

TRAUMA

TRAUMA is now a collective as well as an individual experience, how does the school community process this? And how do we support people who have experienced very particular traumas during lockdown or as a result of facing an even more uncertain future?

What is trauma?

Trauma is damage done by distressing events, to individuals and communities.

Many schools are familiar with adverse childhood experiences (the ACEs model) and the effect of trauma on our children and young people, but what about collective trauma? This is felt in the aftermath of seismic events and can last a long time.

Why is trauma important now?

The massive upheaval we are going through potentially brings trauma from many sources: fearing for loved ones, losing loved ones, economic insecurity, fear of an unseen enemy out there, isolation and separation during lockdown, generalized anxiety, unsafe homes, the barrage of news and social media, and life changing in the blink of an eye.

It is the effects of trauma that are of concern. Many staff in schools will be familiar with the symptoms of individual trauma as shown by some young people being on high alert all the time. Symptoms of collective trauma, as identified by experts such as Thomas Hübl and Bruce Perry, include feeling separate, isolated and distancing ourselves internally from what is experienced as difficult. Our nervous systems don't regulate well, and we can experience hyper-vigilance and emotional dissonance (a conflict between what we experience and what we express).

Being aware and **recognising** these effects of trauma is important as we return to school as we all feel a great pressure to normalize things for ourselves and young people, to rush back into the familiar, to be positive. Of course, these things are important, but **if not addressed, the event and the ensuing trauma can be the invisible enemy in the room.** This then has implications for health, learning, education, and physical, emotional and social development

How can we address the effects of trauma at this time?

The good news is that, according to specialists like Thomas Hübl, what helps heal this collective trauma are things that we have and can emphasise in school culture and community: healthy **relationships**, a human skill set (what we might call social and emotional learning, including **empathy**), and being there for one other, **recognising** this as a collective event that has affected, and continues to affect, us all.

With the Senior Leadership Team and with the staff group:

- What preparation/training do staff need to **recognise** and cope with not only their own upheaval and perhaps trauma, but that of students? How can you ask them? Who can provide this and how?
- What balance do we need to find between being positive, giving a sense of normality and recognizing difficulty and pain?
- How can we help children (and ourselves) process in indirect ways what has happened, without necessarily focusing directly on the experiences we've had?
- What social and emotional learning were we doing before the pandemic that we can build on? What particular learning content and methodologies best support students to process what has happened (bearing in mind different starting points and capacities)?
- What are the **opportunities, safely**, to come together in collective experiences to reduce feelings of isolation and separateness? (music, movement, art, drama, ritual etc.)
- Is there any specialist support we need to plan for, for those students who may have experienced individual trauma in addition to our common experience?