
Trauma Informed Approaches to Support Cold Spring School

— Dr. Amy Alzina —
Superintendent/Principal

Purpose:

- Support for you to support and empower others
- Resources for your classroom
- Limit reinventing the wheel - save your energy

Reminder to self:

There is no perfect response. We will all be okay.

School-Wide Response

1. Assess staff needs
 - a. Provide Staff with time to debrief before students arrive: Tuesday, 7:45am
 - b. Determine which teachers may need more support in debriefing with students
2. Provide staff with resources for coping and recovery
3. Create a system to identify students who may need more support
 - a. [Spreadsheet](#) about students with loss and heightened risk factors
4. Track absences and connect with families
5. Provide on-going opportunities for staff to support each other
6. Provide information to families

Trauma-Informed Approaches for Cold Spring Students

— Post Crisis Response —

Objectives

- Self-care
- Trauma-informed understanding of student responses
- Recovery and resiliency
- Increased risk factors and signs of students who need more support
- How you can help: Trauma-informed practices in the classroom
- Resources & handouts
- Questions?

Self-Care

- Flight reminder: “Please put on your oxygen mask before assisting others”
- Know your own limits
- You will have similar reactions to your students
- Ask for help - EAP 1-800-999-7222
- Give yourself permission to relax or zone out
- Lean on your community

The ABCs of Self-Care

Priorities for educators/caregivers:

- Awareness - Assess your own stress level, thoughts and behaviors.
- Balance - Seek balance in work, personal and family life, rest, and leisure.
- Connection - Social connection reduces stress (co-workers, friends, family, and community).

Student Responses

- Expect a wide variety of responses
 - Guilt, Fear, Worry, Disbelief, Sadness, Anger, Shock, and more
- Emotional and behavioral responses can shift
- Changes should be expected to last for at least 6 weeks if not longer
- There is no normal reaction to loss, and no timeline for recovery

Domain**Negative Responses****Positive Responses**

Cognitive

Confusion, disorientation, worry, intrusive thoughts and images, self-blame

Determination and resolve, sharper perception, courage, optimism, faith

Emotional

Shock, sorrow, grief, sadness, fear, anger, numb, irritability, guilt and shame

Feeling involved, challenged, mobilized

Social

Extreme withdrawal, interpersonal conflict

Social connectedness, altruistic helping behaviors

Physiological

Fatigue, headache, muscle tension, stomachache, increased heart rate, exaggerated startle response, difficulties sleeping

Alertness, readiness to respond, increased energy

What to Expect...

Student Responses: Preschool

- thumb sucking
- bedwetting
- clinging to parents
- sleep disturbances
- loss of appetite
- fear of the dark
- regression in behavior
- withdrawal from friends and routines

What to Expect...

Student Responses: Elementary

- irritability
- aggressiveness
- clinginess
- nightmares
- school avoidance
- poor concentration
- withdrawal from activities and friends
- repetition of questions and stories

What to Expect...

Student Responses: Middle / High School

- sleeping and eating disturbances
- agitation
- increase in conflicts
- physical complaints
- delinquent behavior
- poor concentration
- maladaptive coping (drug or alcohol use, severe aggression)

Risk Factors for Heightened Reactions

- Exposure to the actual event
- Personal injury or loss of a loved one
- Level of caregiver/family support
- Displacement from their home or community
- Limited / interrupted access to required medication
- Pre-existing risks
 - Previous traumatic experience
 - Mental illness
 - Immigration status
 - Low SES/financial hardships

Other Risk Factors

Remember, a small minority of children may be at risk of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD):

- Re-experiencing the disaster during play and/or dreams
- Anticipating or feeling that the disaster is happening again
- Avoiding reminders of the disaster
- General numbness to emotional topics
- Increased arousal symptoms

Also please consider children of first responders!

When To Seek / Recommend Additional Assistance

When you observe:

- Intense feelings of discomfort
- Significant symptoms that persist longer than six weeks
- Suicidal thoughts or planning
 - [Know The Signs](#)
- Other self-destructive acting out (sexual, aggressive, or substance use)
- Intense family conflict

Where To Seek Additional Assistance

- Amy Alzina, cell- 805-895-3652 or email - aalzina@coldspringschool.net
- School psychologist, Beth Laurie
- Family, Youth and Children's Services: (800) 565-4300

Supporting Displaced Students

- Take time to talk to them one-on-one
- Assess basic needs
- Pre-conference with student → what information they want shared and how they want to be introduced
- Assign a buddy to help them learn class and school routines
- Offer choices to them to increase their sense of control

Stress Reactions and Changes are NORMAL

- Healing and recovery is the norm and expectation
- Emotions and behaviors can change with frequent reminders
 - Sirens, smoke, driving by damage
- It is normal to have a stress response that may last for prolonged amount of time.

How we respond will help with the healing process

How You Can Help - General Guidelines

- Remain calm and reassuring
 - “We will be okay”
- Acknowledge and normalize their feelings
 - Active Listening → Paraphrase or reiterate what is said. There are no wrong feelings.
 - Ex: “This is hard” or “It’s okay to be sad”
- Encourage students to talk about fire-related events
 - Multitmodal
 - Don’t force it
 - Follow their lead

How You Can Help - General Guidelines

- Promote positive coping and problem-solving skills
 - Proactive: review spaces and activities that they can use when feeling upset
 - Be flexible
 - Model the skills
- Emphasize their resilience and the community's resilience
 - Focus on what they have done before to feel better when upset or sad
 - Focus on identifying the helpers
- Strengthen social bonds and peer supports
 - Collaborative group work, encourage them to be kind to one another
- Take care of YOU

How You Can Help - Getting Back to “Normal”

- Overall well-being (students and staff) is enhanced by returning to school
- Routines = Comfort
- Re-connecting with friends and community is healing

How You Can Help - Foster Resiliency

- Resiliency means adapting well after tragedy.
- A resilient student is able to access coping strategies (not perfectly)
- Encourage, re-teach, and model coping tools:
 - ❖ Deep breaths
 - ❖ Listen to music
 - ❖ Drawing
 - ❖ Provide time for social connection
 - ❖ Use social stories as needed

How You Can Help - Classroom Specifics

- Maintain structure and routine
- Shorter lesson plans
 - attention/concentration may be impacted
- Slower pace
- Increase time for personal expression and discussions (e.g., community circles)
- Plan hands-on activities
- Structured opportunities for positive social connections
- Reduce homework
- Expect an overall performance decline
- Model positive coping skills
- Stick to the facts
- Limit media exposure

How You Can Help - Special Needs Considerations

- Structure, consistency, and routines
- Consider triggers and cues, anticipate rather than react
- Use social stories
- Assess need for closer supervision
- Provide choices to lend control
- Visuals and hands on materials

Classroom Activities - Group Discussions

Classroom meetings / group discussions → can help validate their feelings about experiences

- ❖ Set-up norms/expectations
- ❖ Focus on positives
- ❖ Promote a sense of security
- ❖ Highlight all the help and togetherness in the community
- ❖ May need to happen regularly and with more frequency - Repetition helps children process

Restorative Practices

- Opportunity to have students openly share their feelings and thoughts with peers and adults in a circle format
- Can include a “talking piece” to encourage structure and consistency
- Begin with low risk questions and gradually to medium to high risk questions
- Questions may include:
 - What has happened?
 - What have you thought about since you...
 - What could you do to make things better?

Classroom Activities - Elementary

Creative expression

- ❖ Students can draw, write, or talk about what they best remember, or respond to questions or topics
- ❖ Structured sentence starters can help prompt thoughts and reactions

Hands on / active tasks

- ❖ Gross motor activities (exercises to music, skipping, jumping)
- ❖ Help children can *organize* or *build* projects (scrapbooks, replicas, etc.) to provide a sense of mastery and a chance to organize what may be chaotic and confusing events

Sample Script for Teachers

The fires have impacted all of us. It is normal to have many different emotions and reactions. Some of you may feel scared, angry, guilty, shocked, or relieved and these emotions may change and may last awhile.

I want you to know that Cold Spring School is a safe place, and that all teachers are here for you. Today, and over the next couple of weeks, we are going to support each other and take time to talk about what has happened.

- ❖ Review ground rules for discussion → respect, right to pass
- ❖ Allow for emotional expression
- ❖ Conclude all discussions with a focus on positives (e.g., safety, helping hands)

Discussion Starters

- What has this been like for you?
- How have you been taking care of yourself?
- How have you been taking care of others?
- Where have you seen helpers?
- How can we support each other?
- How did you help your family during or after the disaster?
- How could you help your family if you were in another disaster?
- Did anything good or positive happen because of the disaster? Did you learn anything?
- What has this experience made you grateful for?

- Take a Break -

Brainstorm with your community of teachers about appropriate activities for their grade level and school site.

Ideas may include...

- ❖ Letters to firefighters
- ❖ Posters thanking first responders
- ❖ Sentence starters / writing prompts
- ❖ Create a social story for your classroom
- ❖ Community circles
- ❖ Classroom volunteer / fundraising activities

- During Breakout -

- Check In (How are you and your team doing with this information?)
- What are your concerns for your classroom?
- How will you create time/space to assess the needs of your students?
- What will your schedule look like for the first day/week?

Responding to Students

- **Authentic listening**
- **Be genuine**
- **Be direct and developmentally appropriate**

Examples of acknowledging feelings and behaviors:

- I hear you're worried. That is normal. Right now you are safe and have people to help you.
- We don't know the answer yet, but we are going to figure it out.
- It's okay to be angry. Would you like to take a quick break or listen to music right now?

Responding to Students

Reframe and focus on the positive:

“This is the time to talk about kindness and how can we support each other.”

“We don’t decide what is worse. We just try to help each other”

“This is really hard and we are all going to be okay.”

Remember...

- There is not a perfect answer - there is not a perfect thing to say.
- Trust yourself in the moment - you know what to do because you care.
- We want to fix but we can’t. We can listen and support.

Responding to Students

What about getting emotional in front of my students?

- It is okay for kids to see you upset → label how you are feeling and model coping
- If you are on the verge of a major meltdown get help from a nearby teacher so that you can take care of yourself

How do I respond to students who can't stop worrying?

- Empower them to focus on the things they have control over
- "This has been a scary time, there are many things to worry about . Right now you are safe."

Responding to Students

AVOID...

- Forcing students to tell their stories
- Probing for personal details
- Saying things like “everything will be OK,” or “at least you survived.”
- Say what you think people should feel or how people should have acted
- Be negative about available help
- Make promises you can't keep such as “it will all get back to normal soon.”

Resources

National Association of School Psychologists. (2015). *Helping children after a natural disaster: Information for families and educators* [handout]. Bethesda, MD: Author.

<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/wildfire.aspx>

<http://www.nctsn.org/trauma-types/natural-disasters/fires/wildfires#q6>

<https://www.ready.gov/coping-with-disaster>

http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/pfa/english/appendix_e3_when_terrible_things_happen.pdf

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/crisis/crisis.pdf>

<https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/wildfires/afterfire.html>

<https://www.schoolcounselor.org/school-counselors/professional-development/learn-more/helping-kids-during-crisis>

<https://www.tacanow.org/family-resources/helping-children-with-asd-adjust-to-the-major-fires/>

Have Questions?

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We Are Cold Spring School Strong

