



Briefing Note: Trauma Informed Teaching Practice

To:	Hon Jan Tinetti, Associate Minister of Education		
Cc:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Date:	22 April 2021	Priority:	Low
Security Level:	In Confidence	METIS No:	1256279
Drafter:	Branka Vasilic	DDI:	04 436-8964
Key Contact:	David Wales	DDI:	04 463-7669
Messaging seen by Communications team:	No	Round Robin:	No

Purpose of Report

This briefing responds to your request for information on 'trauma training' in relation to behaviour. You were interested in what training is out there for teachers who want to understand ākongā who have experienced trauma and are displaying challenging behaviours.

This report discusses:

- trauma and trauma informed practice in relation to behaviour
- the availability of Ministry funded professional learning and development (PLD) in trauma informed practice
- options for delivering PLD in trauma informed practice for teachers
- the role of educational psychologists and Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLb) in supporting trauma informed practice
- trauma informed practice in other jurisdictions.

Agree that this briefing will be proactively released.

Agree / Disagree


Katrina Casey
Deputy Secretary
Sector Enablement & Support


Hon Jan Tinetti
Associate Minister of Education

22/4/2021

23/4/2021

Background

1. Principals have expressed concerns and suggested a link between an increase in severe behaviour in schools and ākonga traumatic life experiences. Recent correspondence has detailed the impact severe behaviours have on school staff. Teachers feeling pressure to resolve these situations is resulting in burn out and lack of job satisfaction, with some teachers leaving their roles. Principals have consistently referred to the complex issues New Zealand communities are facing and ākonga are experiencing as related to poverty, family violence, housing, health care, drugs and alcohol, and gang involvement.
2. Being at school offers a powerful intervention opportunity for trauma-affected students. Western definitions of trauma include the emotional, physiological and psychological effects of stressful life events such as violence, interrupted relationships and neglect. Māori descriptions of trauma include the harmful disruptions that impact whatumanawa (heart), tinana (body), hinengaro (mind) and wairua (spirit) which are further impacted by Māori and indigenous experiences of "colonisation, racism and discrimination, negative stereotyping and subsequent unequal rates of violence, poverty and ill health".¹
3. Exposure to trauma in childhood can affect ākonga academically and socially throughout their time at school and their whole lives. To help with recovery, children need the support of well-informed and caring adults.
4. Behaviour is a response to one's social, physical and cultural environments in coordination with the actions of others and is a dynamic process between people. Focusing on changing individual behaviour on its own, limits recognition of the role social environments and relationships play in influencing behaviour change and can lead to deficit focused and exclusionary practices in schools. We need a shift from providing services for individual ākonga, to support that enables change through empowering inclusive learning environments and positive relationships through collaboration. A relational way of understanding behaviour resonates with Kaupapa Māori theory and socio-cultural understanding of human behaviour.
5. Behavioural issues can also result from differences between ākonga cultural beliefs, values and practices, and those of their teachers and school. Culturally inclusive and enhancing practices are an important part of influencing challenges that interrupt ākonga learning.
6. When faced with challenging behaviour, teachers can be supported by Ministry learning support specialists to partner with ākonga and their whānau to understand the contributing factors. Individualised plans can be implemented to address unmet needs and focus on prevention and early intervention, and integrating other government and community-based wellbeing supports and services.

What is trauma informed practice?

7. Trauma informed practice provides teachers with knowledge about how trauma may present, the impact it has on ākonga and how to respond. These practices help ākonga feel safe, continue to build relationships and learn. Whole school trauma informed approaches focus on collaborative, relationally-based and consistent strategies to support distressed students.

¹ Pihama, L., Smith, L.T., Evans-Campbell, T., Kohu-Morgan, H., Cameron, N., Matakī, T., Te Nana, R., Skipper, H., & Southey, K. (2017) Investigating Māori approaches to trauma informed care. *Journal of Indigenous Wellbeing*, Vol. 1, Issue 3, p 18.

8. Trauma informed approaches also take account of the stress teachers experience when supporting ākonga who have experienced trauma. They emphasise the importance of self-care practices and teachers working together to provide universal strategies to support trauma informed environments for all students. Trauma informed practice is not about asking teachers or school staff to be therapists.

Ministry funded PLD for trauma informed practice

9. The Ministry does not currently consistently fund trauma informed practice PLD for teachers, schools or in early learning settings. However, schools often request Ministry learning support specialists to provide coaching in trauma informed training as part of support for a student. Tailored PLD for groups of school staff is also often provided by Ministry learning support specialists, RTLB or mental health services.
10. For example, Intensive Wraparound Service | Te Kahu Tōi interventions can include a whole school trauma informed practice workshop for teachers as a component of a student's plan. Trauma informed practice is also a core component of the Understanding Behaviour Responding Safely (UBRS) training.

11

9(2)(f)(iv)

12. The Ministry funds Post Graduate courses with content about trauma informed practice. This includes the Educational Psychology training programme and Post Graduate Diploma in Specialist Teaching.
13. We understand that trauma informed practice is not part of initial teacher education.

Options for delivering PLD in trauma informed practice

14. The Ministry has undertaken an initial search for existing, experienced and proven New Zealand providers of trauma informed practice. We identified two providers who are delivering trauma informed practice training – Engage Training Company and Werry Workforce Whāraurau.
15. Engage offer education based, one day in-person workshops on trauma informed practice. The workshop content covers:
 - early environmental trauma and the brain
 - positive environments and child development
 - neuroscience research.
16. The training aims to deliver this complex content in a way that can be immediately translated into practice.
17. Teachers and Learning Support Coordinators (LSCs) in Auckland and Tai Tokerau have recently attended these workshops.
18. Werry Workforce Whāraurau offer online learning modules in trauma informed practice and in-person workshops in Auckland. The workshop content covers:

- understanding the importance of building resilience and fostering positive and stable relationships with children/tamariki and whānau
 - maximising safety for children/tamariki
 - supporting children/tamariki manage overwhelming emotions
 - understanding the impact of trauma on those who care for and work with vulnerable children/tamariki
 - thinking about ways to look after yourself while caring for children/tamariki
 - understanding the common types of trauma and the impact of trauma on child/tamariki development and behaviour
 - considering trauma in different cultures.
19. This workshop content is developed in consultation with a Māori advisory board and with input from Auckland University of Technology's Māori service team.
20. Other providers, such as Brainwave and Skylight Trusts offer similar training, for example in child development, neuroscience and to support children experiencing grief.
21. Integrating trauma informed practice within existing evidence-based frameworks, like Positive Behaviour for Learning - School Wide and Huakina Mai, is likely to lead to a more sustained response to student trauma. Ministry learning support specialists (for example our Educational Psychologists) and Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour should also be linked in with this PLD as they continue to support teachers and school leaders to work with students who are experiencing trauma and distress. Additional resources, including teacher release time, would be beneficial. When teachers can share information within their school community and have time to do this through an instructional peer model, changes are more likely to be effective and sustained.
22. We note that one-off professional learning opportunities do not sufficiently embed learned practices or achieve a sustained mind shift.

The role of educational psychologists and RTLB in trauma informed practice

23. Ministry learning support staff, including Educational Psychologists, use a range of evidence-informed approaches to support students, parents and teachers, including trauma informed practice.
24. Specialist learning support staff working alongside teachers in the classroom, for example using coaching, enables collaboration, shared sense making and planning and practicing strategies.
25. Most RTLB are aware of trauma informed practice and incorporate this into their work. Access to trauma informed practice PLD varies from cluster to cluster.
26. All new RTLBs are required to complete the two year Post Graduate Diploma in Specialist Teaching (Learning and Behaviour) through Massey University. They learn about a range of approaches including trauma informed practice.
27. In addition to the Massey course, each cluster plans to meet the PLD needs of RTLBs. There is a growing interest in trauma informed practice and neuropsychology and some clusters have undertaken cluster-wide PLD on these topics.

9(2)(f)(iv), 9(2)(g)(i)

Trauma informed practice in other countries

28. Trauma informed practices can be found in schools across the globe. North America, Australia and UK offer a number of examples.

29. Monash University's trauma informed classrooms approach² includes:

- understanding trauma
- how exposure to trauma affects child development
- the benefits of trauma informed practice in schools
- trauma informed care models and principles.

30. In 2020, the Welsh government conducted a review of how well primary and secondary schools support students with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)³. The review recommended that:

schools should:

- provide both whole-school and targeted support for vulnerable students, in partnership with other services, based on an understanding of the impact of ACEs on children
- prioritise building trusting and positive relationships with families that encourage them to share important information with the school
- ensure that there is suitable access to calm, nurturing and supportive spaces for all vulnerable students, including those with ACEs, and particularly for older secondary students
- provide training and support all secondary school staff, not just those involved in pastoral work, to understand their role as a potential trusted adult for vulnerable students
- establish mechanisms to share information about vulnerable students and families confidentially and sensitively with relevant staff

local authorities and regional consortia should:

- share relevant information about vulnerable students and families promptly with schools
- assist schools to develop ACE-informed strategies to support vulnerable students

the Welsh Government should:

- promote the Wales Accord for the Sharing of Personal Information and encourage the timely sharing of information about vulnerable students and families with schools.

31. The USA National Association of School Psychologists⁴ states that trauma informed schools promote:

- feelings of physical, social, and emotional safety in students
- a shared understanding among staff about the impact of trauma and adversity on students
- positive and culturally responsive discipline policies and practices
- access to comprehensive school mental and behavioural health services
- effective community collaboration.

² [Five approaches for creating trauma informed classrooms - Monash Education](#)

³ [Knowing your children – supporting ākongā with adverse childhood experiences \(ACES\) | Estyn \(gov.wales\)](#)

⁴ [Trauma-Sensitive Schools \(nasponline.org\)](#)

Next steps

9(2)(f)(iv)

Proactive Release

33. We recommend that this briefing is proactively released as per your expectation that information be released as soon as possible. Any information which may need to be withheld will be done so in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.