

Discussion Guide for Defining Trauma with School Personnel

By Jen Alexander, M. A., NCC, SB-RPT

OPENING

In recent years, the word trauma—along with trauma-sensitive or trauma-informed education—has become more widely used. Often, folks have different ideas about what trauma is. It's important for us to be clear on the definition as we work together to build a trauma-sensitive learning environment.

QUICK-WRITE OR DRAW

Draw, doodle, or write words about what comes to mind when you think of the word trauma. Then share something on your page with a colleague nearby, if you want to.

VIDEO

Now we'll watch a short video of Jen Alexander, a fellow educator, trauma expert, author, and leader in the movement to build trauma-sensitive schools. She'll share her definition of trauma. While you watch, think of examples of trauma that may impact youth and adults in our school community.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Was there anything about Ms. Jen's definition of trauma that surprised you?
2. Do you think everyone experiences trauma? Why or why not?
3. How might trauma affect children, adolescents, or adults differently?
4. Why is important for educators to understand what trauma is, how it influences people at school, and what we as professionals can do to be sensitive to the needs of individuals who are experiencing trauma?

CHART PAPER ROTATIONS

Using the headings below on multiple pieces of chart paper, encourage small groups to start at one piece, discuss their thoughts, and write down contributions. Then have them move to the next paper and do the same thing until they've written ideas on each page.

- What traumas can happen at school?
- What examples of trauma outside of school may be affecting our youth and families?
- Do educators experience trauma? If so, how?
- What does our school community already do that you think is beneficial to people who may be experiencing big stress or trauma?
- What concerns might educators have about diving deeper into trauma-sensitive educational practices?
- What benefits could there be to improving our collective understanding of trauma-sensitive education and how to strengthen these practices within our unique job roles?

CLOSING

Understanding what trauma is and how it may affect youth or adults is only the beginning of what every educator needs to know. Becoming a trauma-sensitive educator will increase your knowledge about trauma and its effects, but that alone isn't enough. You also need to learn the skills that can help you meet the needs of *all* learners in both preventive and responsive ways.