Practicing Responding to Trauma Scenario Directions

Materials Needed
Trauma-informed, resilience-oriented schools principles
Practicing responding to trauma scenarios

Directions
Before beginning this activity, each participant should be familiar with the Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Principles and Discussion Questions.

Ensure that all participants have received the Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Principles document and the Practicing Responding to Trauma Scenarios document.

Break participants into smaller groups to facilitate discussion on the following prompts:

1. **What are the different assumptions behind the two responses to the student’s behavior?**

   Common responses might include:
   - *Students can’t vs. won’t do a specific action.*
   - *The student should behave with respect in all environments vs. the student does not have the skills to behave in the new school environment with a teacher who is touching her and trying to help.*

2. **How does each response help meet the following goals?**

   - Maintain high expectations
   - Reduce the challenging behavior
   - Solve chronic problems durably
   - Build skills and confidence
   - Create or restore a helping relationship

Note to facilitator: The second approach in each scenario comes closer to meeting all five goals. Whereas the first approach may reduce the challenging behavior without achieving these goals.

Follow-Up Activity
Create scenarios that directly reflect your school population for further discussion. It is suggested that scenarios leave off the second response and have participants create a more trauma-informed, resilience-oriented response to the student and the situation.

Adapted from Black, P. (n.d.). Trauma Scenarios Directions. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.
Scenario #1
“Ashley just transferred into my 4-year-old classroom after being placed in foster care. I wanted to make her feel welcome. I moved to put my hand lightly on her shoulder when I was explaining an assignment, but she slapped my hand away. Then she stared at me defiantly.”

Common Response
“Why she just decided to slap me is beyond me. I was trying to be helpful and welcoming. Her reaction was totally out of proportion to the situation. Physical aggression simply cannot be tolerated or excused. She needed to learn that right away. There had to be immediate and significant consequences if I am to maintain order in my classroom. When I tried to remove Ashley to the office, she just lost it. Instead of complying, she chose to struggle and start kicking me. I don’t like to see students suspended, but Ashley needs to learn that she cannot behave that way in school.”

Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Response
“I must have startled Ashley without meaning to. It is clear she does not want to be touched. She may have other triggers, as well. If I put any extra demands or expectations on her right now when she is hyper-aroused, she could escalate and that will just make the situation worse. I told Ashley we would talk about what just happened when she calms down. I need to build a relationship with her and help her feel safe or she won’t be able to learn in my classroom. I know it’s common for kids in foster care to have trauma. I need to find out more about what Ashley’s needs are by talking to her when she’s calmer, reviewing her school records, and consulting with her foster parents and caseworker. If I need to, I’ll contact our Building Consultation Team for support.”
**Scenario #2**
“Aiden just transferred into my 5th grade class. His family is in the adoption process. I wanted to make him feel welcome. I moved to put my hand lightly on his shoulder when I was explaining an assignment. He pushed me away and ran out of the room.”

**Common Response**
“Why he chose to push me away and leave the room is beyond me. I was trying to be helpful and welcoming. His reaction was totally out of proportion to the situation. Physical aggression simply cannot be tolerated or excused. He needed to learn that right away. There had to be immediate and significant consequences if I’m to maintain order in my classroom. When I told Aiden to go to he office, he kicked the wall in the hall and ran outside. I don’t like to see students suspended, but Aiden needs to learn that he cannot behave that way in school.”

**Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Response**
“I must have startled Aiden without meaning to. It’s clear he has difficulty when he is touched. He went into flight mode immediately, which tells me he felt unsafe. My first priority needs to be to find out how to help Aiden feel safe in the classroom.

We started to work on that after the incident. Aiden ran to the playground. I called for coverage in my classroom and went to the playground to make sure that Aiden was safe. When he began breathing regularly, I approached him and asked if he was ready to talk. I asked him ‘What happened?’ and followed up with ‘How would you like me to get your attention next time?’ I know it’s common for kids who have been adopted at a later age to have trauma histories. I need to find out more about what his needs are through brief daily conversations, reviewing his school records, and consulting with his pre-adoptive parents and caseworker. If I need to, I’ll contact our Building Consultation Team for support.”
Scenario #3
A school has experienced a sharp increase in discipline referrals at lunch and recess. The lunchroom is loud and chaotic. Problems in the lunchroom then carry out to the playground resulting in rule breaking and student fights. The lunchroom expectations have been taught on two occasions. This has resulted in no change in the data.

Common Response
To address these problems, classes are lined up and are not allowed into the lunchroom until they are at noise “level zero.” Students have assigned seating and are expected to be silent at lunch until behavior improves. Students are not dismissed to recess until they meet lunchroom expectations. Recess is a privilege that needs to be earned through good lunchroom behavior. Students who do not earn it go to a supervised classroom until recess is over.

Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Response
School staff are curious about what is going on. Teachers are given questions to discuss the problem with their students in a community circle. Students report the following stressors: They need a break from the rigor of the classroom, are hungry and want to be first in line before the favorite foods run out. Some students reported others talking about them on social media and behind their back at school.

The school staff decided to hold restorative circles to discuss social media conflicts. They have staggered lunch start time to have fewer students in line at a time and reduce noise. They created a lunch/recess committee with several students and teachers, an administrator, and the staff person in charge of food service. The task of this committee was to redesign lunch/recess protocols and practices.
Scenario #4
“Andy just transferred into our high school after being placed in foster care. She showed up late to biology and I reminded her what time school starts. She glared at me and then said, ‘I know how to tell time, b****’ and walked out of class.”

Common Response
“Why she yelled at me and walked out is beyond me. I was trying to be helpful because we start earlier than the neighboring high school. Her reaction was totally out of proportion to the situation. Verbal aggression simply cannot be tolerated or excused. She also cannot just walk out of my class. She needed to learn that right away. There had to be immediate and significant consequences if I’m to maintain order in my classroom. I called the behavior response team right away. I don’t like to see students suspended, and I don’t know what it was like in her previous school---but that kind of behavior is not tolerated here at our school. She needs to learn that if she is going to make it.”

Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Response
“I wonder what it’s like for Andy in the morning. What barriers could there be to her even getting to school? It’s clear that calling out her tardiness in front of the class didn’t work for her or for me. She may have other triggers, as well. I told Andy we would talk about what just happened when she calms down. I need to build a relationship with her and help her feel safe or she won’t be able to learn in my classroom. I know it’s common for kids in foster care to have trauma. I need to find out more about what Andy’s needs are by talking to her when she’s calmer, reviewing her school records, & consulting with her foster parents and caseworker. If I need to, I’ll contact our Building Consultation Team for support.”
**Secondary School Scenarios**

**Scenario #5**
A middle school has experienced a sharp increase in discipline referrals during the transition from entering the school to getting to first hour homeroom. The hallways are loud and chaotic. Students are often running after each other and shouting. Problems that start on the way to school between students result in rule breaking and student fights. The students have been reminded of hallway expectations twice during their first hour homeroom.

**Common Response**
To address these problems, students are assigned a designated entrance based on grade level, lined up, and allowed into the building on a staggered schedule. With double staff supervision assigned, students are instructed to keep their voices to ‘level zero.’ Students who receive additional referrals receive one hour in-school suspension and have to write about the importance of maintaining punctuality in a ‘work environment.’

**Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Response**
School staff are curious about what is going on. Teachers are given questions to discuss the problem with their students in a community circle. Students report the following stressors: They don’t get many chances during the school day to socialize, since lunch is also highly controlled. Some students reported others talking about them on social media and behind their back at school. They also report not understanding the purpose of their first hour homeroom since it’s just adults telling them about rules or making them do ACP projects they don’t understand.

The school staff decided to hold restorative circles to discuss social media conflicts. They also created an advisory committee with several students and teachers, and an administrator. The task of this committee was to redesign the first hour homeroom so that it was useful for staff and students both. School staff set up several meeting spaces where students can gather close to their homeroom to socialize before class starts. They also instituted a flexible tardy policy which allows for a start time of the first hour homeroom to deviate by five minutes to help students transition.
Scenario #6
A school has experienced a sharp increase in discipline referrals at lunch and recess. The lunchroom is loud and chaotic. Problems in the lunchroom then carry out to the hallways and school yard resulting in rule breaking and student fights. The lunchroom expectations have been taught on two occasions. This has resulted in no change in the data.

Common Response
To address these problems, classes are lined up and are not allowed into the lunchroom until they are at noise “level zero.” Students have assigned seating and are expected to be silent at lunch until behavior improves. Students are not dismissed to recess until they meet lunchroom expectations. Leaving the lunchroom is a privilege that needs to be earned through good lunchroom behavior. Students who do not earn it go to a supervised classroom until the full lunch period is over.

Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Response
School staff are curious about what is going on. Teachers are given questions to discuss the problem with their students in a community circle. Students report the following stressors: They need a break from the rigor of the classroom, are hungry and want to be first in line before the favorite foods run out. Some students reported others talking about them on social media and behind their back at school.

The school staff decided to hold restorative circles to discuss social media conflicts. They have staggered lunch start time to have less students in line at a time and reduce noise. They created a lunchtime committee with several students and teachers, an administrator, and the staff person in charge of food service. The task of this committee was to redesign lunchtime protocols and practices.
Scenario #7
A middle school has experienced a sharp increase in discipline referrals while entering the school and moving to their first hour homeroom. The hallways are loud and chaotic. Students are often running after each other and shouting. Problems that start on the way to school between students result in rule breaking and student fights. The students have been reminded of hallway expectations twice during their first hour homeroom.

Common Response
To address these problems, students are assigned a designated entrance based on grade level and lined up and are let into the building on a staggered schedule. With double staff supervision assigned, students are instructed to keep their voices to ‘level zero.’ Students who receive additional referrals receive 1-hour in-school suspension and have to write about the importance of maintaining punctuality in a ‘work environment.’

Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Response
School staff are curious about what is going on. Teachers are given questions to discuss the problem with their students in a community circle. Students report the following stressors: They don’t get many chances during the school day to socialize, since lunch is also highly controlled. Some students reported others talking about them on social media and behind their back at school. They also report not understanding the ‘point’ of homeroom since it’s just adults telling them about rules or making them do additional projects they don’t understand and that don’t earn any credits.

The school staff decided to hold restorative circles to discuss social media conflicts. They also created an advisory committee with several students, teachers, and an administrator. The task of this committee was to redesign the homeroom period so that it was useful for both staff and students. School staff set up several ‘meeting spaces’ where students can gather close to their homerooms to socialize before class starts. They also instituted a flexible tardy policy which allows for a start time of an advisory to deviate by 5 minutes to help students transition.
Staff Scenarios

Scenario #8
An elementary school has experienced a sharp increase in discipline referrals at lunch and recess. The lunchroom is loud and chaotic. Problems in the lunchroom then carry out to the playground resulting in rule breaking and student fights. The lunchroom expectations have been taught on two occasions. This has resulted in no change in the data.

Common Response
To address these problems, classes are lined up and are not allowed into the lunchroom until they are at noise “level zero.” Students have assigned seating and are expected to be silent at lunch until behavior improves. Students are not dismissed to recess until they meet lunchroom expectations. Recess is a privilege that needs to be earned through good lunchroom behavior. Students who do not earn it go to a supervised classroom until recess is over.

Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Response
School staff are curious about what is going on. Teachers are given questions to discuss the problem with their students in a community circle. Students report the following stressors: They need a break from the rigor of the classroom, are hungry and want to be first in line before the favorite foods run out. Some students reported others talking about them on social media and behind their back at school.

The school staff decided to hold restorative circles to discuss social media conflicts. They have staggered lunch start time to have less students in line at a time and reduce noise. They created a lunch/recess committee with several students and teachers, an administrator, and the staff person in charge of food service. The task of this committee was to redesign lunch/recess protocols and practices.
Scenario #9
John Hampton has been reunited with his family after two years in foster care. He is in 7th grade and has two younger siblings. The school has been given information showing that his mother, Mrs. Hampton has completed her counseling and community service related to her DUI and domestic abuse charges. John is happy to be back with his mom and siblings, and they are relieved he is home. However, reuniting as a family has been difficult. His mother is in the process of learning how to support his regulation needs which means that sometimes he comes to school dysregulated and other days he is ready to learn. Mom has not been able to assist him with homework as she is making dinner for the children once she gets home from work around 6 pm. As a result, many days John arrives at school unprepared for the day. It is the end of the quarter and John has 10 missing assignments in math.

Common Response
John’s math teacher, Mrs. Lang, has made a call to his mother. She stated that she is worried about his grade and wonders why his homework has not been completed. The teacher asks John’s mom the following questions:

1. Does John ever do any homework for math?
2. Do you check his assignment notebook to see what he must do?
3. Do you set aside time for homework and sit with John while he does it?

Mrs. Lang states that John will fail math if he cannot get his homework done and come to school prepared. She must see improvement to be able to give him the benefit of the doubt. John’s mom becomes upset and starts yelling over the phone at Mrs. Lang. She swears and says that the teacher isn’t doing her job and that it is not the family’s job to teach her son math. After all she is not in 7th grade and hasn’t gone to school to learn how to teach. Mrs. Hampton is going to complain to the principal and get Mrs. Lang in trouble. Then she is going to post on Facebook what a terrible teacher Mrs. Lang is and how she doesn’t do her job! The teacher hangs up on John’s mom and immediately goes to the teacher’s lounge to let off steam about this incompetent mom who does not care about school. She starts by saying, “No wonder John is a terrible student! His mother is crazy!”
**Family Scenario**

**Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Response**

John’s 7th grade math teacher, Mrs. Lang is concerned about John’s 10 missing assignments. She decides to call his mother and find out if there is anything she can do to help. Mrs. Lang begins the conversation by asking how things are at home, how John is feeling about being at home and how it is going for Mom and John’s siblings. John’s mom states that it has been stressful. She can barely get dinner on the table and get the kids to bed before she washes clothes and prepares lunches for everyone the next day.

Mrs. Lang says, “thank you for sharing this with me. John is struggling in math, but I can hear that it is difficult for him to get work done at home. It is important that all of you work on bringing your family back together. John is missing some assignments. Do you think there is anything I can do to help him get caught up?”

Mrs. Hampton responds that she wants him to do well and wonders if the teacher could help him for a little while after school.

Mrs. Lang responds that she can do that and will talk to John tomorrow about scheduling some time. She asks Mrs. Hampton to please let her know if there is anything else the school can do to help their family.

Mrs. Hampton ends the conversation by saying she is so grateful for the call and will keep in contact. She encourages Mrs. Lang to text her if there are problems that the home can help address.