

Please note: This is a transcription of what the expert says in this module. It includes all words and is not edited to correct grammar or other errors.

Question: What do I do if a student discloses a traumatic experience?

So if a student discloses a traumatic experience to you, we want to be very careful about what they're saying. Without a whole lot of detail, we can probably get a sense that this is something traumatic. This is something really adverse and that the student will need help. So let's cut them off before they start going down the road of giving all the details of their entire traumatic story, not because it's not important but because they're not ready to share it. They're going to experience a whole lot of symptoms because their trauma is not resolved. But if they start to tell us, we want to be encouraging, right? We want to let them know that this is important, that we're proud of them for sharing, that we understand that it could be really difficult and that maybe they've been waiting a long time to tell anyone about this and that it's important that they do tell. And let's set up the time and setting so that they can disclose so that they can follow through and share their story with someone who's a professional. So part of the reason why we want to cut a student off if they're beginning to tell a traumatic experience is because we want to help the student to stay regulated. Often times the way traumatic memory works is if these events are entangled with emotions and physical sensations and students may even start to dissociate not even be in touch with what they're doing the deeper into the story they go. We want to help them stay grounded in reality because in reality is where they are safe. The closer they get back to their traumatic experience, the more they're talking about it, the less safe they feel. And the more arousal we get, the more symptoms we get, the more difficult it is for them. So what we're helping them to do is stay grounded in the moment with us. We can get the initial detail, the basics of what happened. And then let's try to slow them down. If they're getting too upset to even give that we need to get them some privacy pair them up with someone who's a professional and set them up to tell it in a way that if nothing else, as they're disclosing, so that we can get services involved. There's someone there who understands how to validate without over validating, right? Someone who can help them to feel heard without edging them deeper into the trauma that could possibly lead them to be more overwhelmed, have more difficulty, feel less safe.

Question: What should I do if a student starts talking about their own traumatic experience during the lesson?

So if we're teaching a lesson and a student starts to communicate about their own traumatic experience, we need to interrupt them almost immediately and it's not because we don't want to hear what they're saying. It's because retelling stories of trauma can be very triggering and can lead them to re-experience the trauma, experience things like flashbacks and have things come back to them like visceral thoughts and images and overwhelming physical sensations. So when we're interrupting that child, the reason we're doing it is actually for their own safety and to stop the trauma from accumulating on itself. So we can interrupt them and we can do

it still in a way that's respectful and in a way that communicates that we understand. This is something that maybe they need to talk about so it could be as simple as, "I hear you. It sounds like this is a personal experience that you went through and I want you to be heard but because we have the whole class here, this is not the time". So let's follow up. When? Right after class. Right when the bell rings and let's link them to someone that they can discuss it with, that they can disclose to that will know what to do with that information.

Question: What should I do if we are in a group setting and students start to share their own traumatic experiences?

So if we start one of these lessons and all of a sudden, one student starts sharing a personal experience and another student starts sharing a personal experience and it starts to shower the room with all these negative experiences and conversation starts to really break out, we have to act quickly and immediately because what we're competing against is then the overwhelm for each of those individuals as they tell their experience. And the more they get in touch with their trauma, the less control they might be in the moment of specifically what they're doing. They can feel more physically activated, they could be more sensitive to perceived threats and maybe take action in a way that isn't necessary. So we need to find a way to get the room back on track. If that means calling someone in according to school safety protocols, whether it's security or an administrator or whatever it is we need, do that. Now, teachers are usually pretty savvy. They know their classrooms well, so if leading into the lesson, you know you have some students that are difficult to manage in emotional discussion, maybe we have someone to back us up already on deck. Hey, I'm heading into period 6. This class has struggled with the book that we were reading. There is a theme around whatever it might have been combat child abuse sexual abuse, whatever it was and they really struggled then were going to bring up some of that same content today. Can you just be ready? Can you just be by your phone if I need you or maybe you come in with me from the beginning and give me an extra adult in the room to be able to manage the dynamics.

Question: If I know a student has a history of trauma, should I approach the lessons differently?

So if we know, based on background information or whatever it might be, that a student has a trauma history, it's important that we acknowledge it in our own minds and monitor that student may be a little bit more closely. The trap there is that all students could really have a history that we don't know about. So really we need to be monitoring as many of the students as we can as we go through our lessons in general, but if there's a specific student that we're worried about, then knowing their level and depending on your relationship and maybe that child has actually disclosed their trauma to you and that's how you know, so maybe then it's giving them a little

bit of a frame beforehand or even providing them with an option. Hey, look, I know that you told me earlier in the year, you had a really bad experience with your dad. We're going to be talking about some of those topics today in class. So I want to give you an option. You can join us in class and then let's figure out a sign. So if you need to bail or you need to leave and take space, we know what you're going to do. Or maybe I set you up with the counselor downstairs and you can go through the topic with them rather than with the whole class and be in a better position to regulate to understand the information and to not have to worry about your classmates.

Question: If I see some warning signs and think that a student may have undergone some form of trauma, what should I do?

So in general If you feel like you're seeing signs of maybe trauma has occurred for the student, but they haven't come forward. Maybe we even went as far as asking and they're still not really giving you an answer but our concern lives on, there's no harm in being able to discuss the concern with a couple of your colleagues to see if maybe they share your concern. And maybe even go as far as contacting child protective services and evaluating if this is able to be referred. A lot of screening centers for child protective services have the option where you can go and talk to them about, "This is what I'm seeing. Is this worthy of a referral. Is this something that you would take action on?" And they'll let you know pretty directly, "You would need more information" or "You know, with how little we have we can't really go on it". Or maybe they say, "You know, what we're going to do a follow-up in 24 hours, 48 hours, just to make sure that your concern isn't necessarily the case and make sure the student is safe".