

Stephanie Filio, M.Ed.

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RESPONDING TO STUDENT TRAUMA

A TOOLKIT FOR SCHOOLS
IN TIMES OF CRISIS

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all the students who sleep, eat, cry, write, laugh, type, read, fold paper cranes, and dare to dream in the stillness of the school counselor's office when the rest of the world is chaotic.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have been lucky enough to work with some of the most amazing educators in my city, state, and country. At each school I have worked in, with each administrator and every teacher relationship, I have gained more tools for my toolbox. This includes the larger educational community at Free Spirit Publishing who seek to reach students through their publishing, editing, writing, and wrangling of “free spirits” like me!

Amazing peers in our school counseling family (ayyyeeee my beautiful LKMS school counseling team!), school social workers, and the many specialists all bring another level of enrichment to our schools. They have taught me grace and teamwork and great compassion, always reminding me to remain a lifelong learner at heart. Of course, my amazing, devoted, and vocal middle school kids continue to be my central guides to better myself and my practice. They tell me what they need, and they are patient with me as I learn. They are truly our “next steps” as we navigate our developing world.

Eddie, Maddie, and Mason: thank you for always sharing me with my “school babies.” Thank you also to the rest of my family (including those stalwart friends) who still encourage me to dream big, step outside of the box, and take chances in life and with my heart. Be good.

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LIST OF REPRODUCIBLE FORMS

See page 71 for instructions for downloading digital versions of these forms.

Teacher Quick Sheet for Trauma Response	58
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INTRODUCTION

AN ODE TO 2020 AND THE PANDORA'S BOX IT OPENED

The COVID-19 pandemic hit the world hard. Sometimes it feels like it was the opening show to one of the most challenging years we have ever experienced. In the same way that I started looking around my house and noticing things that needed fixing, perhaps the quarantine-induced stillness revealed obstacles in our society that had always bubbled below the surface but remained covered by busy, moving schedules. Either way, recent months have been turbulent to say the least. We are still paddling our way out of deep waters, and the future remains very uncertain. If we have learned anything, however, it is that the connections we foster and the ways we support each other make all the difference, especially in the darkest of times.

In the days that followed the announcement of the school closures, many educators connected with colleagues, parked alone in front of our empty schools and cried, had comforting staff meetings on Zoom, and began to imagine our identities as teachers, counselors, administrators, coaches, and specialists outside of the school building. Then, we got down to business.

Like other industries during the pandemic wave, we had to figure out how to adapt to many new challenges, and fast. Along with healthcare, education stood out among the most resilient professions. Within days, many of us had schedules, online spaces, meetings, spreadsheets, and a plan. These early days and the weeks that followed were not without flaws, but not for lack of effort. I was in such awe with my own administrative team and the teachers I am so lucky to work with, it almost felt like an out-of-body experience. As if to not allow the adults to outdo them, many of our young students responded in spades as well. Some joined us digitally, some completed work on their own, some contacted their teachers through TikTok! Even for those students and school districts that faced additional obstacles to digital learning, the heart and intense dedication were there.

Behind the scenes of high-intensity situations like this, our brains work in overdrive to process our thoughts and emotions. Strength and grit will only take us so far as we try to develop understanding. In time, our students often sat silently in virtual lunch bunches begging us not to end the video calls because they just wanted to be together in some capacity. They started to message us about their sadness, and we began to get reports of children and families struggling to endure.

I've heard stories about people getting hit by cars and standing up immediately afterward, only to collapse when the body's adrenaline slows down—allowing their minds to register the pain from broken bones. Similarly, the excitement of adapting to the pandemic situation began to wear off and we started to feel the full effects of what was actually happening. Institutions our lives had always been based on simply stopped, social interactions that got us from one day to another were no more, and safety felt far out of reach. We were suffering and so were our students.

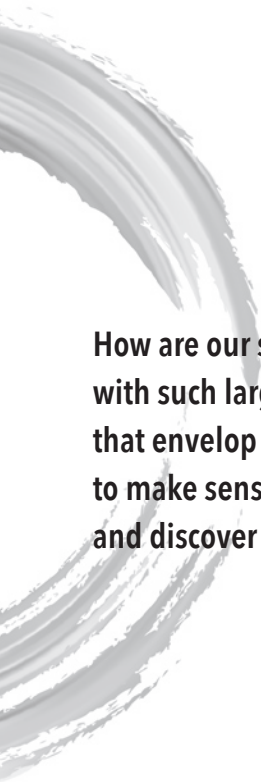
And then, as we were reeling from the pandemic, we took another huge fall. This time, the problem was not a virus, it was us. While we watched the police murder of George Floyd in horror, and witnessed and/or participated in mass protests, historic patterns of inequality and racism were laid bare. Our country as a whole began to fully register the reality that years of implicit, and often explicit, systemic racism has been allowed to control the masses and destroy the lives of our Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) citizens. It is tragic to think of the progress our society could have made over the decades by more strongly supporting BIPOC students—and future leaders—and guiding White students to understand racism and become anti-racist.

How are our students coping with such large-scale traumas that envelop them as they try to make sense of their world and discover their identities? These

large-scale crises are eclipsing all of the usual crises young people already endure and must make approaching adulthood seem daunting, if not impossible.

I know I am not alone in believing that educators are here to help change the course of history. When we give our students a voice and a platform, they are able to grow into adults who will lead our country and world in meaningful and impassioned

ways. With our guidance and belief, they will renew *our* hope in the ability of humans to create an equitable and just world. Our students deserve our care and understanding of what they have already been through and of the traumas they are currently experiencing. After all, one might say that we adults are the root of the problem for allowing such health threats and societal tensions to rise to this point in the first place.



How are our students coping with such large-scale traumas that envelop them as they try to make sense of their world and discover their identities?