Synced For Success: An Online Training Series to Address Trauma and Sensory-Related Behaviors

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BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

• Prevalent Charter School (PCS)
• Grades: 2-8, Ages: 7-13 years
• Specialized school for students with dyslexia with high prevalence of trauma and sensory-related behaviors
• 1 in 8 children has sensory-related dysfunction
• 1 in 4 children has been exposed to a traumatic event
• 51% of children exhibiting sensory-related challenges also present with full or partial post-traumatic stress symptoms
• Sensory and/or trauma-related dysfunction can cause an extended state of fight or flight, making it difficult for children to follow directions, recall instructions, and attend to tasks, thereby disrupting the classroom dynamic
• The staff at PCS expressed a need to increase confidence and satisfaction in addressing and responding to sensory and trauma-related behaviors in the classroom
• Evidence supports teacher training on behavior management to foster successful academic instruction and a positive school environment

METHODS & MATERIALS

PARTICIPANTS

1. Educate teachers, staff, and clinicians on trauma and sensory-related behaviors through the provision of educational modules and informational handouts
2. Facilitate application of teacher, staff, and clinician’s knowledge through an interactive, case-based module
3. Infer feasibility of trauma and sensory-related materials, handouts, and interactive sessions on increasing confidence and satisfaction in identifying and responding to behaviors in the classroom

RESULTS

CONFIDENCE & SATISFACTION AMONG TEACHERS

Case-Based Module Participants: n=36

Case-Based Module Participants: n=30

I will be more aware of signs of trauma or sensory issues in the clients I work with and will more carefully consider how my responses and interventions impact my clients from a trauma and sensory standpoint.

It was helpful to apply the information from the presentations to the case studies. The facilitated learning and it was helpful to hear responses from the various attendees as well.

CONFIDENCE & SATISFACTION AMONG CLINICIANS

I liked using a real case to work through and apply the knowledge I learned.

DISCUSSION

• Through our needs assessment, the teachers and staff at PCS reported an increased prevalence of trauma and sensory-related needs amongst their student body and, consequently, a need for education on these behaviors.
• Due to the high prevalence of these behaviors in children in the community as a whole and the benefits of a collaborative approach, we expanded our target audience to include clinicians and occupational therapy students. This expansion allowed us to infuse the feasibility of our education materials and their applicability beyond the classroom.
• We found that there was a positive trend regarding levels of confidence in responding to trauma and sensory-related behaviors and satisfaction with available materials. Pre-implementations, levels of confidence and satisfaction were widely dispersed across the Likert scale. Post-implementation, all respondents displayed a shift towards being “somewhat” or “very” confident and satisfied.
• Participants in our final case-based scenario module, Turning Knowledge into Action, reported that live instruction and collaborative group discussion enhanced their overall comprehension. Participants also indicated a high likelihood of using our education series in the future. Teachers and staff especially benefited from having occupational therapists participate in and share their expertise during this session.

OUTCOME MEASURES

Confidence & Satisfaction Among Teachers

• Trauma and sensory-related behaviors
• Likert scale

Knowledge Check Questions

• Multiple-choice questions

Case-Based Module Feedback

• Live case-based module
• Interprofessional attendees
• Clinicians
• Teachers
• OTD Students

OBJECTIVES

1. Educate teachers, staff, and clinicians on trauma and sensory-related behaviors through the provision of educational modules and informational handouts
2. Facilitate application of teacher, staff, and clinician’s knowledge through an interactive, case-based module
3. Infer feasibility of trauma and sensory-related materials, handouts, and interactive sessions on increasing confidence and satisfaction in identifying and responding to behaviors in the classroom

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

The ability to work virtually in collaboration with PCS allowed us to continue the development of our project despite the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions. A benefit of a virtual project was the opportunity to increase access and sustainability of our education materials, thereby fostering expansion beyond our original target population. However, the need to adapt elements to meet COVID-19 guidelines did force us to forgo certain on-site activities. Additionally, unforeseen COVID-19 related responsibilities placed on teachers significantly limited participation. Ultimately, these challenges created the opportunity to introduce creative thinking in our approach, strengthening our problem-solving and clinical reasoning skills.

CONCLUSION

Occupational therapists are experts in utilizing a holistic and creative approach for sensory-based and trauma-informed care. We are uniquely positioned to create and provide training on identifying and addressing sensory and trauma-related behaviors. It is imperative to appropriately educate teachers, clinicians, and occupational therapy students on trauma and sensory-related behaviors to support elementary school student participation and ensure their success in the classroom. Evidence-based education and training generates foundational knowledge and skills. Participants can then disseminate these skills amongst their peers and help change the way our respective professions approach trauma and sensory-related behaviors in children.

Despite barriers, we determined that providing knowledge through a virtual platform can still produce effective results and have a positive impact on improving professional skills. The addition of a case-based module was an important part in facilitating learning and comprehension of educational material.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

• Understanding the principles of Synced for Success will allow teachers and clinicians to:
  • Effectively train others on the interplay of trauma and sensory-related dysfunction
  • Apply trauma-informed care to their respective professions
  • Address needs for individuals with related needs
• Concept tree
• In-person events

REFERENCES

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Owens, EdD, Director of Special Education, and all the teachers and staff at PCS Teachers & Staff

Polirstok, A., Carter, A. S., & Briggs, H., 2019. “It was helpful to apply the information from the presentations to the case studies. The facilitated learning and it was helpful to hear responses from the various attendees as well.”

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