

Trauma Informed Reflective Supervision: Building Emotional Capacity and Resilience



Emily Santiago MS LEP and Greg Jennings, Ph.D.

The Center for Cognitive Diversity and California State University, East Bay CASP October 2019



Burnout is a community issue not an individual one. Educators need structured systems for emotional support.

15% of teachers leave the profession every year; in areas impacted by significant trauma the numbers are far higher.

Even the most caring and competent educator is vulnerable to burnout.

Self care strategies are not enough. Proactive mental health supports are needed in helping professions.

Introduction

Trauma Informed schools must prioritize safe and stable relationships. Thirty percent of teachers leave within their first 5 years; however in high poverty schools the turnover rate is 50% higher (Ronfeldt, Loeb et al 2013). This disruption of relationships harms all students but especially those with trauma. Working directly with people who have experienced trauma increases the risk of burnout.

Educators that recognize the impact of the work on their personal functioning are better able to address burnout and bias and be responsive to the needs of their students. *Reflective Supervision* builds resiliency and improves outcomes for staff and students and has been shown to reduce turnover by 12% in early infant mental health models (Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan, 2019). It is now time to expand this model to the K-12 space.

Trauma Informed Reflective Supervision enables professionals to:

- 1.) Reflect on experiences and implement Trauma Informed Strategies in their community
- 2.) Evaluate the impact of secondary trauma on their own personal functioning and develop examples of healing strategies
- 3.) Understand the limits of one's own assumptions and knowledge and being open to changing one's mind in the face of new situations and evidence

Expected Benefits of Trauma-Informed (TI) Reflective Supervision:

- Provides access and training to urban and rural areas, reducing barriers of distance, travel, and accessibility
- Promotes collaboration across regions and allows professionals to share knowledge and experience
- Allows people to openly discuss successes and challenges to reduce isolation and burnout
- Confronts bias in a safe and confidential setting
- Builds self compassion and understanding

Method

The Center for Cognitive Diversity has provided Reflective Supervision in small online groups to educators as part of a Trauma Informed Educator certification program since April 2018.

Confidential sessions were held 2 hours monthly via Zoom with a group of 3-5 educators for a recommended duration of 10 months. *Principals, general and special education teachers, university professors, school psychologists and school counselors* were part of the heterogeneous groups that ranged from early career to veteran educators with a focus on Trauma Informed practices.

Results

Participating educators reported that monthly Reflective Supervision gave a greater sense of 1. socio-emotional self awareness, 2. an increased capacity to respond to the emotional needs of students, and 3. a decrease in trauma response symptoms (i.e. chronic exhaustion, hypervigilance, fear, etc).

Next steps in the program are to examine how Reflective Supervision can reduce *staff turnover and burnout*. Educators also began piloting the *Dynamic Empowerment Self Assessment*™ tool monthly to monitor their wellbeing and reflect on the impact of trauma response. We hope to expand access to this tool for use with professionals to improve wellbeing and resilience.

What is Reflective Supervision?

Reflective Supervision (RS) is **'a collaborative relationship for professional growth that... strengthens practice. RS builds the capacity of individuals, relationships, and organizations by cherishing strengths and partnering around vulnerabilities'** (Shahmoon-Shanok, 1991). Creating a structured space to discuss complex emotions and challenges allows educators to feel heard and relieves stress. It also allows the staff person to experience the very sort of empathetic relationship that they are expected to provide for students and families in schools.

Core elements of TI Reflective Supervision:

- **Regular structured sessions (2 hours, once a month, online)**
- **Self Evaluation tool: Dynamic Empowerment Self Assessment™**
- **Confidentiality Agreements**
- **Modeling of co-regulation strategies**
- **Celebrating small wins and successes**
- **Providing a predictable and safe space to discuss challenges**



Small Group Reflective Supervision Video Conference

Testimonials and Results

Monthly Reflective Supervision was provided to 34 educators in 5 states. 100% of those participants who responded to the survey reported that "The Reflective Supervision course is helpful in both relieving stress and vicarious trauma from my job and receiving support."

'I am able to take time to look at how the work affects me and have colleagues I respect show they understand and offer strategies. With Reflective Supervision, I have been able to continue working in a school deeply affected by trauma and have hope.' -Andy, teacher, San Pablo, Ca

'I leave each session energized and full of ideas. I recommend this program to anyone who works in schools.' Brooke, university instructor, Fresno, Ca

'I was ready to leave the profession, Reflective Supervision, gave me a new way to understand my students and myself. I am now excited to continue teaching with purpose and compassion.' -Lauren, teacher, Carquinez, Ca

Trauma Informed Principles in Supervision

- Safety:** Sharing without judgement and providing confidentiality agreements
- Choice:** Identifying options and honoring decision making. Choosing to participate.
- Trust and Transparency:** Valuing and building relationships first, predictable schedule and agenda
- Empowerment:** Building self awareness and supporting skill development
- Collaboration:** Working together to listen, share resources and strategies
- Historical/Racial/ Gender Issues:** Reflection allows us to be vulnerable and address bias within ourselves. Groups encourage each other to do the brave work it takes to create systems that disrupt injustice, prejudice, and oppression in all its forms

Principles of TIC based on Fallot and Harris (2009)

Signs of Secondary Trauma

Even the most competent and caring educator may be vulnerable to burnout due to Secondary Trauma. These signs and symptoms are based on the work of Laura Van dernoot Lipsky and described in 'Trauma Stewardship.'

Trauma Exposure Response	Example
Feeling helpless and hopeless	"Why am I even getting out of bed?"
A sense that one can never do enough.	"I am not doing enough and I should be doing more."
Hypervigilance	"I eat in a hurry, I do everything in a hurry because I feel like there is a ticking time bomb waiting to go off."
Diminished Creativity	"All my energy goes to _____"
Inability to embrace complexity	You may become dogmatic and opinionated, and you may look to take a side in a debate no matter what it is about.
Minimizing	"Well I didn't get shot so what do I have to complain about?"
Chronic Exhaustion/ Physical Ailments	Stress induced diabetes
Inability to listen/deliberate avoidance	"I leave my voicemail full"
Dissociative moments	"I didn't realize what I was doing I found myself lost in the image of what happened to my client."
Sense of Persecution	"What if leaving is not an option? I'm a martyr there is nothing I can do."
Guilt	"How can I be going out to dinner right now?"
Fear	"I ask a colleague to walk me to my car."
Anger and Cynicism	"When you see suffering it is very hard not to want revenge"
Inability to empathize	"I have a hard time laughing and playing with my kids"
Addictions	"I find myself needing another glass of wine"
Grandiosity	"I can't take a day off, how could they go on without me?"

Resources

- Anje Van Berckelaer, MD. *Using Reflective Supervision to Support Trauma-Informed Systems for Children*. Multiplying Connections.
- Fallot, Roger & Harris, Maxine. (2015). *Creating Cultures of Trauma-Informed Care: A Self-Assessment and Planning Protocol*.
- Matthew Ronfeldt, Susanna Loeb, and James Wyckoff, "How Teacher Turnover Harms Student Achievement," *American Educational Research Journal* 50, no. 1 (2013): 4-36. Retrieved from: <http://aer.sagepub.com/content/50/1/4>.
- Scott Heller, S., & Gilkerson, L. (Eds). (2009). *A Practical Guide to Reflective Supervision*. Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE.
- Roni Berger and Laura Quiros. (2014). *Supervision for Trauma Informed Practice*. *Traumatology* Vol. 20, No. 4, 296-301
- Lipsky, Laura van Dernoot, Burk, Connie, *Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide To Caring For Self While Caring For Others*.
- Dynamic Empowerment Self Assessment*™ Center for Cognitive Diversity. <http://www.cogdiv.com>