Teacher Strategies for Classroom

Sample Questions

Heather T. Forbes, Help for Billy (Page 76)

Working with students of trauma requires us to take a new approach.

* If you are not able to drop your personal mirror and understand the behavior is not about you…it’s about the student, trauma practices will fail.
  + Dropping your personal mirror allows you to stay calm and seek the cause to the problem that is happening before you.
  + When you are working with students who are escalated emotionally, by you staying calm and nurturing, they will begin to feel safe.
* The Brain Drives Behavior – therefore it is out of the student’s control when they are highly escalated, they cannot physiologically problem solve, focus, or learn when their brain is overwhelmed with “cortisol”.

Important Questions to Ask

What is driving this student’s behavior?

* What else is really going on here?
  + The behavior is a mask and reaction to a cause that is causing the behavior.
* What does this child need?
  + Student needs a safe place to go to get their emotions under control so that they can problem solve. Looking at what the student needs, allows for you to assess their stress level and know that confrontation will only escalate the child to a new level of fear and loss of control.
* How can I change my perspective?
  + If we know the brain is driving the behavior, we know that the stress is coming from the caregiver. You are the adult that can model a calm approach during the storm of the student’s behavior.
* What keeps me only looking at the behavior?
  + One, the student may be setting off a trigger inside of you, an ACE that you personally have had to struggle with. Our traditional middle class norms keep us riding a dead horse and ending up at the same place each time. If we are going to make difference, we have to be willing to change our approach.
* What is this behavior communicating right now?
  + The student impacted by trauma is in great need of a caring adult in their life. The behavior can be a reflection or outcome of a traumatic event that happened in the home that was very disturbing to the student.
* What in the environment could be triggering this behavior?
  + A certain word or action can set off a student’s trigger and have nothing to do with the classroom or the school. It just happens to expose itself while at school.

Questions that lead to solutions

What can I do at this very moment to improve my relationship with this student? Knowing what a student of trauma needs is a powerful model of teaching resilience, problem solving, and trust. The disruption is not about you, it is about the student. When we keep our focus on the student, change begins to take place; the journey begins for that student.

* How can I make this relationship safe for the student?
* Does the student need me to validate him?
* What does the student need from me?
* How can I respond to the student so they don’t feel threatened?
* How can I physically position myself to create safety in relationship for the student?
* Can the student respond to exploratory questions, not solutions I give him, that show I am interested?
* How can I convince the student that I truly want to understand his or her struggle?
* How can I be more authentic for the student?
* If I stop talking and start listening, will the student feel like he or she has a voice?
* How can I serve the student?

These are powerful questions for you to reflect on your current classroom disciplinary practices. If you notice, the questions are questions that are asking how I respond to the student…not how I react to the behavior.

* The questions are asking you to step out of your shoes and step into the student’s shoes.
  + Try to understand what the student must be going through in order to set off their trigger of emotions.
  + The student’s caregivers are not providing the safety or the nurturing environment that the student deserves to be raised.
  + You as the teacher can make a significant impact on the student’s life by building a relationship with the student that validates them, listens to them, seeks to know what caused their trigger to go off, and providing a safe nurturing classroom environment.
  + **The greatest change for the student is how you respond to him in the middle of one of his or her storms. This is where change begins…the journey starts and progress will be seen through the manner over time in which the student begins to self-regulate (you have set up the strategies…safe zone) and begins to look at you for safety during the times they escalate.**

Examples……from “Help for Billy,” pages 78-79 gives a compare and contrast of traditional strategies verses trauma informed strategies. The accountability is very important, but it should be the last part of the conversation when the student is calm and able to problem solve. Consequences can be given in a caring and compassionate manner without being punitive and harsh. The new approach brings change, the traditional approach adds to the trauma the student is already experiencing.

**A question to always ask yourself when dealing with discipline**

Am I responding to the student or am I reacting to their behavior?

Responding to the student brings about change…

Reacting to the student causes fear and emotional escalation that quickly can get out of control

As a teacher…you can be the storm in a student’s life, or you can be the sunshine and the rainbow that brings calm to the storm.