

Buffalo Hide Academy:

February 2020

Critical Incident Debriefing Workshop: Charlie Speicher

On February 20-21, the Tamarack Grief Resource Center hosted a two-day workshop on Critical Incident Debriefing which I, along with Chris Lewis, was able to attend. This seminar focused on creating a healing environment in the aftermath of a traumatic incident. Further, it helped crystalize the Student Centered approach Buffalo Hide has been developing since 2016. In a nutshell, kindness and empathy help students stay regulated. We define these interactions with the acronym AREA (*see the slides below for a breakdown of those terms*). Regulated students are better emotionally and physically equipped to learn in an academic setting. But we also recognize that in Browning, MT, there can be no learning without *healing* occurring concurrently. Our model is built upon the notion that learning and healing are of co-equal importance to our school, and they both need to be happening at the same time.

We use our understanding of scientific concepts such as neuroplasticity (which means we can “re-wire” our nervous systems to respond to healthy stimuli through attachment based experiences) to nourish and structure our Buffalo Hide culture and curriculum. This concept alone is a game changer, because it means that we have the ability to help traumatized individuals feel better about the world and their place in it. And that’s our obligation.

Below are slides with additional information:

Creating a healing space with traumatized individuals.....

Main goal is to increase the amount of AREA

By having more positive experiences with caring staff, we position our students to be able to emotionally regulate more effectively

That goal is very counterintuitive to Western educational philosophy - standards, benchmarks, GPA’s, # of grad’s.....those are the wrong metric to gauge success by. We can measure success amongst our population by the frequency of loving interactions we have.

Student Centered Model - AREA

Trauma Informed? Not good enough

BHA is Trauma *Engaged* - meaning we meet the trauma, screen for it, respond to it, assist in reprocessing, and provide conditions for PTG

This is accomplished with clinical strategies such as-

Companioning

Modeling

Noticing

Reprocessing

Retraumatization Avoidance

A - Attuned

R - Relational

E - Experiences of

A - Attachment

AREA

Attunement - Ability to understand and respond to a student's inner feeling world while encouraging mastery of their external world (basically, vibing with student)

Relational - The student centered model is a relational model, meaning our emphasis is building healthy emotional connection with students

Experiential - Trauma reprocessing, companionship

Attachment - Biological, emotional, spiritual connection to caring adult. The keys to our innate biological safety system.

Examples of AREA

Loving interactions

Expressing Empathy

De-escalation

Increasing autonomy

Confidence building

Praising

Affirming/Validation

Affect Regulation

Mirror Neurons - Our experience can “mirror” our students experience, and vice versa (emotional connection causes our brains to “rewire” to reflect the experience of whomever we’re attending to)

Affect/Emotional Regulation - ability to keep one’s nervous system within optimal ranges

Corrective Experiences - Recapitulation - Reprocessing (school relationships, family relationships)

Goals of Student Centered Approach

- 1 - Increase opportunities for attachment based regulation
- 2 - Avoid retraumatization
- 3 - Optimize window of tolerance
- 4 - Increase self awareness regarding interior environment (where trauma is located in body)
- 5 - Provide conditions to foster resiliency, and ultimately PTG
- 6 - Facilitate neuroplasticity in middle brain (train amygdala to stay chill)

Neuroplasticity - retraining the Nervous System

Exterior cortex - cognitive, analytical center and function

Middle Brain (Mammalian brain) - Emotional center of brain mostly affected by traumatic experiences

We aim to create regulatory experiences through love, empathy, and care to rewire neural connections of middle brain.....

Neuroplasticity action creates healthy, adaptive connections in this portion of the brain, thus "retraining the central nervous system" to be stronger

How can this be measured?

Cortisol tongue swab?

PTG narrative inventory?

Physiological cue's - heart rate, sleep, etc.?

Life satisfaction brief survey?

Other ways to detect stress/rest?

BHA Goes Skiing!

Buffalo Hide students enjoyed a ski trip to Teton Pass ski resort at the end of February. The day was a huge success with incredible weather, great snow conditions, and happy students. While a few of them are approaching expert level, the majority of our students skied for the first time ever and seemed to really enjoy themselves in spite of the struggle. The trip was prefaced with lessons about the geology and cultural history of the region as well as snow and climate science. Students got to make personal connections between the lessons they learned in class and the unique experience of skiing in the middle of the Backbone of the World.



