

NINE PRACTICAL WAYS TO MAKE ASSESSMENTS MORE TRAUMA-SENSITIVE

Students and teachers alike can carry trauma into the classroom. There are ways to make space for recovery.



Here are 9 suggestions for making the assessment process fairer and more sensitive to the needs of those with trauma histories:

BE TRANSPARENT

People who have experienced trauma need transparency and trust. Let them know exactly what the assessment will entail.



Example:

If you say, "one more subtest" and after that you try to start another, you've violated trust.

GIVE CHOICES

Many who are recovering from a traumatic experience need to have a sense of autonomy, even in smaller choices.



Example:

Let the student choose their own writing instrument or when to take breaks.

ALLOW MOVEMENT

Studies show that movement helps young students regulate their emotions.



Example:

Outdoor walks help greatly with depression and anxiety for both students and teachers.

ENSURE A SAFE SPACE

Many students don't want their peers to see them singled out for assessment, especially at school.



Example:

Create a private space and allow the student to make themselves comfortable.

VALIDATE FEELINGS

Students may be dismissive or reluctant to join in on the process. Affirm their frustrations and apprehensions without taking their comments personally.



Example:

Check in with them if you can see they're getting frustrated during a test and validate their feelings.

MODEL SELF-ADVOCACY SKILLS

Don't expect a student to automatically know they are allowed to ask for what they need during an assessment.



Example:

Proactively ask them if they want to take a break, get water, or have a snack — priming them to do this for themselves over time.

ASSESS THE ASSESSMENTS

Know your student's background. Review assessments beforehand to ensure questions are culturally and linguistically appropriate.



Example:

A test question about hurricanes might upset someone from a state affected by that type of natural disaster.

EXPAND THE NARRATIVES

Use your report to provide context not reflected by test scores. Change the narrative from "What's wrong with you?" to "What happened to you?" or "What else could this be?"



Example:

Explore the possibility that a behavior may be related to trauma or a co-occurring condition.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Counselors and practitioners can become dysregulated from their own trauma or by their students' trauma. Have access to the tools you need to cope.



Example:

If you're experiencing stress, ask a colleague to step in for a moment or use one of your own coping mechanisms to advocate for yourself.

Scan the QR code to read more in-depth about this topic.

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