

# Guidance for teachers

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## Summary

### **In the Classroom**

- Stay away from general discussions of current events and mandatory assignments.
- Stay open to discussions when initiated by the students.
- Acknowledge and redirect students who might create difficult situations for their peers.
- Trauma looks different in everyone.
- Support students in their strengths.

### **Individual Interactions**

- Check in with open ended questions
- Let the students take the lead.
- Do not interrupt.
- Keep confidentiality, unless you consider there might be danger to the student or others.
- Do not give advice.
- If you do not feel equipped to talk about something, point them towards Vertrauenslehrer\*innen.
- Everyone is different.

# IN THE CLASSROOM

## STAY AWAY FROM GENERAL DISCUSSIONS OF CURRENT EVENTS AND MANDATORY ASSIGNMENTS.

Students need to be able to deal with their trauma at their own pace. While some might be happy to participate in class discussions, mandatory assignments leave them without choice. While discussing current events in class is important, the students well-being needs to take priority.

## STAY OPEN TO DISCUSSIONS WHEN INITIATED BY THE STUDENTS.

If students choose to bring up current events, take time to listen to their thoughts and respond to them appropriately. It is important to acknowledge their thoughts and give them the necessary time and attention to help them move forward.

## ACKNOWLEDGE AND REDIRECT STUDENTS WHO MIGHT CREATE DIFFICULT SITUATIONS FOR THEIR PEERS.

It is important to acknowledge the reactions of all students. Depending on age, language ability and level of comfort, some students might be happy to answer peer questions, while others feel uncomfortable. Monitor situations carefully and react according to the students' wishes.

## TRAUMA LOOKS DIFFERENT IN EVERYONE.

Trauma has a fundamental impact on people's brains and bodies. Some might turn inward and quiet, while others are loud and 'act out'. Students dealing with trauma need a safe environment to deal with it. Avoid punitive responses and remember that their reactions are not a personal attack. Seek conversation and try to find collaborative solutions to find classroom appropriate responses (e.g. taking a quick bathroom break).

### Some likely behaviours:

- sleeping/eating disturbances
- physical complaints
- delinquent, self-seeking or sabotaging behaviour
- increase in conflict
- trouble concentrating

## SUPPORT STUDENTS IN THEIR STRENGTHS.

Encourage students to show their knowledge and strengths in this new environment.

Helpful strategies to loosen up learning situations:

- Exit slips - what did you learn today?
- Journaling for the sake of journaling - allowing reflective, quiet periods; guided or open, potentially with music!
- Student teachers - knowledgeable students teach their peers
- Think, pair, share - to allow casual exchange of knowledge and new material
- Learning Centres - allowing students to work independently across various tasks

# INDIVIDUAL INTERACTIONS

## CHECK IN WITH OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

Let the students know that you are happy to chat and listen. Ask open ended questions that allow the students to answer to their level of comfort.

## LET THE STUDENTS TAKE THE LEAD.

Allow the students to decide how much they are comfortable sharing. Offer them a space for conversation without pushing for information.

## DO NOT INTERRUPT.

Allow students to speak without showing impatience, making assumptions, asking 'cheerful' or 'trivial' questions. Observe breaks in conversations to give some breathing space.

## KEEP CONFIDENTIALITY, UNLESS YOU CONSIDER THERE MIGHT BE DANGER TO THE STUDENT OR OTHERS.

Unless there is a concern for people's safety, it is important to treat students' information with respect and confidentiality.

## DO NOT GIVE ADVICE.

Unless specifically asked for guidance regarding school or local matters, refrain from offering advice on how to 'solve' a problem. Students in crisis need time to reflect and process their experiences.

## IF YOU DO NOT FEEL EQUIPPED TO TALK ABOUT SOMETHING, POINT THEM TOWARDS VERTRAUENSLEHRER\*INNEN.

It's okay to feel unequipped for these situations. Feel free to point towards mentors, responsible teachers or the school psychologist. **Words of acknowledgement** could be

- "This is important;
- I want to hear what you have to say."  
Followed by
- "I'll be free when the class is over"  
or
- "Let's talk after I get this group started."  
Or even,
- "Would you like me to find your mentor?"  
Or,
- "Perhaps in the break, you can see if Ms. Flannery is in the office."

## EVERYONE IS DIFFERENT.

There is no one best way to deal with this. Some students will want to talk about their situation, others will want to treat school as an escape space. What is important is that students have agency, and that they are in control of how to deal with their new environment. Teachers can be essential support in this by providing safer spaces and room for exploration and conversation.