

CREATING

Trauma-Informed Classrooms

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Trauma-informed classrooms are learning environments that work to address the educational needs of students who have experienced trauma.

The research estimates that 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys experience sexual assault before the age of 18.¹ Sexual assault and other traumatic experiences can greatly impact a young person's safety in the school environment, as well as their ability to focus, learn, and regulate emotions.² Every person who has experienced trauma will respond uniquely, but it is not uncommon for educators to see the impacts of trauma present through difficult behaviors, challenging emotions, and/or low school attendance. Successful solutions to these issues can be found when the whole of the student's experience is taken into consideration. Teachers and school staff can play a vital role in providing supportive responses to trauma and creating healthy learning environments for all.





How can I support a student who has experienced sexual assault?

Support and believe the young person:

The research shows that false-reporting rates for sexual assault are very low, only occurring in between 2 and 8 percent of cases.³

Survivors of sexual assault who are believed are much more likely to continue seeking help. If a student discloses sexual assault, thank them for telling you and state that you believe them.

“THANK YOU, I'M SO GLAD YOU TOLD ME;
I BELIEVE YOU AND WANT TO DO
ALL I CAN TO SUPPORT YOU.”

Work with the student to understand their safety concerns:

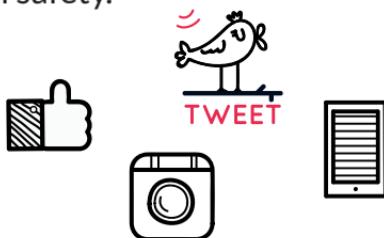
Title IX protects the right of all students to receive an education free from sexual violence. Safety accommodations at school cannot over-burden the survivor or limit their access to educational or extracurricular opportunities.⁴

Survivors of sexual assault can often identify unsafe aspects of their environment that may not be easily seen by others. Ask the question: “How can I help make school feel safer for you?”



Most sexual assaults are perpetrated by someone the survivor already knew.⁵ Consider the safety implications if the person who committed the assault is a family member, friend, or another student in the school.

Consider the impact social media and electronic communication can have on a student's wellbeing. These modes of communication can be used as platforms to bully, harass, and threaten. Even if harmful messages are sent by someone outside of the physical environment, they can greatly impact the survivor's ability to focus while at school. Talk with the student about ways to help increase their digital safety.





**Have a system in place for students
who need to miss class time:**



A student who has experienced sexual assault or other trauma may need to be absent for a variety of reasons including: physical/mental health concerns, participation in the criminal justice process, or as part of their safety plan.



Set clear expectations and develop ways for students to stay current on their school work; it can be helpful to create assignment packets that can be completed at home.





Understand the importance of confidentiality:

Many young people who have experienced sexual violence fear telling their peers, families, and communities about the assault. Confidentiality is important for a variety of reasons, including: threats of bullying and harassment, fears of not being believed, and safety concerns.

Respect the right of students to tell their own story when they feel it is appropriate. Be clear about the limitations of confidentiality in your role as a mandated reporter and include information about other people you may be required to inform, including family members and other school staff. Assure the student that you will not discuss the matter with anyone who does not need to be directly involved.



What are my responsibilities as a mandated reporter?

All teachers and school staff are required to report suspected abuse or neglect of a person under the age of 18.⁶

Review your school and district policies. You will be better equipped to support a student if you know where to turn should a report need to be made.

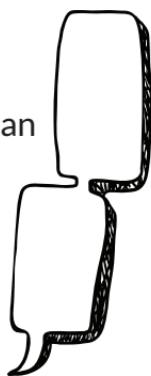
To effectively support survivors through the mandated reporting process it is helpful to:

Inform youth about your role as a mandated reporter both before and after a disclosure; work to remind students as needed to ensure their understanding.



Communicate with the student about the report; provide information regarding when the report will be made to Child Protective Services/Law Enforcement and what exactly will be reported. Give the student the opportunity to be present while the report is made.

If you are required to inform a parent/guardian about the report, tell the student about this responsibility and provide information on how you plan to do so. Give the student the opportunity to be present while their family member is informed.



Have a conversation with the young person about next steps of the report; discuss and address any safety concerns they may have. Offer to assist the student in getting connected to supportive services.



How can I create trauma-informed spaces for all students?

You may not be aware of the trauma histories of every student in your classroom. Below are some things you can do to make your classroom a safe learning environment for everyone.

Set clear expectations and boundaries:

Many survivors of sexual violence report feelings of betrayal after the assault. Educators can help to rebuild a survivor's ability to trust by setting clear expectations, boundaries, and establishing predictable routines.

Be aware of potential triggers when assigning difficult content:

Give advanced notice of traumatic events that occur within class materials such as books, movies, or other media.

Provide opportunities for alternative assignments for students who may be triggered by class content.

Debrief as a class; provide further education on difficult topics such as sexual assault. Reach out to your local community sexual assault program if you would like support in having this conversation or suggestions on materials to use.

Provide resources that students can access independently:

Inform students who they can turn to for support within the school, such as a counselor, and offer to assist them in getting connected with that person.

If a young person is not ready to speak with school staff, they may be willing to seek outside help.

The King County Sexual Assault Resource Center is available to provide support and information to survivors at anytime. See page 13 for contact information.

Encourage self care:

Sexual assault and other traumatic experiences can be difficult topics to discuss for any student. Create space within your classroom for students to take meaningful breaks from the material.

Work to create a classroom culture that normalizes self-care so as not to stigmatize students who do take breaks.

Leave the door open:

A student may not be ready to reach out for help in the moment, but it is important to let youth know that they can seek support at anytime.

¹ Understanding Sexual Violence: Tips for Parents & Caregivers of Children. (2015) *National Sexual Violence Resource Center*.

² The Effects of Trauma on Schools and Learning. (n.d.)
The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

³ Lonsway, Kimberly A., Archambault, Joanne, & Lisak, David. (2009) False Reports: Moving Beyond the Issue to Successfully Investigate and Prosecute Non-Stranger Sexual Assault. *The National Center for the Prosecution of Violence Against Women*.

⁴ Bolger, Dana. (n.d.) 9 Things to Know About Title IX.
Know Your IX.

⁵ What Is Sexual Violence? (2010) *National Sexual Violence Resource Center*.

⁶ RCW 26.44.030

Contact:



King County
Sexual Assault
Resource Center

King County Sexual Assault Resource Center serves survivors of sexual assault and their support networks in King County, as well as provides education and prevention services to the community.

To learn more about KCSARC services please call the 24-hour resource line at 1.888.99.VOICE (86423) or visit www.kcsarc.org

To receive more information about educating on the topic of sexual assault, please reach out by email to education@kcsarc.org

To locate sexual assault programs in other areas, please contact the National Sexual Assault 24-hour Hotline at 800.656.HOPE



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