

Trauma-Informed Teaching

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Outline

- Who am I?
- Session Objectives
- Prevalence of Trauma
- (Cognitive) Effects of Trauma
- Classroom Strategies
- Brainstorming Session

Who am I?

- BA in Mathematics, Smith College
- Almost-MEd in Secondary Math, Westfield State Univ.
- HS Geometry teacher, Rise Prep Academy (SPS)
- Critical STEM geek
- Teaching as activism
- Cat, snake, and plant parent
- Jack-of-all-trades

Session Objectives

- Be aware of the prevalence of trauma in K-12 students
- Recognize the demographic differences in trauma
- Understand the effects of trauma on the brain, and how these manifest in the classroom
- Gain a toolset of strategies for supporting students with trauma
- Develop a concrete plan for implementing a trauma-informed practice in your classroom or school

Prevalence of Childhood Trauma in the US

ACE = Adverse Childhood Experience

- **Abuse** (emotional, physical, and/or sexual)
- **Household instability** (intimate partner violence, substance abuse, mental illness, parental separation/divorce, incarcerated household member)

At least 1 ACE: 63.9% of adults

Four or more: 17.3%

Higher rates among women, POC, lower-income folks, those without college degrees, those unemployed or unable to work, and young adults

(Cognitive) Effects of Trauma

Impairments in:

- Neurocognitive processes
- Brain development
- Learning
- Language development
- Sensory processing
- Mental health
- Social skills

Higher rates of:

- Smoking, alcoholism, drug abuse
- Depression, suicidality
- Poor overall health and fitness

Poor mental and physical health →
reduced energy, focus, motivation,
curiosity, and self-efficacy

Trauma / adverse experiences

Sympathetic nervous system (stress response)

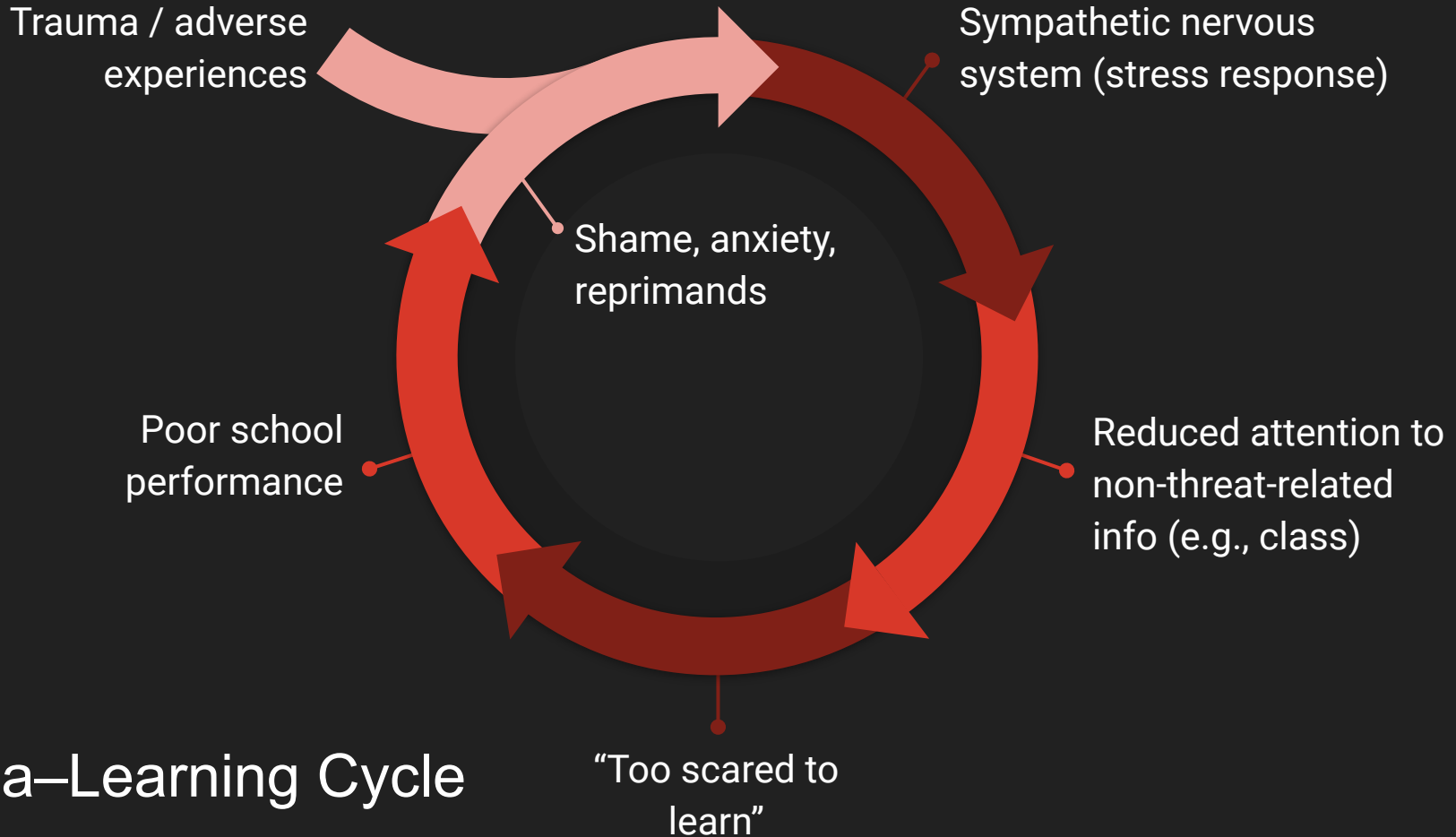
Shame, anxiety, reprimands

Poor school performance

Reduced attention to non-threat-related info (e.g., class)

"Too scared to learn"

Trauma-Learning Cycle



Classroom Strategies

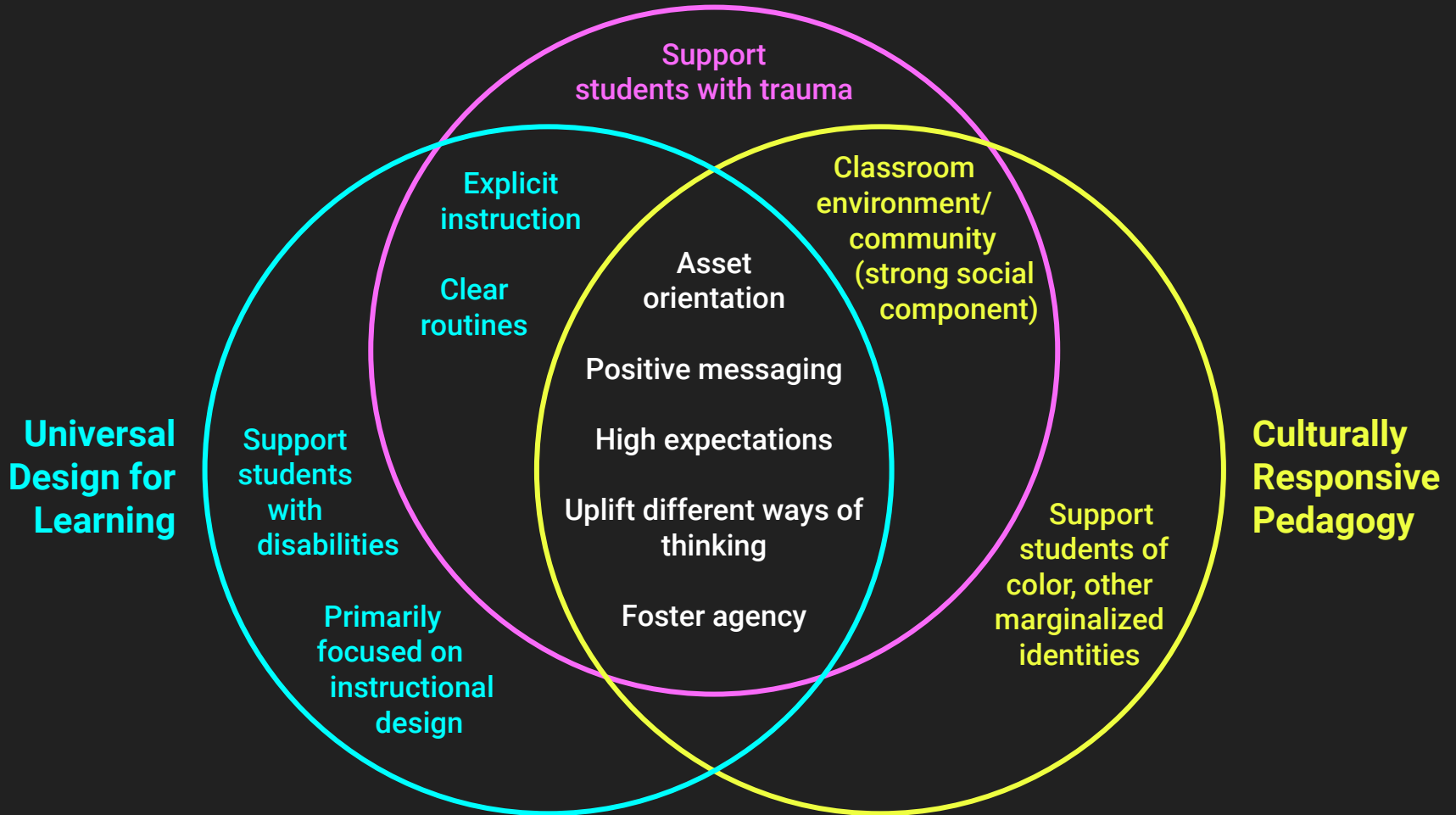
Break the cycle!

Foster a sense of safety → enable thinking & learning

Safety =

- Physical
- Social & emotional
- Intellectual

Trauma-Informed Teaching



Brainstorming Session

On your own or with the folks at your table:

1. Analyze your current classroom practices through a trauma-informed lens. In what areas is your class supportive of students with trauma? In what ways might it be challenging?
2. Identify one change you can make in your classroom right away or soon. Use the SMART goal outline to make a concrete plan.

Share out!

Citations & Suggested Reading

1. Cole, S. F., et al. (2005). [Helping Traumatized Children Learn: A Report and Policy Agenda](#). Massachusetts Advocates for Children.
2. Davidson, S. (2017). [Trauma-Informed Practices for Postsecondary Education: A Guide](#). Education Northwest.
3. Felitti, V. J., et al. (1998). "Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.
4. Gay, G. (2002). "Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching." *Journal of Teacher Education*.
5. Perkins, S., & Graham-Bermann, S. (2012). "Violence Exposure and the Development of School-Related Functioning." *Aggression and Violent Behavior*.
6. Perry, B. D. (2006). "Fear and learning: Trauma-related factors in the adult education process." *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education*.
7. Swedo, E. A., et al. (2023). "[Prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences Among U.S. Adults—Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2011–2020](#)." *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.
8. Van der Kolk, B. A. (2015). *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, mind and body in the healing of trauma*.
9. Wilson, V. (2020). "Trauma-informed teaching of adults." *Fine Print*.