



First, Do No Harm:

Developing Trauma-Informed Medical and Health Professions Education Practice
MAY 23, 2024

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

1. Explain the concept of trauma-informed education
2. Describe how trauma-informed education can support inclusive environments
3. Implement practical tips to prevent and address instances when learners' emotions are activated through curricular experiences

What is Trauma-Informed Education?

Trauma-Informed Education involves being aware of the ubiquity of experiences of trauma, so that we are sensitive to the possibility of trauma within all learners, bringing humility to our teaching approach. It does not avoid the discussion of trauma and traumatic experiences.

Principle 1: Be aware of the ubiquity of trauma

Acknowledge the high prevalence and complexity of lived experience of trauma, which also reinforces the importance of acknowledging it in our teaching.

Principle 2: Avoid re-traumatizing learners

Reflect our awareness of trauma as we prepare for our teaching sessions by keeping diverse learner experiences in mind.

Principle 3: Compassion is not coddling

Support each other by recognizing and honoring each other's lived experiences.

Principle 4: Stoicism is not a requirement in Health Professions Education

Uphold each other's right to experience and express difficult emotions, recognizing that we all self-regulate our emotions in unique ways.

Principle 5: Learn as you practice

Listen to feedback about how you can continue to improve your teaching, reach out for support and resources, and practice humility and self-compassion.

Cases and Discussion Questions

Please note that the cases are fictitious but are drawn from experiences that have occurred in the faculty. They may contain details that bring up difficult thoughts and emotions for some participants; we encourage each individual to prioritize their own self-care in their review of this content.

- ***Case 1: Cascade of Disclosure***
- ***Case 2: Stoicism***
- ***Case 3: Epistemic Injustice***

Key Point – Take “Universal Precautions”

The vast range of experiences, interpretations, and perspectives of trauma, and the complexity of trauma itself (emotional, physical, historical, intergenerational, etc.) means that many adults will have more than one, and often complex experiences of trauma.

There is no way of knowing who in the room has had what trauma, and it is important that we do not make assumptions about who might be present in the room. Rather than looking to identify what experiences are present, it is important that we take “**universal precautions**” to create a safe and supportive learning environment for everyone and anyone.

Key Points for Implementing “Universal Precautions” (Categories by VanderKaay, 2023¹)

Predictability: Offer your learners safety and comfort by sharing expectations and avoiding surprises.

- Give advance notice to learners about upcoming topics, slides, cases, and experiences when possible.
- Open the session with a description of how to approach these difficult topics and what language to use.

Flexibility: Prioritize learning over standardized practices by being open to doing things differently.

- When working in small groups, consider having an additional facilitator available to debrief with learners.
- Allow learners to leave and re-enter the space if required to engage in self-care.
- Normalize and explicitly acknowledge difficult situations and emotional responses, encouraging learners to connect with others and additional resources.

Connection: Foster healthy relationships with learners and others by forming meaningful connections.

- Be transparent about why you are teaching the material, acknowledging the difficulty of the topic, its importance, and its effect on various demographics present in the room.
- Show authentic, universal respect and welcome for the uniqueness of each learner by learning their names and making efforts to build a relationship.

Empowerment: Promote learner agency and autonomy by building learner confidence and comfort.

- Encourage and empower learner feedback by practicing humility and a willingness to listen and learn.
- Involve learners in how to approach and manage emotions and difficult topics.

Further Learning

[Watch the video recording of the session](#)

¹[Do It Anyway! Trauma-informed pedagogy resources](#) by Dr. Sandra VanderKaay, McMaster University
Berman S, Brown T, Mizelle C, Diep T, Gerber MR, Jelley M, Potter LA, Rush P, Sciolla A, Stillerman A, Trennepohl C.
Roadmap for trauma-informed medical education: introducing an essential competency set. ACAD MED. 2023
Aug;98(8):882-8. doi:10.1097/ACM.0000000000005196.

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