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Trauma-Informed suggestions for Helping Everyone Learn

Follow these tips from expert Jen Alexander to help everyone in your classroom learn during times of collective trauma.

1. Slow Down.



Think about how you will reassure students and families you are ready for all students, whether or not they met the previous grade level's standards. Consider how you will prioritize pre-testing, instruction, practice, common formative assessment, supplemental intervention, and summative assessment without pushing too much. Trying to do too much academically too soon will cause dysregulation and may contribute to behaviors that compromise real or felt safety as well as relational or even personal health. Focus on felt safety, relationships, and regulation first.

2. Be Confident Kids will Catch up.



Academic skills may undergo a small decline after school closures, but they tend to be followed by a catching up. In part, this may be because teachers often respond to school closures by focusing on what students need to learn most in an effort to make up for lost instructional time. Good teachers who connect and provide feedback during distance learning and who help address inequities once schools reopen make a difference.

3. Keep Your Eye on the Ultimate Goal.



Remember that we need educators and students to feel safe, be connected, and able to get regulated before learning is possible. Learning is always our goal, so we aren't lowering expectations when we prioritize the first three essentials in trauma-sensitive schools; we're just taking well-paced, realistic steps toward it, which ensures we will get there.

4. Be Compassionate with Yourself and others.



As stress goes up, it's hard for any of us to access the executive functions that help us act to meet short- or long-term goals. If you've noticed yourself being more forgetful, more disorganized, or even foggy in your thinking, that's why. Expect that students will forget things more often and have trouble organizing their worlds too. Give yourself and others the same grace when struggling as you need on your worst day (and on days even worse than you've ever encountered). Each of us is doing our best.

Remember, helping one another be safe and feel safe helps us learn.

