
Trauma-Sensitive Vision Questions

The Trauma Sensitive Vision Questions are an important part of the process for becoming a Trauma Sensitive School (TSS), a process that begins with a shared and deepening understanding of the impacts of traumatic experiences on student learning. **A Trauma Sensitive School (TSS) is one in which all students feel safe, welcomed, supported and empowered to participate fully in all the school has to offer. Addressing trauma's impact on learning, including trauma from racism and other structural inequities on a school-wide basis is at the center of its educational mission.** It is a place where an ongoing inquiry-based process allows for the necessary team work, coordination, creativity and sharing of responsibility for all students, and where continuous learning is for educators as well as students. A shared understanding is central to this work as it provides an added dimension for understanding *how* our students learn and behave and in so doing helps us develop a trauma sensitive lens. Having and using this trauma sensitive lens is guided by these vision questions as we develop action plans to address our school-based priorities.

Much has changed since we were together with our colleagues and students in school buildings last March. Our students and their families have experienced the collective and unprecedented traumas of both a public health and economic crisis exacerbated by systemic racial inequities as well as the police killings of black men and women which led to widespread marches and demonstrations. As we embark on the coming school year, whether learning takes place face-to-face, remotely or in a hybrid model, trauma-sensitive educators prepare to respond to the needs of our school community. Now more than ever, understanding the impact trauma has on the ability of children to learn is critical to our students' success. Trauma-sensitive schools are uniquely positioned to understand and respond to the impact these crises are having on students, families and educators.

The challenges schools face are significant, but the recognition that learning requires **safety, trusting relationships, connection, equity and belonging, adaptability** and **all of us working together** guides us in creating the needed changes in our school to support students' success through creating a trauma-sensitive, safe and supportive learning environment. We can expect a uniquely challenging school year, making trauma-sensitivity more important than ever in keeping our students engaged in learning, and in fostering their sense of belonging to our caring school community.

As we bring our students back to school, in whatever way that is, trauma-sensitive educators will consider the kinds of actions that we, as a school community, want to take to address our priorities and urgencies. Below we offer a tool – ***the trauma-sensitive vision questions*** - that helps us consider how the proposed actions will move us closer to our over-arching vision of creating a trauma-sensitive, safe and supportive school.

The purpose is not necessarily to answer each question, but rather to help remind us in general terms of the **attributes** of a trauma-sensitive school as we consider priorities and plan action steps. These questions help us solve problems, make decisions, and inform our action planning.

How will addressing this priority or taking a particular action ...

*deepen our **shared understanding** across the school community of how trauma impacts learning and the need for a whole- school approach that values the expertise of educators and includes the voice of students and families?*

*help us to effectively **support all students** to feel safe -physically, socially, emotionally and academically?*

*address students' needs in **holistic ways**, taking into account their relationships, self-regulation, academic competence, and physical and emotional well-being?*

***explicitly connect** students to the school community and provide multiple opportunities for students to practice newly developing skills throughout the school so they feel a sense of true belonging?*

*support us to **work together as a team** with a sense of shared responsibility for every student?*

*help us **anticipate and adapt** to the ever-changing needs of our students?*

How can we use the trauma-sensitive vision questions ...

during collective reflection and inquiry about how to best create a trauma-sensitive, safe and supportive school, with all staff discussing together how to best serve students in the current COVID-19 context?

in grade level team discussions?

by individual teachers who are thinking of creative ways to connect with students both online as well as in person, when the time comes?

as a tool to help problem-solve what might be getting in the way of a group or individual students engaging in online learning?

as a guide in thinking about - in a hybrid model —helping students who are at home stay connected on the days they aren't in school?

A decorative graphic consisting of several overlapping, semi-transparent purple shapes that form a triangular shape pointing to the right, located at the top left of the page.

Read More:

A Guide to Creating Trauma-Sensitive Schools: Download a free copy of [Helping Traumatized Children Learn, Vol. 2](#) and read more about the trauma-sensitive vision questions on p. 65.

Educators Speak: Students, families, and educators alike faced the stressful challenges resulting from sudden school closures in March, 2019. TLPI convened a group of trauma-sensitive school leaders to listen to the many ways in which they are using the trauma lens to buffer the traumatic effects of the challenges and guide their work during these difficult times. [Please read more about their thinking and guiding questions here.](#)

Importance of belonging: Literature corroborates that social rejection affects the brain in similar ways that physical pain does. [Please read more here.](#)

Importance of Safety: A Washington Post article published this summer notes that *Being Safe and Feeling Safe Aren't the Same Thing*. [Read the article here.](#)

Follow the link for additional resources, including blogs and videos:
www.traumasensitiveschools.org

as a handout, or if we are all in the same building, these questions could be posted in the room where we meet to help guide our action planning discussions.

Expanded Trauma-Sensitive Vision Questions

1. How will taking these actions deepen leadership's and staff's shared understanding of how trauma impacts learning, relationships and behavior and why a school wide-approach is needed?

Consider leadership's and staff's understanding of the following:

- trauma is prevalent among the student population
- trauma can play a major role in difficulties students face in learning, behavioral and relationships issues
- students need support to develop skills to overcome these difficulties and succeed in school
- the goal is NOT to identify specific students but rather to create a whole-school environment that will support ALL students
- all students want to succeed, and educators need to look for the good intentions that underlie challenging behaviors
- trauma is a systemic factor that impacts how we view our students as well as how our students learn and behave. Creating a trauma sensitive school (TSS) is necessary to address the whole school (systemic) nature of trauma's impacts, without which the burden of these impacts is born solely by the student as they struggle to adapt to succeed in school. The process for creating a TSS (Understanding, Readiness, Reflection/Action planning) is a model for implementing whole school change that can be used with other systemic inequities, including race

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2. How will taking these actions help schools effectively support all students to feel safe-physically, socially, emotionally and academically?

Consider whether the school environment is:

- experienced by each and every student as a safe place including:
 - physical safety
 - social safety
 - emotional safety
 - academic safety
- organized in such a way that all students' needs for safety are met
- based on a structure that maintains the balance between consistent expectations of all community members with the flexibility of a caring inclusive and equitable learning environment
- characterized by predictable routines and respectful relationships

3. How will taking these actions help us address all students' needs in holistic ways?

Consider whether the school focuses on:

- helping students succeed by supporting them to develop skills in four key areas that are critical to learning: Identity?
 - relationships with adults and peers
 - self-regulation of emotions, behaviors, and attention
 - sense of competence from achieving in academic and non-academic areas
 - physical health and well-being
- avoiding "misunderstanding" students by recognizing the connection between a student's presentation and their underlying needs
- thinking about students in a culturally-responsive way that respects and affirms their diverse backgrounds, identities, strengths and challenges

4. How will taking these actions help us to explicitly connect all students to the school community, foster a strong sense of belonging for each and every student and provide multiple opportunities for students to practice newly developing skills?

Consider whether the school focuses on:

- Identifying ways to support students in making positive connections to peers, adults, and activities
- Helping individual students develop the specific skills they need to successfully make these connections
- Collaborating with other staff to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive approach/plan for each student

5. How will taking these actions help us to work together as a team with a sense of shared responsibility for all of our students?

Consider whether the school is a community of adults where:

- there is a structure and a culture in place that promotes teamwork among educators
- staff share responsibility for all students and address together the impact of trauma on learning
- there is a process and a structure in place that can help staff figure out what to do when a student is struggling

6. How will taking these actions help us anticipate and adapt to the ever-changing needs of our students and to the impacts from the broader community, including the impacts of structural inequities, including racism?

Consider whether the school has in place:

- A process and structure to address the changes we want to make based on our deepening understanding, and recalibrate support as our understanding of the needs of the school community shift.