

**Good teachers
cost a lot, but
poor teachers
cost a lot more.**



F.O.N.T. Focus on New Teachers

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TRAUMA AND LEARNING

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The numbers are stark: One in four U.S. students will witness or experience a traumatic event before the age of 4, and more than two thirds by age 16. Children cannot close their eyes to a parent's arrest, a forced eviction, abuse, death or divorce. With each traumatic event, the instinctive trigger to "fight or flee" is pulled over and over again.

Over time, a child's developing brain is changed by these traumatic experiences. Areas that govern the retention of memory, the regulation of emotion, and the development of language skills are affected. The result is a brain that has structurally adapted for survival under the most stressful circumstances-but not for success in school.

In fact, kindergartners who have suffered traumatic experiences score below average in reading and math, even when influential factors like income and parental education are factored in, according to a 2015 study published in the journal *Pediatrics*. They are also three times more likely to have problems with paying attention, and two times more likely to show aggression to their classmates and teachers.

Many educators know that no matter how hard they work, or all the different things that they try, there are still some students that they struggle to reach. Now we know the science of why. With a mixture of empathy, flexibility, and brain-based strategies, trauma-informed educators are creating cool, calm classrooms that work for all of their students.

The traumatic events that students experience shape students' brains. The disruptive behavior that teachers often see, and punish is a result of the student trying to self-protect. Their altered brains are screaming, "Fight! Flee! Freeze!" It can seem as if these students are shutting down, but their brains are telling them that they need to be safe. When the situation is charged, it cannot be business as usual. The teacher must think, "How can I bring this down and get back to learning?"

These students cannot learn until their fears are calmed and their attention is refocused. A brief break for a student that is about to lose control can be helpful. In Brockton, Massachusetts at the Brookfield School, the "Mindful Moment Room" helps to accomplish this. Students can step inside and listen to audio of chirping crickets, see fairy lights and sit in a comfy chair. Students cannot simply wander in. The student communicates to the teacher that they need a break or the guidance counselor can recommend a student to the room. Some students just need a respite from the visual and auditory assault that is a classroom atmosphere.

Preventative work at Brookfield School has really helped students calm down during stressful situations. Casey O'Brien, a school adjustment counselor, meets with small groups weekly to practice stretching and breathing exercises. Students learn to self-regulate, calm down and refocus their minds.

At the Barrett Russell School in Brockton, Massachusetts, there is a small tent in a kindergarten classroom where students can curl up on a pillow or run their fingers through sand. Some classrooms have a trampoline where students can take an active break from classroom activity.

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DID YOU KNOW?

- NYSUT has a list of benefits it offers to teachers
- There are legal packages and discounts on different types of insurances
- NYSUT also offers help with mental health issues
- Check out their website for more information

www.NYSUT.org



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*"In education, we are striving not to teach
youth to make a living, but to make a life."
W. A. White*

We're on the web:
[http://
www.farmingdaleteachers.org](http://www.farmingdaleteachers.org)

Trauma cont.

Keeping in mind that brains of some traumatized students are ill-adapted for language development or memory retention, visual cues can be helpful. The day's events and routines are on a calendar well in advance and are posted in succession by simple pictures. Behavioral expectations are also illustrated.

Teaching strategies can include asking students to repeat instructions, use more written instruction or visual prompts for multi-step directions. This can be done with something as simple as a Post-it note on a desk.

Flexibility is key. Give the students the materials and conditions they need to help them to be successful. Trauma-informed education is not about using a specified curriculum, but about giving students the support they need to access the regular curriculum.

The Illinois Educators' Association has partnered with NEA to provide teachers with the professional development they need to be able to teach, and the services students need to be ready to learn. The topic of traumatized students in the classroom has resonated with teachers because they see it everyday, and the professional development helps them to be better teachers to these students.

Excerpt from *NEA Today*, Winter 2017

Websites for Teachers

Science: nsta.org The National Science Teachers Association site is a goldmine for classroom teachers who may not feel comfortable teaching science. There are lots of articles and the latest science stories and news to be found here.

History: free.ed.gov This site acts as a clearinghouse for all the educational materials developed by government organizations. You can find primary sources, videos and photos for almost any topic and it's all free.

Young readers: scholastic.com/stacks At The Stacks, students can post book reviews, get reading recommendations, play games based on the latest series, watch "Meet the Author" videos and more.

Writing: educationnorthwest.org/traits There is an overview of the 6 + 1 model, with research to support the program, lesson plans, writing prompts and rubrics. You can find writing samples to practice scoring and see how other teachers scored the same piece.

Math games: nlvm.usu.edu At the National Library of Virtual Manipulatives, you will find activities for every area of math for every grade level.

Best of Facebook: facebook.com/scholasticteachers This could be a useful page as you will find free printables, lesson plans, craft ideas, giveaways, and news. Just "Like" the page. You can also participate in the "Ten O'Clock Teacher Question" discussion, posted and answered by teachers like you.

Linda McCoskey

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