

Trauma-Informed Care Interview/Evaluation Questions

Trauma-Informed Care is an approach used to prevent retraumatization, a worsening of trauma symptoms, and promotes healing. The approach requires a paradigm shift in our thinking and the questions we ask (i.e., “What’s wrong with you?” vs. “What has happened to you?”).

Key concepts:

- 1) Trauma is the physical and psychological response to an event or set of experiences that overwhelms an individual’s ability to cope.
- 2) Retraumatization refers to an experience, environmental property, smell, sound, or image that triggers the body’s stress response system (i.e., fight, flight, or freeze).
- 3) The outcomes (i.e., physical, emotional) of trauma vary based on age in which trauma(s) occur, physiology, environment, level of support, and coping ability.
- 4) Some cope, while others exhibit behaviors ranging from withdraw to aggression.
- 5) Trustworthy and caring relationships, as well as physically and psychologically safe environments, provide the foundation for a TIC approach.
- 6) TIC is an approach, while trauma-specific services (ex: cognitive behavioral therapy) address the outcomes of trauma to support healing. Services include a trauma-assessment and specialized treatments.
- 7) A TIC approach empowers students with voice (i.e., adults actively listen to student concerns and needs) and choice (i.e., choices are offered to empower students to take control of their life).
- 8) TIC builds upon student strengths and focuses on skill building.
- 9) Environments and rules are predictable and consistent. Routines are taught and consistently reinforced.
- 10) Employees understand how experiencing trauma impacts brain architecture and functioning, learning, physical and social-emotional health, relationships, and behaviors (i.e., internalizing and externalizing behaviors).
- 11) Employees utilize empathetic listening skills, provide encouragement, and believe that all students can learn.
- 12) Employees possess the understanding that change in behaviors involves both progression and decline; inconsistency in normal; change takes time; and adults must have a deep faith that growth is possible.
- 13) Employees help students build memory and cognitive skills, and assist students in identifying and managing feelings, so that students can understand their experiences, manage behaviors, and understand the effects of trauma.
- 14) Supports are provided to help students manage emotions related to fear, anger, shame and disassociation (with self and others).

To assess TIC knowledge and experience working with traumatized students:

- 1) Our school district is trauma-informed. How do you define trauma?
- 2) Describe your understanding of trauma-informed practice.
- 3) Tell me/us about your experience(s) working with students affected by trauma.
- 4) In what ways can traumatic experiences affect a student’s education (learning)? Behaviors? Relationships? Physical and social-emotional health?

- 5) Describe how you have (or will) differentiate the supports you provide students based on the outcomes of trauma.
- 6) Classified employees: Although you may not have frequent, if any, contact with students, what might you do as an employee to support students or colleagues who may have or are experiencing trauma?
- 7) Share a “success story” about an at-risk student that you had a significant role in making a difference in their education.
- 8) Describe some of the methods you have used (or will use) to measure a student’s progress toward a goal or task.
- 9) Tell us about a time when you acted in a caring and sensitive manner with a student during an emotional or tense situation.
- 10) Describe a time when you had to remain calm when dealing with an escalated student. What did you learn from the experience? How did you handle the situation? Would you do anything differently based on your understanding of how trauma impacts students?
- 11) What experience do you have working with students who may have experienced trauma?
- 12) Describe how you have (or will work) worked with students to build resiliency skills.
- 13) Describe the steps you would take if you expected child abuse (physical, sexual, neglect, etc.). (Assess understanding of reporting requirements.)
- 14) Describe how you have (or will) deescalated and manage student behaviors. How does your suspicion that a student has experienced trauma impact your behavior management plan? (Assess whether they will differentiate responses and/or treat every student with equal compassion knowing that they may not know if a student has experienced trauma.)
- 15) What are your beliefs about a student’s ability to learn if they have been traumatized? What are your beliefs about your ability to help all students learn? What strategies will you use to close the achievement gap?
- 16) Describe how you would give students choices within the classroom. (Assess whether students have opportunities for empowerment.)

To assess their understanding of a trauma-informed environment:

- 1) What are your expectations of a trauma-informed school? A trauma-informed employee?
- 2) Classified employees: Although you may not have frequent, if any, contact with students, what might you do as an employee to support the trauma-informed care initiative?
- 3) What does a trauma-informed school look like and sound like to you?
- 4) Describe how you will model and encourage trauma-informed practices within collaborative teams.
- 5) Describe the steps you will take to create a safe, trusting, and respectful environment within your classroom? Within your job classification? Within your school as a whole?
- 6) Describe a time when you had to collaborate with people with different perspectives, values, or beliefs than yours. How do you approach people for support or collaboration if their perspectives, values, or beliefs, are different than yours?
- 7) How would you respond if you had concerns about student misbehaviors, or how colleagues were managing student misbehaviors?

- 8) Describe a time in which you felt compelled (or would feel compelled) to share an unpopular viewpoint with colleagues? What did you say or wish you had said? How did you say it?
- 9) What strategies would you use to support colleagues who have been working closely with at-risk students? To build resiliency amongst employees?
- 10) How do you communicate with parents/guardians if you have concerns about a student?
- 11) Describe your organization and documentation skills related to student discipline issues, parent/guardian communications, interventions, and reports to Children Protective Services.
- 12) Describe a time in which your compassion, positive attitude, or supports have helped an at-risk student stay calm.
- 13) Describe your views on discipline versus punishment. (Assess whether employees have a punishment mentality or recognize the need to teach expectations.)
- 14) How do you establish predictable classroom environments and share expectations? (Assess classroom management expectations.)
- 15) Describe your thoughts on how teachers and/or administrators should resolve disrespect, profanity, insubordination, theft, or other non-violent behaviors? Examples of consequences? (Assess out-of-the-box thinking on discipline management options.)
- 16) How do you support students during transitions? (Between schools, classes, grade levels, from an illness, or school consequence.)

To assess relationship-building skills:

- 1) What strategies have you effectively used to build trusting and caring relationships with students?
- 2) Describe how you have worked with (or would work with) students who did not seem to trust adults?
- 3) Describe a time in which your active listening skills helped a student in need.
- 4) Give an example of a time when you were part of a great team. What did you do as a member of the team? How did your participation impact your relationship with team members?
- 5) Healthy boundaries are important when working with students. Please explain what “healthy boundaries” mean to you and how you have demonstrated these in the past.
- 6) Discuss your views on maintaining confidentiality of student information. In what situations would you tell an administrator or counselor about information student(s) have shared? How would you respond to a student if he/she shared information about potential abuse or trauma and asked that you keep it confidential?
- 7) How do you respond to students if you perceive that they are being disrespectful or insubordinate? If the behaviors are occurring during class or in front of other students or colleagues? If the student is not assigned to you as a teacher?
- 8) Explain how your nonverbal (body language) and verbal communications (tone, choice of words, volume of voice) impact your relationships with students.
- 9) Describe a time when you were able to establish a strong relationship with a highly resistant, noncompliant, or hostile student. How would you establish a strong relationship with a highly resistant, noncompliant, or hostile student?
- 10) Describe how you have (or will engage) engaged and/or developed trusting and respectful relationships with parents/guardians/families.

- 11) Describe a time when you volunteered to help a student in need. How did they react? How did it turn out?
- 12) What does perspective taking mean to you? Describe a time in which you were able to see things from a student's point of view.
- 13) Describe a time in which you looked at a student's point of view, during a disagreement or situation involving misbehaviors, before making a decision.
- 14) Describe your use of humor with students. Describe your thoughts on the use of sarcasm when joking with students.
- 15) Tell us about how you learn about your students, their culture, and/or community.

To assess management of difficult situations:

- 1) Tell us about a time when you were in a stressful situation at work. How did you respond?
- 2) Describe your approach to resolving conflicts involving students. Give examples of how you have resolved conflicts.
- 3) Describe the steps you would take to de-escalate a situation, student, and/or family member.
- 4) Describe how you have responded to (or would respond to) a student who you felt was being disrespectful to you in front of their peers.
- 5) We all learn from our mistakes. Tell us about a time when you approached a student, coworker, or administrator because you felt they were making a mistake. What was the issue and how was it resolved?
- 6) What was the most difficult work related problem you have ever faced? How did you resolve the problem?
- 7) Describe how you handled (or would handle) a crisis situation. Example(s)?
- 8) Describe a time in which you calmed a student, or parent/guardian, who was being irrational or escalated. What strategies were effective? Not effective?
- 9) Tell us about how you use conflict resolution skills with students.
- 10) Describe how you will provide feedback to students about their behaviors.
- 11) Describe a time when you used coping skills to remain calm and compassionate when interacting with an escalated student. How have you shared coping strategies with students and/or coworkers?
- 12) Describe how you would respond if colleagues were engaged in a negative conversation about students or parents. (Assess willingness and appropriate measures to extinguish negative conversations.)
- 13) Describe a time in which you had to let go of the need to control a situation. What was the issue and why was it necessary for you to "let it go"?
- 14) Tell us about a time in which you were able to see a student's side of an issue when you were "upset" with the student.
- 15) Describe how you provide (would provide) feedback to a student who was having behavior issues. (Assess whether they attempt to imagine how they would feel in the student's place.)

To assess self-care and secondary trauma:

- 1) What do you do to maintain a healthy work – life balance?
- 2) How do you "sharpen your saw" (7 Habits reference)?

- 3) What do you need from the school district to support your success in this position?
- 4) How do you respond to fast paced, high demand, increased stress situations at work?
- 5) How have you (or will you) support colleagues with work related stressors?
- 6) How do home/family stressors impact you within the work setting? Your relationship with students or colleagues?

Interview items were acquired/modified from the following sources or developed by Kelly Goodwin-Glick for use in school settings:

National Council for Behavioral Health

<https://www.nationalcouncildocs.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Interview-Questions-for-Trauma-Informed-Care.pdf>

Social Work Helper

<https://www.socialworkhelper.com/2015/09/22/common-job-interview-questions-therapists/>

Illinois Collaboration on Youth: Summary of Trauma Informed Interview Questions

Appalachian Behavioral Healthcare – Examples of Value Based Interview Questions