



Kids Who Experience Trauma – How a Mentor Can Help

Most of us are familiar with grief. It is often something we are comfortable showing and thus sharing. It entails feelings of sadness and often loss. Trauma on the other hand is something that often remains hidden, something that is dealt with privately, many times without sharing with others. For our mentees, this can increase the everyday challenges of being a kid. It can make learning more of a struggle and can affect behavior. Below are some tips from Caelan Kuban Soma, Detroit based clinical director of the National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children, a program of the Starr Global Learning Network. By understanding kids who have been through trauma, we can better position ourselves to support them and help them build the resiliency they need to face the challenges in their life.

1. **Kids who have experienced trauma aren't trying to push your buttons.**
2. **Kids who have been through trauma worry about what's going to happen next.** Routine structure can help. Knowing their mentor will come each week, and knowing what to expect from them can help.
3. **Even if the situation doesn't seem that bad to you, it's how the child feels that matters.** Being non-judgmental is key.
4. **Trauma isn't always associated with violence.** We know that a trauma our mentees share is being suddenly separated from their parent due to incarceration or deportation.
5. **You don't need to know exactly what caused the trauma to be able to help.** Focus on the feelings and don't worry about the facts.
6. **Kids who experience trauma need to feel they're good at something and can influence the world.** Helping them create and achieve goals, no matter how small can help. Or asking them to teach you how to play a game or complete a project can build in them that sense of competency that can also provide them with a sense of mastery and control. Instead of telling them they are good at something, give them the opportunity to show you.
7. **There is a direct connection between stress and learning.** High levels of stress, especially when it is prolonged, makes learning tough. Give them a stress free escape during your visit where they don't have to focus on learning. They may find when they go back to class in the afternoon they are better able to focus.
8. **Self-regulation can be a major challenge for students suffering from trauma.** Taking that break from studying, or even a break from the worries they carry with them by spending time with you, being able to be a kid and just have fun, can help.
9. **It is ok to ask kids point-blank what you can do to help them make it through the day.** Your mentee might tell you they just don't feel like talking today. Or maybe they will ask to do something more active than usual.
10. **Remember you are not alone in supporting your mentee.** Your Mentor Director is there to listen when you need to talk and we maintain a direct line of communication with the School Contact to ensure that when information needs to be shared, it can be.

Excerpted from [10 Things About Childhood Trauma Every Teacher Needs to Know, We Are Teachers Staff, The first Blog in the Childhood Trauma Blog Series, sponsored by TLC.](#)

Are you interested in learning more about trauma and resiliency? If so, please mark your calendar for the next Mentor Training, to be held March 28th. Watch your email for more information.