



## Counseling & Wellness Services Trauma-Informed Teaching



Trauma-informed teaching considers how trauma influences learning and behavior. Trauma can have a wide range of characteristics with variations in how individuals may be impacted. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration or SAMHSA defines individual trauma as “..resulting from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.”

It is important to note, that trauma is individually defined. What is traumatic for one person may not be traumatic for another. *Do not assume that because you experienced a similar event or circumstance and didn’t find it traumatic that the person with whom you are interacting will have a similar reaction.* The effects and impact of trauma may be long lasting and be experienced inconsistently. A seemingly forgotten trauma can rise to the surface unexpectedly based on some triggering event.

Some examples of traumatic events or circumstances may include but are not limited to:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Death of someone close
- Military combat
- Homelessness
- Oppression
- Experiencing or witnessing violence or assault
- Neglect or abandonment
- Serious illness, injury, or accident
- Experiencing or witnessing a natural disaster
- Food insecurity

Trauma may impact a person’s ability to engage in relationships, cognitive functioning, emotional lability, physical and emotional energy and stress tolerance.

To apply trauma informed approaches to your teaching consider the following:

- Create Consistency and Routine with Room for Flexibility. It is important that your syllabus accurately depicts the behavioral expectations for your students.
  - Is participation expected and will it be graded?
  - List all assignments and due dates. If possible, build in flexibility on assignment due dates.
  - At the start of each class present the learning outcomes for that class.
  - As often as possible, create a general pattern for how each class begins and ends. If you know that the class pattern will change, introduce this to students.
- Provide a list of typical classroom activities that students will engage in. If a new classroom activity is to be used, introduce it prior to the class or minimally at the start of the class.

It is important to maintain sensitivity to possible “triggering” events or exchanges that can occur during class. The goal is not to anticipate or protect students from difficult material, the goal is to create an environment where risks are limited. Some ways to limit risks to students include:

- Give students advance warning of potentially difficult topics to be discussed or considered in class.
- Provide students with multiple options for assignment topics so that students have a higher likelihood of avoiding triggering subjects.

- Create a course policy that clearly states that it is acceptable for students to temporarily step out of class to take a break from or avoid trigger content or engage in self-care.
- Remind students of available campus resources.
- Explicitly acknowledge that something has occurred in class that may have a negative impact on students from specific backgrounds or experiences.
- Provide multiple methods for students to share their views and guidance on how to appropriately share their views within the context of the classroom situation.

Remember: **choice** is an important factor in empowering students to experience a sense of control and safety in addressing potentially threatening experiences in the classroom.

Providing information about campus mental health services such as Counseling and Wellness Services as well as other supportive resources such as Student Advocacy and Wellness, Disability Services, and the campus identity centers can serve to further create a safe environment for students to learn.

Showing respect for students is critical.

- Learn and use student's preferred names.
- Listen to them with your full attention.
- When possible include personal information about yourself that connects to a class topic or activity.
- Provide multiple methods for students to reach you.
- If you notice that a student is struggling, reach out to the student and see if there is anything that you can do to provide support and help them to succeed.
- Reframe your thinking about the reasons for a student's behavior. Assume that you do not know what the cause of their behavior is and do not assume negative character traits.

### **Counseling and Wellness Services**

053 Student Union

937-775-3407

[wright.edu/cws](http://wright.edu/cws)

Providing individual, couples and group therapy, crisis intervention, psychological testing and psychiatric service.

Open Monday through Friday from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm

### **Raider Cares Line**

937-775-4567

24-hour crisis telephone service

### **Student Advocacy and Wellness**

051 Student Union

937-775-3749

24-hour support line: 937-260-0167

[wright.edu/studentsupport](http://wright.edu/studentsupport)

Assisting Students in overcoming obstacles to success including: financial management, homelessness, food insecurity, power-based violence, and other situations impacting a student's success.

Open Monday through Friday from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm