

SAFETY BRIEF: SUPPORTING STUDENTS WHO HAVE BEEN VICTIMIZED

Academic Needs

The following strategies may help the child regain confidence in his or her ability to succeed at learning and may lessen frustration with difficult tasks:

- » Find ways to provide one-to-one assistance or tutoring in problem areas—from both adults and peers, if possible.
- » Break down large projects into smaller tasks so that the student can have more frequent feedback and a sense of satisfaction from completing a task.
- » Minimize competition and try to set up failure-proof tasks.
- » Eliminate timed tasks or allow the student more time to complete tasks.
- » Provide well-defined procedures for transition from one activity to another.
- » Assign the student a classroom job, such as helper to the teacher.
- » Ask resource staff how to obtain other academic help for the student, if necessary.
- » Ensure access to all educational services for which the student is eligible (e.g., free or reduced price meals programs, Title I services, and bilingual programs).

Emotional Needs

It is important to acknowledge the child's strengths and skills and not simply the victimization. Reinforce positives by providing experiences that leave the child with a feeling of accomplishment. Help the child identify something he or she can do well. The following strategies may help a child increase his or her self-esteem:

- » Let your behavior indicate to the child, "I like you. I like to be with you."
- » Use statements such as, "You have done this very well. I think you have gotten better at this task."
- » Acknowledge and validate the student's positive qualities.
- » Play games that will be winning situations for the child.
- » Begin each day with a clean slate.
- » Read to the child or have him or her read to others. Use stories in which children are the heroes and overcome great odds through competence, strength, and intelligence.
- » Help the child talk about feelings. Label feelings, both your own and the child's. Teach and encourage the child to talk about his or her feelings instead of reacting inappropriately.
- » Encourage the child to express his or her feelings through creative mediums, such as art, music, dance, and writing.
- » Help the student to identify and become part of extracurricular activities or clubs.

Behavioral Needs

Children who have been maltreated sometimes find that acting out in school is the only available form of expression for their feelings of anger, fear, and guilt. It is imperative to redirect inappropriate behaviors, but remember that these children may be extremely sensitive to adult control. However, they may respond well to structure and limitations on highly stimulating tasks. The goal is to help the child build up a sense of self-control that comes from an ability to predict events and participate successfully. The following strategies may help to structure learning situations in ways that may be helpful to students:

- » Be consistent, calm, and clear in your directions. When speaking, bend down or sit down with the younger child to speak directly to him or her in a quiet voice.
- » Help the student realize there are consequences to behavior and the student can make a good choice to exercise control over behavior.
- » Provide time and reasons for the child to get up and move around to discharge some energy. Encourage structured play or exercise. Do not withhold recess, lunch, or physical education as punishment.
- » Avoid taking away possessions as a disciplinary measure.
- » Set up the classroom to help the child stay on task. Move the child's desk closer to the teacher's desk; use a study carrel or timer.
- » Avoid using corporal punishment. The child has had adults use power and force inappropriately and must be shown other ways to solve problems.
- » Do not allow destructive behavior as an expression of anger. Talk about appropriate release of anger. Have children demonstrate or rehearse appropriate behaviors.
- » Model nurturing concern toward others. Foster empathy and sensitivity to others. Verbalize those feelings and model empathetic behaviors. Watch for this behavior and praise the child when he or she is appropriately empathetic toward others.

Social Needs

Young children will learn how to get along with their peers by first getting along with the adults who are important to them. Do not expect good peer relations until the student can forge a relationship with an adult. Help the child learn social skills through these strategies:

- » Be a role model; demonstrate and talk about acceptable ways of behaving with others. Express your own feelings appropriately.
- » Offer guidance on how to deal with peers. Social skills or friendship groups are useful. Locate and use books on the topic of making friends.
- » Set up group activities so the children have a chance to learn from each other. Cooperative learning is a model that may empower these students.