



TAM Reflections is published by ESS as a service for educational professionals participating in our Trauma Attuned Model (TAM) Coaching and Consultation professional development. Each Issue highlights an important trauma related topic and provides practical applications for the school environment.

Trauma & Self-Awareness: Increasing Personal Bandwidth

Trauma attuned practices has become a bit of a catch phrase in recent years. While it is wonderful that trauma is finally receiving some recognition, it is imperative that we take the time to fully process and understand the effect trauma can have on others. Specifically, it is of the utmost importance that we focus on the ways in which professional caregivers such as educators and clinicians are impacted.

Prior to the COVID 19 pandemic, it was commonly believed that more than 10 million students in the US experienced trauma due to various adverse events (E.g., abuse, natural disasters, etc.). We can easily expect that number to be much higher now, as most children (and adults) experienced some degree of trauma in response to this world-wide pandemic. Many students will react to traumatic events in emotional and/or behavioral ways that may be disruptive to their lives and resulting in negative consequences. As educators and clinicians, we are exposed to these emotional and/or behavioral responses daily resulting in a greater risk for secondary traumatic stress.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) defines secondary traumatic stress as “the emotional duress that results when an individual hears about (or is exposed to) the firsthand experiences of another. Its symptoms mimic those of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).” Symptoms of secondary traumatic stress may include:

- Re-experiencing personal trauma
- Changes in memory and perception
- Altered sense of self-efficacy
- Depletion of personal resources
- Hypervigilance
- Hopelessness
- Anger and cynicism
- Sleep issues
- Fear
- Chronic Exhaustion
- Physical ailments
- Guilt

When secondary traumatic stress is left untreated, many talented professionals end up leaving their jobs and the field altogether. Organizations that are truly trauma attuned will take steps toward prevention. The best practices for prevention will include a multidimensional approach that involves individuals, leadership, and organizational policy. The three most effective prevention strategies include:

1. Psychoeducation
2. Skills training
3. Supervision/Consultation

While prevention is essential, when secondary traumatic stress is already present, effective interventions such as cognitive behavioral strategies or mindfully based methods may need to be employed. Integrating Mindfully Based methods into routines (such as at the start or end of each class) is a great way to embed intervention into the academic day.

NCTSN recommends the incorporation of the following concepts as being essential in the creation of any trauma attuned system:

- Recognition of secondary trauma on staff
- Recognition that trauma exposure is a job risk
- Understanding that trauma can shape the cultures of a school
- Understanding that a traumatized organization is less likely to be effective
- Development of the ability to translate trauma attuned knowledge into meaningful action, policy, and improvements.

References

Secondary Traumatic Stress: A Fact Sheet for Child-Serving Professionals

https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/secondary_traumatic_stress_child_serving_professionals.pdf

How to Maintain Emotional Health When Working with Trauma

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227968103_How_to_Maintain_Emotional_Health_When_Working_with_Trauma