

Uninformed View vs. Trauma-Informed View

The descriptions below can be used to help determine to what extent a particular school policy, protocol, procedure or document is or is not trauma-informed. The contrasting views are designed to draw attention to language, both verbal and non-verbal, that does not support a trauma-sensitive school environment and may trigger students with trauma histories.

Uninformed View	Trauma-Informed View
Views negative behavior solely as student choice. Utilizes punitive consequences to motivate students (e.g., shame, blame, guilt, rejection, isolation or deprivation).	Views students as wanting to do well but possibly 1) lacking the necessary skills to get their needs met or 2) having developed misunderstood patterns of behavior in response to challenges. Considers students may have a negative world view that influences their interactions.
Characterizes student challenges in negative language (e.g., acting out, uncontrollable, manipulative, naughty, defiant). Communicates an expectation of failure.	Characterizes student challenges in constructive language (e.g., in need of emotional regulation, calming strategies or skills).
Refers to students using labels (e.g., “Tier 3” or “EBD”).	Eliminates the use of labels and uses richer language to describe students (e.g., Lance does well with his peers when he receives assistance on the playground).
Utilizes an authoritarian approach.	Uses a collaborative approach.
Punishes or minimizes the importance of the student’s coping strategies.	Recognizes that behavior is communication and searches for the function of the behavior. Strives to support the student meeting the function of the behavior in positive and productive ways.
Does not take the whole student into account (e.g., strict focus on academics only, reduced capacity for genuine warmth or concern, prioritizes task completion exclusively).	Recognizes student academics, behavior, social-emotional learning, health, and family and community wellness as connected and works to integrate support from a whole student perspective.
Does not teach expectations to the student and assumes the student should already know.	Teaches and re-teaches expectations in school. Understands that teaching is not simply telling. Differentiates instruction for both academic and behavioral expectations.
Creates systems by which the student must demonstrate he/she is worthy of intervention or must qualify for services (e.g., special education).	Promotes systems that are integrated (not “siloed”) and a culture where all students get what they need to be successful, regardless of whether they qualify for services or not.
Prioritizes the needs of the school or staff over the needs of the student.	Fosters a student-centered environment.
Uses professional “insider” language or jargon.	Uses language that can be understood by students and families considering comprehension level, language skills, culture, and native language.

Adapted by the Wisconsin Department of Instruction in collaboration with Sara Daniel, SaintA, and Pam Black, Trauma-Sensitive Education, LLC, for use by schools from a similar document created by Elizabeth Hudson for the Department of Health Services.
The five TIC Values are from Fallot & Harris, Community Connections, www.ccdc1.org.