

# Trauma-Informed Tutoring

If a student has experienced trauma, it can have a significant impact on how they respond to stressful situations. In fact, certain scenarios may trigger a biological fight-or-flight response for a student, which can immediately affect their attitude, interactions, physical demeanor, and more.

Taking a trauma-informed approach is crucial to successfully supporting students during a tutoring session. It's also part of a longer ongoing process that involves learning, sharing, and building strong student relationships. **These tips for trauma-informed tutoring will help get you started.**

## Tip #1:

### Know what kind of behavior to look for.

There is no one-size-fits-all way for students to show a trauma response. However, erring on the side of caution when interacting with students helps to avoid situations in which you assume a student's behavior isn't coming from trauma—and then find out that it is. The following behaviors are some of the most common ways students may respond to trauma. However, this list is not exhaustive; trauma responses are unique and can present in a variety of forms.

#### Common Examples of Trauma Responses:

- Self-isolating from peers
- Intense emotional reaction seemingly disproportionate to the problem
- Lashing out physically
- Strong negative self-talk
- Suddenly shutting down a conversation

## Tip #2:

### Communicate and validate.

The two most important steps you can take are to encourage the student to communicate, then validate their experience. In order to communicate, the student may need the right space—both physical and mental—to process, which will help them share their experience and build resilience.

Once you've found a space for the student to comfortably communicate, use active listening skills to validate their experience. Focus on the emotions they are feeling right now, not the event that caused the trauma in the past. Additionally, don't assume that a student is overreacting or exaggerating; try to center the student's feelings. **A student's story may make you angry or upset, but don't assume the student feels the same way.**

#### Do:

- Utilize the couch or library area as a quiet space to connect.
- Listen quietly but actively.
- Let the student express themselves at their own pace.
- Give the student space by offering to step away for a few minutes.

#### Say:

- "How are you feeling right now?"
- "What do you think could be making you feel like this?"
- "What do you normally do when you're feeling like this?"
- "What do you mean by...?"
- "How can I help you right now?"

## Tip #3:

### Give the student options.

After you talk with the student, let them choose how they'd like to proceed. Even if you're in a classroom setting where choices are limited, come up with a few helpful, realistic options that allow the student to take back some control over the situation.

#### Ask if the student wants to...

- Take a break from the work they were doing.
- Get some water or a snack.
- Draw, read, or write to express their feelings.
- Speak with a trusted teacher or counselor.

## Tip #4:

### Follow up and follow through.

If you are concerned for a student's emotional, physical, or mental wellbeing or safety, communicate the situation to an 826 Boston staff member immediately. Otherwise, just continue to be a trusted resource for the student. Be sensitive to what they shared with you, but don't treat the student as "fragile" in future interactions. By remaining present, non-judgmental, and helping them to process difficult emotions, you are providing very meaningful support. In addition, it's important to make sure that you take any actions you promise the student that you will do, or communicate clearly why you are/were not able to. This helps the student build trust.

#### Inform a student if you need to share what they've disclosed to you:

"Your safety is important to me, and I appreciate that you trusted me with this information. It's my responsibility to make sure an 826 Boston team member knows what's going on."

## Tip #5:

### Care for yourself.

When you're supporting students who have experience trauma, keeping yourself healthy and well is sometimes easier said than done. It's critical that you take time to ensure your own well-being. Try to connect with friends, family, and communities that can offer support and allow you to process your own feelings. Make sure that you're feeding yourself well, getting good rest, and discharging extra energy through a walk or run.

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## Additional Resources:

For further tips on trauma-informed tutoring, check out:

- ["Five Ways to Support Students Affected by Trauma,"](#) UC Berkeley
- ["Responding to Trauma in Your Classroom,"](#) Teaching Tolerance
- ["How to Support Students Dealing with Trauma,"](#) Mindful