Trauma-Informed Data Guide

Collecting behavior data with sensitivity and awareness

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Understanding Trauma's Impact on Behavior

Trauma can significantly affect how students behave in school. Behaviors that appear defiant or attention-seeking may actually be survival responses rooted in past experiences.

Common trauma responses that may appear as "behavior problems":

- Hypervigilance (constantly scanning for threats)
- Dissociation (appearing "checked out" or unresponsive)
- Fight/flight/freeze responses to perceived threats
- Difficulty with transitions and unexpected changes
- Challenges with trust and adult relationships

Trauma-Informed Data Collection Principles

- [ ] Focus on understanding, not just documenting
- [ ] Consider the "why" behind behaviors
- [ ] Track environmental triggers with extra sensitivity
- [ ] Note potential trauma reminders (anniversaries, sensory triggers)
- [ ] Document strengths and coping strategies, not just problems
- [ ] Maintain confidentiality with heightened care

What to Track Differently

Setting Events to Consider

- Recent family changes or stressors
- Anniversaries of traumatic events
- Sensory triggers (smells, sounds, visual cues)
- Authority figure interactions
- Perceived threats to safety or control
- Unexpected changes in routine

Antecedents Specific to Trauma

- Sudden loud noises or movements
- Physical proximity/touch (even accidental)
- Raised voices or conflict nearby
- Feeling cornered or trapped
- Loss of control or choice
- Reminders of past experiences

Reframing Behavior Through a Trauma Lens

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Traditional View	Trauma-Informed View
Defiant/oppositional	Protecting self from perceived threat
Attention-seeking	Connection-seeking for safety
Manipulative	Using learned survival strategies
Overreacting	Responding to internal alarm system
Shut down/lazy	Dissociating to cope with overwhelm

Safe Data Collection Practices

- [ ] Avoid public data collection that could shame student
- [ ] Use neutral, non-judgmental language in notes
- [ ] Document privately, not in front of student
- [ ] Focus on observable behaviors, not interpretations
- [ ] Include context that explains, not excuses
- [ ] Note what helped the student regulate

Building Safety Into Interventions

Pro Tip

Before implementing any behavior intervention, ask: "Does this plan increase the student's sense of safety and control, or does it risk triggering a trauma response?"

- Offer choices whenever possible
- Provide predictability through visual schedules
- Create safe spaces for regulation
- Build relationships before making demands
- Use calm, regulated adult presence
- Avoid power struggles and ultimatums

Self-Care for Data Collectors

Important

Secondary traumatic stress is real. Working closely with traumatized students can affect your own well-being. Monitor yourself for:

• Emotional exhaustion
• Intrusive thoughts about student situations
• Feeling helpless or hopeless
• Changes in your own behavior or sleep

- [ ] Debrief regularly with supportive colleagues
- [ ] Maintain boundaries between work and personal life
- [ ] Practice your own regulation strategies
- [ ] Seek support when needed

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Observations & Reflections

Compassionate Data Collection

Classroom Pulse helps you track behavior patterns while maintaining a trauma-informed approach. Understand the whole child.

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