

The Learning Spring

An Education Podcast Series



Group Discussion Guide

Episode Two

Trauma-Informed Education

Featuring guests Alex Shevrin Venet and Mathew Portell

A discussion that draws on their experience and writing, including the book *Equity-Centered Trauma-Informed Education* (Norton Professional Books, 2021) by Alex Shevrin Venet

1. The discussion begins by explaining what trauma is, how it can impact us as human beings, and what is meant by the concept of being “trauma-informed.”
 - a. How familiar are you already with these concepts? Were there any ideas presented that prompted you to want to learn more? Explain.
 - b. Do you feel it’s important to explore how these understandings can be better integrated within all school learning environments? Explain.
 - c. How trauma-informed do you feel your school community currently is or is not? Explain.
2. The discussion explores the difference between “trauma-informed” and “trauma-specific,” while also talking about why it can be important to clearly distinguish between these two concepts.
 - a. Do you feel that confusion about these two concepts might potentially create some reluctance or challenge to implementation for a school community? Explain.
 - b. Can you give examples of current practices in your school community that are “trauma-informed”? And/or examples that are “trauma-specific”? Explain.
3. The discussion explores how *equity* can be an important component of our trauma-informed lens—and how trauma can be a *collective* issue, not just an *individual* one.
 - a. How do you feel issues of inequity can be connected to trauma? Explain.
 - b. Do you feel there are ways that issues of inequity in your school community might worsen or even cause trauma? Explain.
 - c. Are there any current initiatives in your school community that you feel might benefit by adopting this lens to better frame the work? Explain.

4. The discussion emphasizes that trauma-informed education is “a full ecosystem, not a list of strategies.” Guests discuss how being trauma-informed is a universal, school-wide approach—and that it tends to represent for many schools a shift from a “reactive stance” to a *proactive* approach.
 - a. In what ways does this align or differ from your school community’s current understanding or practices? Explain.
 - b. Do you feel there are any current structures, policies, or practices in your school community that might need to be reexamined to better align with a trauma-informed approach? Explain.
 - c. What steps might you take to begin the process of becoming better trauma-informed? Explain.

5. The transformation to a truly trauma-informed school tends to be “more about adults” than kids, and the discussion explores how adult development can be a key component to making a successful shift, especially in adopting what might be a new lens to frame the work. In some ways, the shift might represent a reimagining of the current school culture.
 - a. Are there ways you feel that becoming more trauma-informed might require some changes or updates to your current practices and/or to the overall school culture? Explain.
 - b. In what ways do you feel that the adults in your school community could be supported to make the shift to trauma-informed practice? Explain.

6. The discussion includes how “unconditional positive regard” is an important stance to take in relationship to students. For Alex Shevrin Venet, the message of unconditional positive regard is: “I care about you. You have value. You don’t have to do anything to prove it to me, and nothing’s going to change my mind.” All parents, caregivers, and educators may of course agree with the importance of unconditional regard for children—even while also maintaining high standards. It may, however, be more challenging than we first think to ensure that *all* students feel this way regarding their daily school experiences.
 - a. In what ways do you feel that it may be difficult for some students to receive the message of “unconditional positive regard” in their daily school experience—even if we adults hold this unconditional regard for them in our hearts? Explain.
 - b. What do you think we as educators can do to ensure that all students know they are held in “unconditional positive regard”? Explain.
 - c. Are there any *current* schoolwide policies or practices that your school community might want to reexamine through this lens? Any *new* schoolwide policies or practices that your school community might want to explore implementing? Explain.

7. The discussion also explores how educators and all adults in the school community can benefit from a trauma-informed approach as well. In fact, to effectively provide such an environment for students, it is most likely essential to support the adults in our schools in the same way.
 - a. What steps do you think could be taken to better support the adults and extend a trauma-informed environment to *everyone* in your school? Explain.
 - b. As a trauma-informed school, how would you want all the adults in your school community to feel? How would you want all the students to feel? Explain.

