

Trauma Informed Pedagogy For Higher Education: Occupational Therapy

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Trauma

- Understanding trauma is not just about acquiring knowledge. It's about changing the way you see the world.
- Trauma-Informed Care is about changing the helping paradigm from “What’s wrong with you?” to “What happened to you?”
--Dr. Sandra Bloom, MD ,2007

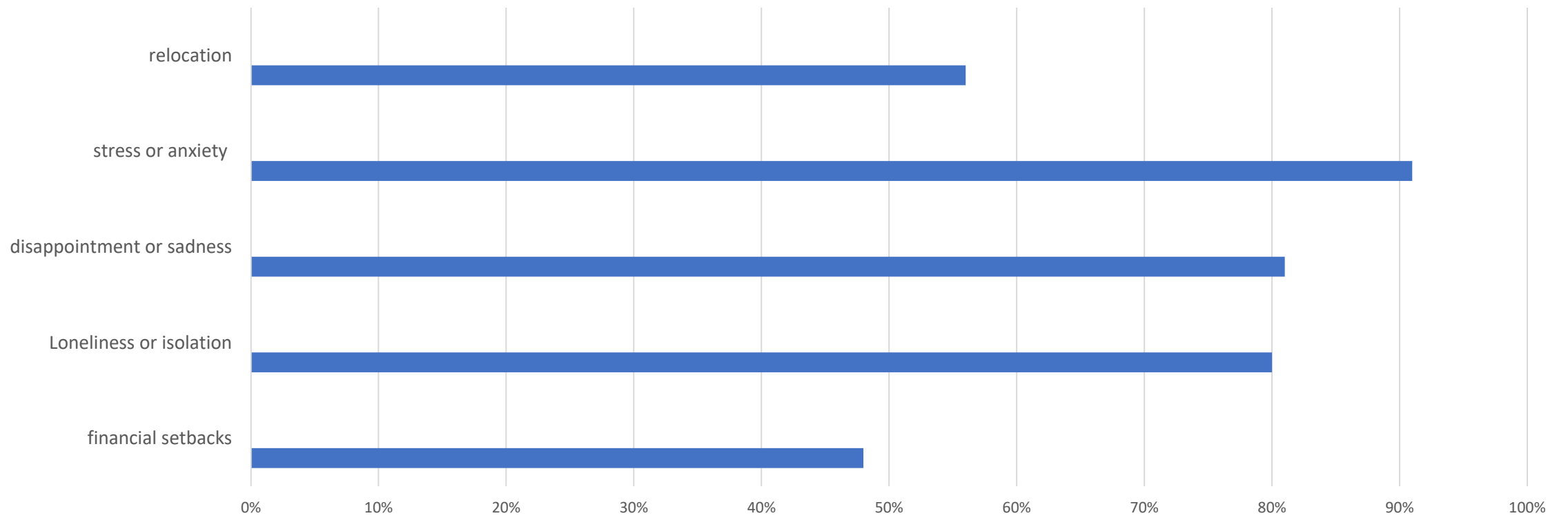
Occupational Therapy and Trauma

- Researchers have called for all health care providers and staff working with children, youth, and adults to apply Trauma Informed Approaches and interventions (AOTA, 2019).
- Occupational therapy practitioners are likely to work with individuals with a history of trauma across many settings, and it is imperative to have a working knowledge of ways to support these individuals.
- It has been argued that occupational therapists in health care share risk factors for burnout with other healthcare professionals, if not more.
 - These risk factors include repeated exposure to distress and difficult behavior, prolonged interventions and uncertain outcome.
 - Issues such as professional status, staffing issues and the nature of the profession have been identified as additional risk factors for occupational therapists (Lloyd & King, 2006).
 - The student profile is dominated by those who identify as female (AOTA, 2018)

College After/During COVID

- Active Minds surveyed 2,086 college students regarding the impact of COVID-19 on their mental health in April 2020.
 - 1 in 5 of college students say their mental health has significantly worsened under COVID-19
 - 80% of college students report that COVID-19 has negatively impacted their mental health
 - More than half of students (55%) say that they would not know where to go if they or someone they knew needed professional mental health services right away
 - Students are finding tools that promote social connection most helpful for caring for their mental health. These include video calls, digital social gatherings (i.e. games or Netflix watch parties), phone calls, and in-person conversations
 - 85% say that focusing on school and work despite distractions has been the most difficult thing about the stay-at-home orders.

THE MOST COMMON WAYS THAT COVID-19 HAS IMPACTED STUDENTS' LIVES



- Self Care has been challenging for students
 - 76% have trouble maintaining a routine
 - 73% struggle to get enough physical activity
 - 63% find it challenging to stay connected with others
- Despite COVID-19, 79% of college students feel hopeful about achieving their school-related goals and their future job prospects.

According to students, the most important things for school leaders to be thinking about in the short term and long term for student mental health during and after the pandemic include:

- Increased academic support: Leniency, accommodations, and flexibility
- More mental health resources: Increased investment in counseling and coping resources
- Focus on soft skills: Empathy, compassion, communication, understanding, and validation for the burdens students are experiencing
- More opportunities for social connection: Replace canceled events, services, and classes with virtual ones
- Engage in long-term planning: Colleges need to be prepared to help students heal and recover when they return and put in place improved practices and protocols to more easily pivot to remote learning in case of another similar crisis

Adverse Childhood Experiences = Childhood Trauma

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study (1998) A pivotal retrospective study that quantified the impact of traumatic experiences.
 - Almost 70% of Kaiser adult patients (n=17.000) reported at least one traumatic experience before the age of 18. Almost 50% report 1-3 traumatic events.
 - Philadelphia Urban ACEs included community factors, e.g., community violence, discrimination, foster care, etc.
 - Dose relationship with adult health outcomes, e.g., cancer, diabetes, lung disease, alcoholism, drug abuse, suicide, smoking, hypertension, heart disease, mental illness, etc.

Prevalence of ACEs in College Students

- Studies have reported 56-89% of college students have had at least one ACE, including the more severe ACEs and 22% reported symptoms consistent with PTSD (Doughty,2018)
 - Community college students report an even higher rate (Anders et al., 2012)
- Another study looked at the drop-out rate of freshmen who had ACEs compared to those who did not. There were significant enrollment differences in the 2nd semester of the freshmen year– 82% for ACE impacted students vs. 92% for non-ACE impacted students, the drop-out rate was even higher if the ACE was sexual abuse (Duncan, 2000) .

Prevalence of Traumatic Experiences for College-Age Students

- According to the AAU Survey (2015) about 23% of undergraduate women and 5.4% of men reported being sexually assaulted by physical force, incapacitation, or coercion.
 - ✓ USC undergraduate women reported 32% rate of SA (AAU, 2019)
- Some student cohorts have even higher rates of traumatic experiences, e.g., Native American, LGBTQ, African American, and Latino
- 66% of college students report experiences of sexual harassment (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2018)
- College students experience higher rates of stalking behavior than the general population.
- 21% of college students report having experienced dating violence by a current partner. 32% experienced dating violence by a previous partner (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2007)

Trauma Related Impacts for College Students

- Students who had traumatic experiences had a harder time adjusting to college
 - Within the first 12 months of college, 21% were treated for mental health issues and half reported trauma histories (American College Health Association, 2012)
- Higher rates of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse
- Students who had exposure to one ACE had more health-related complaints.
- Mitigating factors that reduced negative outcomes for college students with ACEs was the presence of supportive systems and secure attachment.

Trauma Related Academic Impacts for College Students

- Many studies have discussed the impact of trauma on academic attainment, e.g., lower IQ scores(8pts), lower test scores; higher drop out rates, disruptive behaviors, etc.
- Trauma impacts college students in many ways in regards to academic attainment:
 - Challenges with completing assignments or taking tests,
 - Needing more time to complete papers, making requests for special considerations
 - Dropping out within the first year of college
 - Missing classes
 - Unable to comprehend instructions or listen to lectures
 - Tend to be perceived as acting “needy”, “entitled” or seem “belligerent ”or “uncooperative”

A Trauma-Informed Paradigm

- An organizational structure framework that involves understanding, recognizing, and responding to the effects of all types of trauma on well-being and behavior.
- TIC emphasizes physical, psychological, social and moral safety.
- TIC helps survivors rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.
- Additionally, a trauma-informed system of care requires closely knit collaborative relationships with other service system partners who should be trauma-informed as well.

Why Are Trauma-Informed Approaches Necessary?

- Improves educational outcomes
- Supports personal development and well-being of students
- Prevents inadvertent re-traumatization
- Supports faculty and staff

Essentials of Trauma-Informed Approaches

- Connect – focus on relationships
- Protect – promote safety and trustworthiness
- Respect – engage in choice and collaboration
- Empower – provide opportunities to control situations
- Cultural Sensitivity/Privilege and Power
- Strengths-based
- Compassion and Support

What is Trauma-Informed Critical Pedagogy?

"Creating learning spaces that are opportunities for sharing, put the need of the learner at the core, utilize restorative and healing practices, and offer spaces for both self-reflection and critical analysis of larger structures that impact us down to the individual level.... It means learning about trauma, acknowledging its existence, and responding to it in both action and curriculum."— Cities of Peace, 2016

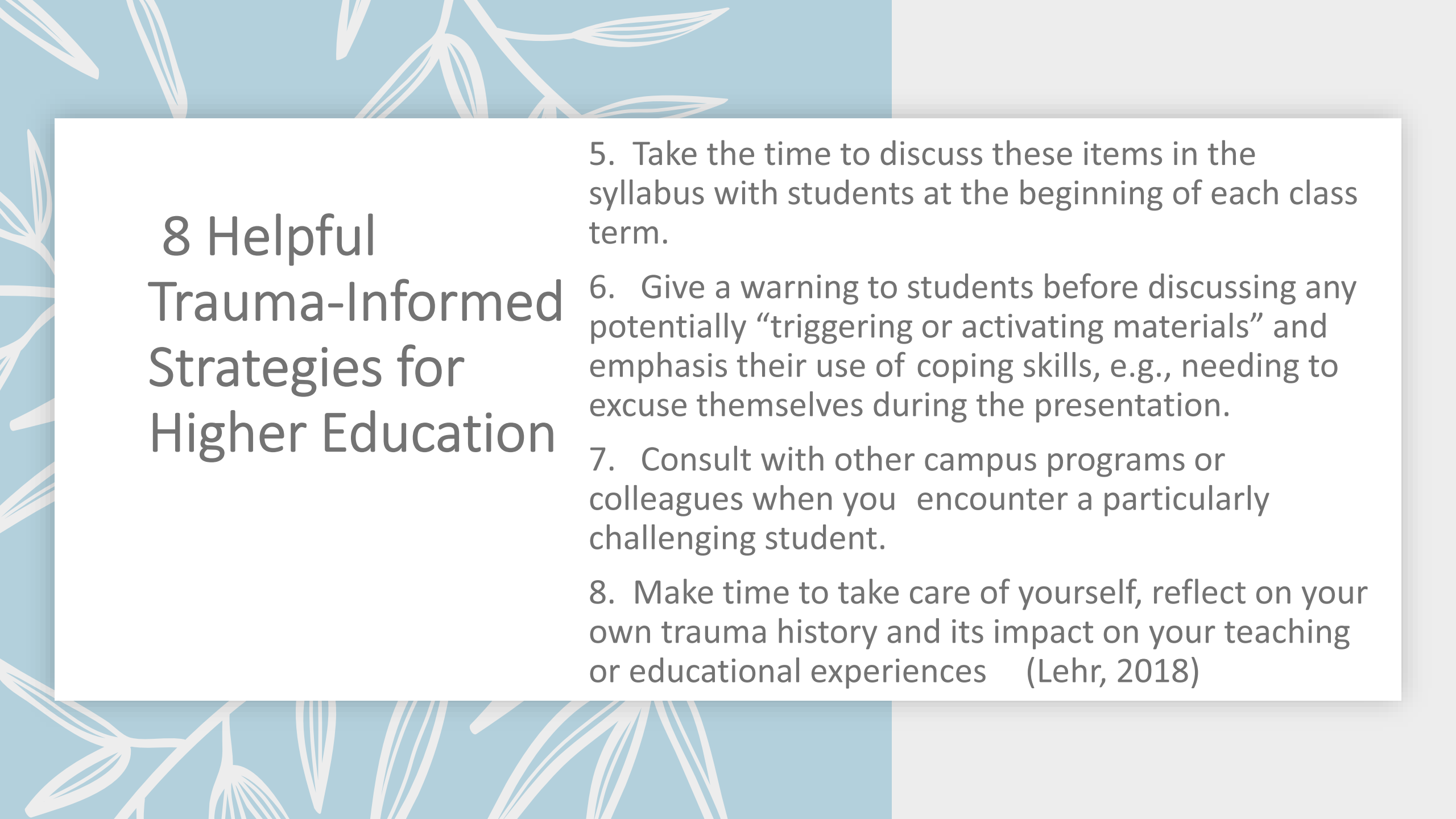
A Trauma Informed Critical Pedagogy:

- Realizes - people of any age may have experienced trauma - trauma takes many forms - problematic behavior often begins as an understandable attempt to cope with trauma.
Recognizes - different types of trauma that may be experienced, lived or even transferred through DNA - the signs and symptoms of trauma - educators and other adults also have trauma that may affect our behavior and responses, mindfulness is necessary.
- Responds - by maximizing student choice - teaches and integrates tools and knowledge to aid in healing and empowerment - with tools and knowledge that is RELEVANT both culturally and personally. - in ways that RESIST re-traumatizing - to build RESILIENCY in students so they can grow and thrive.

(Cities of Peace, 2016)

8 Helpful Trauma-Informed Strategies for Higher Education:

1. Establish and maintain clear expectations, demonstrating dependability, and giving students advance notice for changes.
2. Open up various channels of communication (office hours, frequent emailing, anonymous question/suggestion box) for students and members of the learning community to ask for what they need.
3. At the beginning of each semester ask students if there is anything they would like you to know that would help them have a better educational experience in the class or help you to understand them better.
4. Update syllabi to include information on trauma, campus resources, coping tips, etc.



8 Helpful Trauma-Informed Strategies for Higher Education

5. Take the time to discuss these items in the syllabus with students at the beginning of each class term.
6. Give a warning to students before discussing any potentially “triggering or activating materials” and emphasize their use of coping skills, e.g., needing to excuse themselves during the presentation.
7. Consult with other campus programs or colleagues when you encounter a particularly challenging student.
8. Make time to take care of yourself, reflect on your own trauma history and its impact on your teaching or educational experiences (Lehr, 2018)

Welcome Students Radically to Class

The Center for Advancement of Teaching, Wake Forest University:

- Welcome the students with an intentional invitation in the syllabus rather than a contract. (e.g. “Know that in this course, you are more than a number. I see you and you matter. I ask you to bring your own experiences to enrich one another. Let us begin this journey of learning together.”)
- Provide concrete options for how students can “take care of themselves” if they feel triggered by a topic or conversations (mute your video, send me a private chat, take a break, do a breathing exercise, get a drink of water, take a walk outside, etc.).
- Remind the students that you want them in your class and care about their wellbeing.

Foster Building Connections

- Explicitly talk about the importance of community building, learning from each other, and supporting each other within your class.
- Begin class with asking students about how they are doing, how their week has been going, or with a temperature check about their mood (discussion question, anonymous poll, etc.).
- Approach questions or concerns from a class/community perspective. For example, “How do we as a class want to address this?”, “What does this mean for us as a community?”, or “How can we all support each other through this?”
- Encourage students to build connections with each other through forming study groups, sharing support resources, and checking in on each other.

Impart Purpose

- As an assignment, ask students to describe a better world for them and their fellow human beings. Ask them to consider what role they play in moving toward that future. This helps them imagine and enact the future.
- Invite students to identify/reconnect with their sense of purpose.
- Foster metacognition and encourage students to make connections between the course and life.

Empower and Co-Create

- Explicitly state the value of students' knowledge, insights, and expertise within the course.
- Ask students about their preferences around topics, participation, and assignments through an individual form and/or through a class discussion.
- Encourage students to notice what they need in order to take care of themselves and be successful in their learning, expressing their needs, and meeting their needs.
- Provide frequent opportunities for student feedback about how the class is going and students' experiences with the material and the course structure (Elmagraby, 2021).



Questions

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