**My Trauma Informed Practice Experience**

**So far...**

Two years ago, I was invited to attend a training program that has since, I believe, changed my life for the better. The trauma informed practice approach allows me to support teenagers,  has been and continues to be, an incredibly positive experience. It  has both opened my eyes and encouraged me to become a more reflective practitioner at the secondary school I work in.  Being a parent myself to two teenage girls, I have embraced small positive changes to the way I communicate with them. I  understand that sometimes when the going gets tough it’s ok to just listen and be present rather than feel required to solve/ fix a problem or argument between them. Disagreements are inevitable and are allowed to happen, it’s how you respond that is key.

I don’t endeavour to have all the answers to my supported young peoples’ problems; but help to build up their self esteem with the belief that they are ALL awesome and encouraging them to dare to be brilliant, at anything that works for them, is just pure magic and so very important. I see the support that I give as a small jigsaw piece, sometimes the piece fits and other times it doesn’t.  What I have learned to be such an integral part of TIS healing process is to always have my well-being toolkit at hand that can help our young people draw the picture or fill in the gaps of any missing pieces to their own jigsaw so that it makes sense to them. The hard work to any given TIS task comes not only from the deep and meaningful conversations but also from the simplest of activities such as making a creature out of clay, painting a picture or even going for a walk. These actions invite connection, allow me to be present, in the moment and  further enable me to help  make a difference.

Embracing  the TIS approach has helped me to understand at a deeper level how certain traumatic events can impact so greatly on the lives of  young people. Events such as divorce, family bereavement (including much loved pets), moving house/schools and losing contact with friends or family can have such a detrimental effect on childrens’ emotional health very often leaving them feeling lost, angry and anxious. With much to highlight,  I feel that the following 3 areas have had the biggest impact on my practice;

**Connection-**This  is most definitely key, it helps to build on both current and new relationships and opens up lines of communication, whether that is spoken or non verbal.

**It’s ok to ask difficult questions**! Some situations that young people face are frightening, worrying, scary and upsetting. Very often as an emotionally available adult (EAA), I am  joining them at the end of their story. Through empathetic listening and being present can open a door for us both to make time to go back and re-read the beginning of the story which can be a very hard and painful thing to do. The ACE (adverse childhood experience) Questionnaire has helped provide guidance with this.

**Understanding all emotions is healthy**. In order for us to recognise what an emotion is, it is essential that we try to understand what it feels like, what it looks like and what we can do to help ourselves. Feelings such as anger, disappointment, confusion, sadness all need language to help us understand their meanings.  By validating that all feelings that are felt are real, is like shining a torch right in the feeling’s face. This allows for support to search for the right words to describe it and from then onwards find a way of coping next time that feeling comes around.

This process can take a long time, but with time, patience and a shared level of understanding it can and does happen.

Being an EAA I believe has strengthened my professional relationship with the school’s pastoral team and other key  members of staff. I have a greater understanding for the need to collaborate with key staff within the pastoral team to help me support with any ‘in house’ well-being issues that students may have. These have involved, creating Time to Talk sessions (TTT) where students are offered some time out from lessons to chat about worries/anxieties they might have, suggesting strategies to teachers and other support staff on ways that students can deal with anxiety led situations and speaking with parents that struggle to get their children through the school gates at the beginning of the day. This collaborative relationship has most definitely encouraged all staff to view TIS to be an integral part of each and everyone’s practice.

Sharing my role with that of being a Teaching Assistant (TA) and Autism Champion (AC) allows me to see the ‘whole child’ when they are in school and not just an anxious or angry one that seeks me out for an emergency well-being check in. The amazing aspect of the TIS approach to supporting young people, or anyone around you, is the complete awareness that we ALL have mental health, we ALL have good and not so good days and we ALL need some form of sharing platform to make us feel the best we can. By wondering, imagining and noticing (WIN) is fulfilling to know how much we can help someone even if that someone doesn’t realise they are being helped. Every behaviour is meaningful and every behaviour needs the recognition it deserves.

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