

## Chapter 4


# Nonviolent Discipline Practices Within Classrooms: Best Practices From a Trauma- Informed Perspective

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter focuses on nonviolent discipline practices within classroom settings. The authors draw upon a trauma-informed perspective as a means to encourage professionals working with children to engage in best practices as they decide how to best discipline children under their care. They also address a few examples of nonviolence in U.S. history because peace has worked multiple times as a means to solve social problems. In addition, they provide a brief history of discipline in U.S. schools and how that has evolved over time. Furthermore, they explain possible causes of trauma in children, how to discipline children with histories of trauma, how to implement trauma-informed care in K-12 settings, as well as provide examples of trauma-informed classroom strategies. Using a case study, they provide an example of how to guide teachers to use nonviolent discipline in their work with children with histories of trauma.*

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-6315-4.ch004

## **INTRODUCTION**

Wang's (2010) work reminds us that in present-day America "the concept of nonviolence is usually connected to anti-colonial and civil rights movements" (p. 4) and that brings about the realization that indeed, there is potential for universally alleviating the negative effects of trauma through nonviolent means if we work together since violent disciplinary measures are still prevalent (Craig, 2015; Jennings, 2018; Souers & Hall, 2016; Souers & Hall, 2018). This chapter focuses on nonviolent teaching and disciplinary practices in the classroom, especially because traumatized students are often expected to function like every other student (Jennings, 2018;

Souers & Hall, 2018). Some of the challenging behaviors exhibited by students in classroom settings are often a direct result of traumatic experiences (Craig, 2015; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). From personal experiences in middle school setting in the southeast United States, children with the most traumatic experiences seemingly often exhibit the most challenging behaviors such as aggression and lack of self-regulation among other things. Disciplining children in a trauma-informed manner helps professionals to not only be sensitive and empathetic of the students, but to also avoid re-traumatizing the students with a history of trauma (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014).

Teaching students to be resilient can help them understand their emotions, cope with stress and reach out for help instead of acting out in the classroom (Jennings, 2018; Sorrels, 2015). Resilience is that one characteristic which shields students (or anyone for that matter) who have experienced trauma in their lives in hopes that their past experiences would not accurately predict bad outcomes for the future. Recent evidence reveals that today's classrooms are filled with traumatized students and more than half of the world's children have experienced trauma in the form of abuse, neglect, violence, or challenging household circumstances (Craig, 2015; Jennings, 2018; Sorrels, 2015) and approximately 35 million children in the United States have experienced more than one type of traumatic event (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, 2017).

Trauma in children manifests outwardly by affecting learning, the students' relationships and interactions in the classrooms, and ultimately their academic outcomes (Craig, 2015; Jennings, 2018; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014; Sorrels, 2015; Souers & Hall, 2016; Souers & Hall, 2018). As a result, teachers and school administrators' primary tasks include developing the students' social and emotional growth and an overall improved quality of life (Craig, 2015; Department of Education, 2002; Jennings, 2018). In this case, teaching becomes more than just providing academic instruction and also includes an overall understanding of students' lives and their families' needs. However, the most important questions are: 1). Are teachers and school administrators adequately trained to work with traumatized students without further traumatizing them? 2). Do teachers recognize the symptoms of trauma and treat them at the classroom level? and 3). Can teachers identify that the student's problematic behavior in the classroom could be a result of a traumatic experience before they apply any kind of disciplinary action against the student? Unfortunately, many studies indicate that the situation of traumatized students is also exacerbated by teachers who continue to use violent disciplinary practices including whipping such students when they act out in the classroom to control their behaviors (Ward, Gould, Kelly & Mauff, 2015). Due to lack of training and understanding of trauma, some teachers use violent disciplinary actions when working with students because the teachers fail to understand the underlying factors leading to the student's behavior in the classroom (Jennings, 2018; Sorrels, 2015; Souers & Hall, 2016; Souers & Hall, 2018). The consequences of such disciplinary actions negatively affect traumatized students' physical,

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