

VOICES OF AMI TRAINING

Trauma Informed Approaches to Training

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The increasing awareness of trauma and toxic stress among children, catalysed by the global pandemic and community violence, necessitates a robust and adaptive educational response. The systemic educational response to trauma has focused on fostering resilience in children, adapting schoolwide policies and practices to recognise and respond to trauma's influence on behaviour, learning, and development. A crucial yet often overlooked aspect is the preparedness of teachers. Teachers, now more than ever, need to be equipped to help children whose lives have been impacted by toxic stress and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) (Castro Schepers & Young, 2021).

Recognising that trauma significantly impacts brain development but can be mitigated by supportive environments underscores the necessity for teachers to be well-prepared to address complex trauma and develop competencies and resilience, which are critical for teachers to support children in their care and themselves (L'Estrange & Howard, 2022). Historically, Maria Montessori developed many of the principles of our approach working with children who were exposed to trauma and adversity. Montessori principles align with many trauma-informed practices recommended for teacher training. For example, a core aspect of Montessori education is the emphasis on observation skills. In training, adults learn to observe children meticulously, understanding their behaviours as indicators of developmental needs and capabilities. This practice is crucial in responding to trauma-impacted children, ensuring that teachers can provide appropriate support and interventions.

Another trauma-informed framework, Dr. Bruce Perry's 6 Rs—relational, relevant, repetitive, rewarding, rhythmic, and respectful—resonates deeply with Montessori (Phillips et al., 2022). These elements are integrated into our practice and in training adults learn to connect children to practices that help children feel secure, valued, and understood. This approach not only aids in trauma recovery but also fosters the development of executive function skills and emotional regulation.

Mindfulness is another critical component of trauma-informed practice which is integrated into Montessori training. Mindfulness techniques—such as working with the hands to integrate mind and body—enhances social-emotional competencies, executive function skills, concentration, and self-regulation (Beers Dewhirst & Goldwin, 2020). By practicing concentrated purposeful work, Montessori trainees cultivate mindfulness while learning how cultivating similar opportunities for children is conducive to healing and growth.

Research indicates that support from mentors, peers, and faculty is crucial in helping teachers develop resilience and self-efficacy (Arcelay-Rojas, 2019; Johnson et al., 2015). In Montessori training, adults train within a cohort and relational support systems are cultivated as trainees collaborate with each other, trainers, mentors, and hosts for observation and student teaching. When teachers feel supported and empowered through strong relationships within the field they are better equipped to empathize with and respond to children (Arcelay-Rojas, 2019; Johnson et al., 2015).

Moreover, the Montessori approach emphasizes empowerment through choice, which is particularly beneficial for trauma-impacted children. Providing children with choices helps them regain a sense of control and agency, fostering self-confidence and resilience. Montessori training equips teachers to facilitate this process, offering a wide range of activities that cater to the diverse developmental needs of each child.

Creating environments where children are viewed within a developmental spectrum, rather than a rigid grade-level system, is another trauma-informed practice that is embodied within Montessori principles. This perspective allows teachers to meet children where they are, providing tailored support that promotes their overall well-being and holistic growth. In conclusion, Montessori training programs are inherently aligned with trauma-informed practices, emphasizing observation, relational support, and trauma-informed developmental practices. By integrating these elements into teacher training, Montessori education not only enhances teacher efficacy while equipping them to support their students effectively. As a Montessori trainer, fostering these skills in teachers is crucial in creating a nurturing and responsive educational environment that addresses the complex needs of children.

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