**MEET MICHAEL**

*Michael is 15 and repeating the ninth grade. He’s in your world history class and habitually tilts his chair back and drums annoyingly on his desk with a pencil. This morning, he was doing it—again—while you were trying to teach.*

**WHAT WOULD YOU DO?**

**A punitive response** might mean taking away the pencil, kicking Michael out of class, or even referring him for disciplinary action.

**A trauma-informed response** would shift the reaction in important ways. It would mean adopting a social emotional lens and shifting thinking to consider what might be **causing** the behavior, rather than simply reacting to the behavior itself.

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**DIRECTIONS**

In small groups, think through examples of trauma-informed responses to Michael’s behavior.

Identify a recorder and a spokesperson to report back.

**A. TYPE OF BEHAVIOR: Verbal Disrespect**

Michael is defiant and uses inappropriate language when verbally redirected.

**PUNITIVE REACTION:** Argue with Michael, kick him out of class or refer him for disciplinary action.

**TRAUMA-INFORMED RESPONSE:**

1. **Adopt a social-emotional lens:** How can I address Michael’s feeling of powerlessness so he is less defensive when I redirect him?
2. **Know your students and develop your cultural competency:** How might my words, tone, and body language make Michael feel respected or disrespected?
3. **Plan and deliver effective student instruction:** How can I differentiate my instruction to better meet Michael’s needs and tap into his strengths?
4. **Move the paradigm from punishment to development:** How can I use direct and gentle communication to demonstrate empathy, explain disappointment, and set expectations for changed behavior?
5. **Resist the criminalization of school behavio**r**:** What are the consequences for Michael if he misses class or gets suspended?

**B. TYPE OF BEHAVIOR: Dress Code Violation**

Michael comes to class without a belt on, pants sagging.

**PUNITIVE REACTION:** Lecture Michael about the dress code in front of classmates, kick him out of class or refer him for disciplinary action.

**TRAUMA-INFORMED RESPONSE:**

1. **Adopt a social-emotional lens:** Does Michael have a belt? Should I keep an extra one in the classroom?
2. **Know your students and develop your cultural competency:** How can I affirm that clothing norms are different at home and at school, but neither is good nor bad?
3. **Plan and deliver effective student instruction:** How does my teaching affect Michael’s self-image?
4. **Move the paradigm from punishment to development:** Should I sponsor a dress code where students who consistently meet the dress code are given special privileges?
5. **Resist the criminalization of school behavio**r**:** Does enforcement of the dress code target particular groups of students?

**C. TYPE OF BEHAVIOR: Lateness or Truancy**

Michael is frequently absent from or tardy to his first-period class and is failing.

**PUNITIVE REACTION:** Lock the door after the bell rings and give Michael zeros with no make-up option for work he missed. 

**TRAUMA-INFORMED RESPONSE:**

1. **Adopt a social-emotional lens:** What barriers might prevent Michael from getting to school on time?
2. **Know your students and develop your cultural competency:** Are there family issues that might prevent Michael from getting to school on time?
3. **Plan and deliver effective student instruction:** Is my curriculum relevant to Michael’s identity and lived experiences?
4. **Move the paradigm from punishment to development:** Should I set up a conference with family, teachers, and other school staff to design a behavior intervention plan that supports Michael?
5. **Resist the criminalization of school behavio**r**:** Can our school provide free bus passes to prevent truancy and positively impact Michael’s future?

**D. TYPE OF BEHAVIOR: Aggressive Physical Behavior**

Michael shouldered his teacher out of the way when she blocked the classroom door as he tried to leave.

**PUNITIVE REACTION:** Argue with Michael, call the school resource officer, bar him from class or press assault charges.

**TRAUMA-INFORMED RESPONSE:**

1. **Adopt a social-emotional lens:** What clues did I miss that Michael was upset before he tried to walk out?
2. **Know your students and develop your cultural competency:** What social capital did Michael risk if he had backed down from me in front of his peers?
3. **Plan and deliver effective student instruction:** Michael is most irritable when we read. Can the literacy coach and special education team suggest reading intervention strategies?
4. **Move the paradigm from punishment to development:** Can Michael and I come up with a signal to let me know he’s stressed and needs a 3-minute cool down?
5. **Resist the criminalization of school behavio**r**:** How can I encourage my administration to consider creative interventions as alternatives to suspension and adjudication?

**E. TYPE OF BEHAVIOR: Fighting**

Michael got into a fight in the hallway during first period. There were no serious injuries.

**PUNITIVE REACTION:** Avoid involvement or request that Michael not be allowed back in class because he poses a threat.

**TRAUMA-INFORMED RESPONSE:**

1. **Adopt a social-emotional lens:** How can I be a trusted adult to Michael so he will be more likely to talk to me about what was at the root of the fight?
2. **Know your students and develop your cultural competency:** Who can best help Michael through things I’ve never experienced?
3. **Plan and deliver effective student instruction:** How can I use our curriculum to enhance Michael’s ability to resolve conflict without violence?
4. **Move the paradigm from punishment to development:** Would training students in peer mediation be a positive intervention for Michael?
5. **Resist the criminalization of school behavio**r**:** How can I encourage my administration to consider creative interventions as alternatives to suspension and adjudication?