



SpeakUp!

Mental Health

Majet Reyes, holistic community and trauma therapist, shared the impact of trauma on mental health, and the group of parenting adult participants shared strategies for support at home and at school. Below are tips and takeaways from the conversation.

Trauma Informed

Majet shared the idea that, "we are who we are because of our life experiences." Below is information to help with processing trauma.

- 98% of feelings come from life experiences, especially from childhood
- We sometimes don't realize that old wounds can have physical and psychological effects on us
- Different experiences can trigger us- uncertainty, stress, a difficult person- and cause us to reflect on something that happened years ago
- It is important to deal with trauma- if we don't it can influence our daily life, including how we parent, relate to spouses, engage with friends, etc.

Pete Walker's Complex Stress Responses

Pete Walker's research on four basic defensive structures that people rely on in response to trauma. The goal is to arrive at adulthood with a healthy and flexible response that includes appropriate access to all stress responses. Consider which response resonates with you, as this awareness can help create a more balanced approach.

- The "Fight" response is driven by the belief that power and control create safety; manifestations of fear and anger turn us to fight
- The "Flight" response is driven by the belief that being perfect will make them feel safe and loveable; people exhibiting this response often strive for perfection
- The "Freeze" response is driven by the belief that people are dangerous and that safety is solitude; when you can't make a decision you freeze
- The "Fawn" response is driven by the belief that relationships require forfeiting your needs, boundaries, rights, and preferences

Tools for Coping with Stressors

Majet and the parenting adults in the discussion shared strategies for navigating stressful situations and supporting others.

- Participate in Grounding Exercises such as deep breathing and meditation
- Remember the acronym PALM- **pausing** and breathing, **acknowledging** your feelings, **learning** why you were triggered, and completing **mindful** actions
- Create space for someone to share; allow them to feel seen, heard, and validated
- Acknowledge feelings, using phrases like, "I see you"
- Make sure you are not projecting your feelings onto another person
- Keep an equal playing field with your child- don't assume you know more as an adult
- Be an example- share your story, and be comfortable talking about mental health
- Let your child know it is ok not to be ok
- Tell your children there are solutions and together we will find help

Suggestions for Support at School

Our children spend a lot of time at school. It is helpful for children to learn they are not alone and that school adults and their peers experience stress and anxiety too. Below are some suggestions to share with your school community regarding mental health strategies.

- Use advisory time as a safe space for conversations on mental health
- Include more training for teachers
- Incorporate mindful minutes throughout the day
- Create safe spaces where students can hear that other students have similar experiences
- Ensure coping strategies, mindfulness, and etc. are added to the curriculum
- Encourage more than just counseling during crisis, there needs to be counseling for prevention

Overall, remember that the most protective thing for children is positive relationships with caring adults-- as many as possible, both at home and at school. And keep in mind that to be that caring adult, you need to acknowledge your own trauma and prioritize your mental health.

We recognize that we are all at a different place in our journey. Below are resources we can use to continue our journey in this process:

- [Click Here](#) for Pete Walker's Trauma Typology
- [Click Here](#) for ADDitude Magazine
- [Click Here](#) for the Youth Mental Health Project
- [Click Here](#) for Letters to Strangers, a global youth-run mental health nonprofit
- [Click Here](#) for QPR's Suicide Prevention Training
- [Click Here](#) for information on Youth Mental Health First Aid, offered by SpeakUp!

If anyone has any additional questions or needs help connecting to resources, please email Erica Talley at etalley@speakup.org

Be well,
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