

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 should I do if our community and students have experienced a traumatic experience like a death or natural disaster?

So when there's a community-wide experience, I think we need to recognize that we need a community-wide intervention, right? This is where we really need to look around at our fellow staff members and to our leaders in the district and figure out how we're going to coordinate our effort to meet the response of the community to this event. Shared experiences that are traumatic can be really powerful but they can also really feed traumatic growth in the aftermath. A community that can be strengthened, a community that can be united. But that only happens if we coordinate our efforts.

Question: What are some protective skills that I can teach my students to mitigate the effects of trauma?

So if we're thinking about ways that we might promote resilience and protective factors in our students, we can really look at things like social emotional learning and character development. Even if we think about something like self-awareness for the student who has been through trauma. Even just being aware enough of what's happening in their body, emotionally in their thoughts and physically, can make a huge difference in terms of whether or not they're then able to communicate their concerns and whether or not they recognize if something is maybe not going as it should. It's really similar with a lot of the areas of SEL. We think about relationship skills, right? Having strong relationships with others is a key factor in protecting students from trauma and a lot of other risk factors. So being able to engage in a relationship becomes a massively important skill. It's similar with self-management, right? Your ability to manage your own behaviors and regulate your emotions. A lot of the riskiest choices that students make are in an intense emotional state. So if they have tools to be able to take the edge off of their emotions to be able to dial back the stress a little bit, they're going to be able to think more clearly and be at less risk. It's similar also with decision-making. If we can teach them a proper way to understand decisions and the consequences of the decisions they make and how to weigh different factors, that can also be really important for them cuz moment-to-moment, they could be more effective in the decisions that they're making.

Question: I am trying to help help my students manage the stress that they are experiencing but I am starting to feel overwhelmed myself. What do I do?

So if you're trying to help students, or even just a single student, let alone a group of students that may be are dealing with a high level of stress based on any variety of different things and now you're starting to notice, it's starting to wear on you a little bit, right? You're starting to notice, it's starting to wear on you a little bit little more irritable.

Maybe you're a little more sensitive, right? Maybe you're checked out. Maybe you find yourself not caring as much as you normally would or not feeling like what you can do can make a difference. This is a really important time to take a step back. Something like compassion fatigue is really commonly experienced where we're trying to help someone and we end up taking on the brunt of some of what they've been facing. And it wears on us. We need to be willing to acknowledge that it's happening and find ways to support ourselves. It's not always easy to take a step back from our students, but we can take a step back from ourself and ask honestly, how are we doing. And then try to structure our life in a way that we can recharge. There are always things in people's lives that reinvigorate them and the basics of being healthy is a great way to start, right? How is your sleep? How is your appetite? The basic things that we do to regulate ourselves. Are those still in check for you? And then at the end of the day we might need someone to talk to. It could be a colleague. It could be a professional. But keeping that inside and isolating with it, it will only build over time and ultimately I think it shapes people into maybe acting in ways that they wouldn't normally like because they're responding to emotion rather than who they are and what's important to them. And over time, that only contributes to feelings of burnout and feeling more worn down. So we have to be honest with ourselves. We have to be willing to take a step back and put our wellness first. We need to be willing to ask for help. And we need to be willing to maybe even ask, "Do we need help even for the students? Am I taking too much on in my role?". And maybe I need to be tapping those around me to also come alongside and help these same students so that I'm not crushed under the weight of trying to do it all by myself.

Question: I know the importance of looking out for warning signs and monitoring my students' behavior but how do I do that in a virtual classroom setting?

So being in a virtual climate for education can definitely create barriers to monitoring warning signs and other risk factors in general. At the same time it can create some unique opportunities. It's rare that we get a window into a student's home. And so there are times where maybe just by looking specifically at each student in their display, we might notice things in their environment that we would have never gotten to see before. And it could be something as simple as a student that has a knife in the background or maybe a student that has a bottle of pills that they didn't realize are in the frame, right? Just little things that we can notice. They might have, you know, any variety of stuff that you might be able to catch. You might be able to hear a little bit more of what their home environment is like based on how people are communicating with them and the types of exchanges that they're having in the home. Beyond that I think we really are then stuck with we need to figure out how we're going to elicit student input and feedback. And this is more so, takes a kind of a very conscious effort to make sure that each student is contributing so a very conscious effort to make sure that each student is contributing so that we can get a snapshot of how they seem. If students can go class to class in a virtual day without being on camera or giving much verbal input at all, we're really at a massive disadvantage in terms of knowing whether or not a student is at risk. So if we can manage to get them to give us just a little bit of input and have just a little bit of direct contact, that makes a big difference. If you have a student, you're not hearing

from at all, maybe it's time to have a breakout session. Doesn't have to be long but a brief check in. Or maybe you tap a member of your team and say, "Hey, this student was talking, was engaged. They seem to be falling off. Would you mind following up?". Maybe it's a parent phone call. So maybe now we're calling the home and it's not to say anything specifically good or bad. But just to say how are things going, right? "I haven't heard from your son, daughter, child in a little while and I really would like to get a sense of how they seem to you. What have you been noticing at home?". And all those things are kind of an additional layer that we need to consider now being virtual. Yeah, so as educators, a lot of what we rely on is noticing patterns in our students to be able to figure out where they're at. And depending on how you're conducting your virtual classroom, you might still have that opportunity. But in order to have the opportunity we need to have times where students are actively contributing and engaged. If our virtual format is lecture, how much opportunity are we really getting to recognize patterns at students? We don't have down time. We don't have hallways. We don't have as much of the transition time. However, there is still some, right? Technical difficulties, half the class has logged on, half hasn't been there yet. Take advantage of those opportunities as much as you can. It's hard 'cuz we're usually multitasking but a couple of minutes of chitchat can give you a little bit of that window of what is going on for them. And can I notice this pattern?