



Types of Trauma

Trauma can occur following an event, series of events, or experiences that a person perceives as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening. These experiences of harm can have a lasting effect, in the short or long term, on the person’s functioning and physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Students can experience many types of trauma, including *singular traumatic events* such as a natural disaster like a hurricane or single event of violence like witnessing a shooting death, or chronic trauma, which are recurring events like ongoing family or community violence.

Complex trauma involves multiple traumatic events that may be invasive and interpersonal. This can include abuse or neglect, or regular exposure to substance use disorder. Complex trauma tends to occur early in life with a caregiver or trusted adult and can disrupt the child’s development, including their ability to form secure attachments. Students experiencing complex trauma may demonstrate challenging behaviors and need additional support in the classroom.

Traumatic Event	Complex Trauma	Historical/ Intergenerational Trauma
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acute – singular event • Chronic – recurring events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple events • Invasive/Ongoing • Early onset 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cumulative physical/ psychological/ Social wounding • Over the life span • Across generations • Experienced as a group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural disaster • Witnessing a death • Family violence • Community violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abuse or neglect, (physical, sexual or psychological) • Regular exposure to substance use disorder 	Individuals and communities that have experienced: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slavery • Genocide • Mass deportation • Systemic oppression or racism

Trauma may also include *historical and intergenerational trauma* related to physical, psychological, and social wounding across generations, resulting from massive traumatic events experienced as a group. This type of trauma can be seen among individuals and communities that have experienced slavery, genocide, mass deportation, and/or systemic oppression or racism. Students may also experience racial trauma, the cumulative effects of racism on mental and physical health.

As educators, a trauma-informed lens for examining student reactions may mean a shift in the initial way of viewing what occurs in your classroom. While not all of these classroom reactions — nor every experience that can set off a stress response in students — are necessarily due to trauma, it’s important to know what *may* be a reaction to trauma.

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