
- Resource: Compassion Resilience Toolkit has COVID 19 specific short videos and 1-page handouts on Expectations and Boundaries: <https://compassionresiliencetoolkit.org/staying-resilient-during-covid-19/>

Self-Care Resources for Educators:

- National Child Traumatic Stress Network “Taking Care of Yourself” ideas for adults: https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/factsheet/taking_care_of_yourself.pdf
- Resource for calming exercises based on how you are feeling: <https://www.r4r.support/>
- Stress Management for Educators from Greater Good in Education and *Be Kinder to Yourself* video: <https://ggie.berkeley.edu/collection/stress-management-for-educators/>
https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/video/item/how_to_be_kinder_to_yourself
- Compassion Resilience Toolkit videos/handouts on Stress Awareness, and Relationships: <https://compassionresiliencetoolkit.org/staying-resilient-during-covid-19/>
- Self-Care for Educators Planning Worksheet: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1n_xmbj20CoJeuT-_d_f5d00INbaafDp7kIO3AeKN9A/edit

2. Projects that Build Resilience

Resilience is something we all have in us, and that helps us to restore a sense of hope and possibility. Research shows that there are many factors that help us build and access our resilience. Creating projects or assignments that connect students to the resilience factors can be very helpful at this time.

Projects that promote connection to animals or nature

- Many zoos and aquariums have live feeds: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/coronavirus-zoos-aquariums-live-stream-animals-isolation-quarantine/>

Projects that tap into imagination and creativity



- Art for Kids Hub on YouTube: Learn how to draw, paint, fold and sculpt things to bring out your creativity: <https://www.artforkidshub.com/>

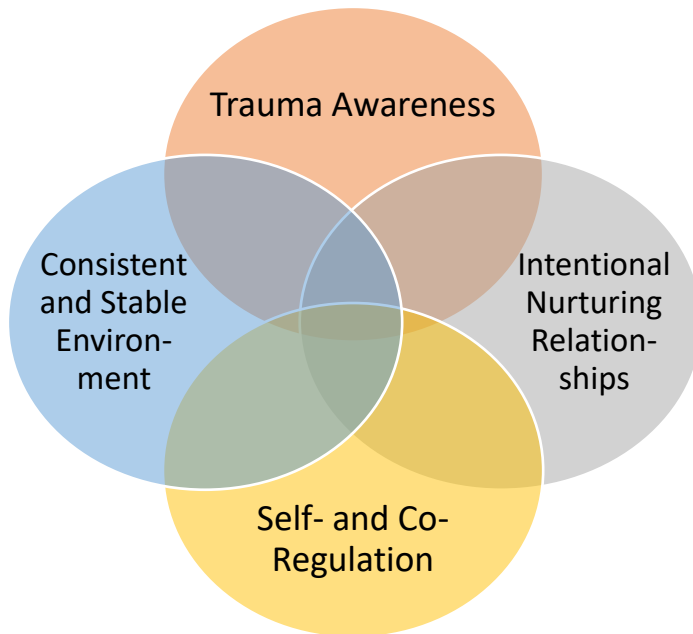
Projects that foster reflection on greater meaning in the pandemic, something bigger than oneself, nurturing relationships in their lives

- Teaching Tolerance ideas on fostering hope - <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/a-trauma-informed-approach-to-teaching-through-coronavirus>

Projects that connect to other people – interviews, collective movement and music like a virtual drum circle, collaborative work that is manageable, helping others

- Greater Good in Education webpage with activities that can be adapted to online: <https://ggie.berkeley.edu/collection/helping-students-feel-connected-to-each-other/>

Trauma and Resilience Informed: Core Practice Areas



1. Trauma Awareness

The current situation is destabilizing, for everyone, and especially for students and families that have been exposed to trauma in the past. **Stress and trauma affect our brain and physiology, shutting down or minimizing the functions of the pre-frontal cortex (critical thinking, organization and planning, language, etc.).** Students (and adults) may experience physical symptoms (headaches, stomachaches), withdrawal from peers and loved ones, forgetfulness about new information, struggles with



organization and concentration, loss of interest or apathy, agitation or decrease in energy, and concerns about stigma and injustices.

In addition to being aware of the impact of stress and trauma, it is helpful to be conscientious of how different students' home situations and experience may be. Things to keep in mind when planning distance learning include the challenges students may face in their physical environments (e.g. no quiet spaces), levels of support at home, and consistent access to internet and computers. Remember that students may be dealing with many different dynamics while trying to maintain their learning, and they may be embarrassed to share why they can't complete assignments or can't always participate in online classes.

Another important part of being trauma-aware is providing guidance for teachers about what to do if/when a mental health crisis comes up with students. **If a student reaches out with a mental health concern, be sure teachers have a clear process for how to respond.**

2. Intentional, Nurturing Relationships

Healthy relationships with other people can mitigate and repair the effects of trauma. Relationships work to restore sense of safety, attachment, and can help rewire the brain to lower stress hormones and, therefore, improve learning and motivation. During this time, relationships and well-being can take priority over assignments and behavioral compliance. **Suggestions and resources for building and maintaining relationships with distance learning:**

- A Teaching Tolerance article has great suggestions about maintaining relationships while doing distance learning: *"In work with students right now, educators should let relationships be the focus. It is important to ensure students have structure and to hold high expectations. But students will fare best if they know their teachers care about their well-being just as much as their behavior and assignment compliance."*
<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/a-trauma-informed-approach-to-teaching-through-coronavirus>
- Creating rituals for online classrooms is another way to strengthen connection and provide some stability. Adapt classroom rituals to the online platform, such as community circles and opening and closing prompts for individual check-ins with students.
 - Greet students by name as they enter the online classroom and create a touch-free or virtual routine (similar to a handshake, a hug or a high five)
 - Online classroom community-building circle with each student sharing their own talking piece
 - Opening prompts such as: something that was hard today and something that was positive; share a rose, thorn, and bud from the week; something you have learned about yourself during the quarantine; best thing you saw on a screen this week.
 - Virtual drumming circle or other music or movement related activity.
<https://www.artistshelpingchildren.org/make-drums-crafts.html>
 - Use an optimistic closure.



- This is a nice video of students talking about “*sending kind thoughts*” to loved ones and even people you don’t get along with:
https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/video/item/train_your_brain_to_be_kinder

3. Self-Regulation and Co-Regulation

Research shows that we learn how to self-regulate our emotions first by learning through co-regulation with others. Students can learn self-regulation from activities, and they can also be affected by the teacher’s emotional state and calming strategies, such as breathing, naming emotions, naming difficult moments or dynamics. **Teachers can help students learn/improve how to regulate their own emotions, and how to read and respond to those around them, which is especially helpful at this time.**

- SEL activities, especially self-management focused: <https://casel.org/covid-resources/>
- Physical activity
 - Students can share their favorite TikTok videos, or other dance videos for teachers to use for movement breaks
 - [GoNoodle.com](https://www.gonoodle.com/) has videos with lots of activities for motor skills, SEL and mindfulness, and academic areas, mostly movement oriented. Registration is free.
 - Exercises that involve cross-lateral movements (e.g. touch one hand or elbow to the opposite knee or foot, march in place and tap hand to opposite knee, draw the hand from the top of shoulder to opposite hip like tracing a sash) promote balanced connections between both sides of the brain, which enhances concentration, focus, and a sense of well-being.
- Mindfulness and breathing – do these activities with the students and share resources for their own use
 - [Smiling Mind App](#) is a free app that has various guided meditation options which can help eliminate your negative thoughts and focus on positivity. This app is evidence-based and has various curricula that can be used in classrooms. There is a special section related to mindfulness during COVID-19 called *Thrive Inside*.
 - Practice guided meditation or mindfulness with the students, e.g. “Sit in a comfortable position with your feet on the floor. Close your eyes if you would like, or look at something that is not distracting, like the floor, the wall, your hands. Picture a place that makes you feel calm. Focus on taking deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth. In for 4 seconds: 1-2-3-4, and out for four seconds: 1-2-3-4. Repeat this for 2 or 3 minutes.”

4. Consistent and Stable Environments

Consistency and stability create safety, which is important for all of us, and especially for those who have been exposed to trauma. **Given that the stability of the school environment and routine is gone, it’s vital to try and provide some structure in the virtual environment, for both teachers and students.** In addition to the creation of rituals already discussed, here are a few ideas for the virtual classroom:



**Alameda County Health Care Services Agency
Public Health Department**

Colleen Chawla, Director
Kimi Watkins-Tartt, Director
Erica Pan, MD, Interim Health Officer

- Be aware that situations are different and try to avoid telling parents what is the “ideal” or “best” learning environment and what is “wrong.” If possible, check in with students individually about their learning environment at home, e.g. quiet space, interrupted/uninterrupted access to internet, someone to explain or assist with assignments, where in their space they are most comfortable to work, etc.
- Use backgrounds on virtual platforms so no one is self-conscious, and family can move around behind the student. Zoom has some stock photos or students can use their own. You can also conduct class with student video cameras off, but they can still ask questions verbally or in the group chat.
- Get familiar with the host tools for Zoom, Google, MS Teams, etc. so that you can create a safer and calmer environment. There are tools for muting participants, raising hands, allowing/not allowing conversation, waiting rooms to enter the classroom, etc.