

Internalizing Behaviours in Classroom and School Settings

Background

In addition to Externalizing Behaviours (please see the brief entitled *Externalizing Behaviours*), Internalizing Behaviours are also manifestations of trauma, or trauma-responses, albeit much less conspicuous than Externalizing Behaviours. As such, internalizing behaviours are harder to identify. Deciphering between the two - external and internal - is essential, as the externalizing behaviours of some children and youth, may overshadow the internalizing behaviours of others who need the same if not more support.

What is an Internalizing Behaviour?

Internalizing behaviours are behaviours directed inward towards oneself. These behaviours often go unnoticed because of their subtle nature. Yet, the identification of them is essential for educators trying to help students in need. Common internalizing behaviours include, but are not limited to, mood and anxiety-related disorders.



Forms of Internalizing Behaviours



Anxiety

Anxiety-related internalized behaviours may manifest in the classroom, and may be hard to recognize externally. They can include increased heart rate, respiratory rate, and muscle tension when being called upon in class, or when working amongst their classmates. Despite the difficulty of recognizing physiological markers of stress, students displaying anxiety-related internalizing behaviours may also display behaviours easier to see such as truancy, or leaving class for long periods of time.

Mood Disorders

Like anxiety-related behaviours, students with mood disorders may be identified through significant changes/deficiencies in sleeping patterns, eating patterns, dressing patterns, engagement, and the ability to participate in class. Students suffering may exhibit observable behavioural changes such as difficulty completing schoolwork, a rapid increase or decrease in weight, or becoming disinterested in activities they previously enjoyed (ex: quitting extracurricular activities associated with the school).



Practical Trauma-Sensitive Suggestions:

- Having a conversation about what has been noticed: for example - speaking to students aside from class, letting them know you have noticed their behaviour. Validating their experiences, and trying to develop a relationship to discuss feelings.
- Considering student characteristics when addressing behaviours: example - taking into account the students' personal preferences (ex: being addressed publicly or privately) when addressing behaviours or providing praise.
- Creating routines and procedures for times of heightened stress.
- Differentiating the individualized aspects of instruction for all students thus offering choice and control which will support anxious students in trauma-sensitive ways.
- Providing developmentally appropriate praise, and making an effort to avoid statements of praise that can be perceived as fake, insincere, or sarcastic.
- Offering appropriate challenges within students' zones of proximal development, that when achieved, enhance a student's self-esteem.
- Scaffolding expectations: For example - not removing all hurdles. Supportive challenges can encourage and support students exhibiting internalizing behaviours.
- Communicating with parents/guardians/caregivers and developing a community of support. Immediate communication of dramatic shifts in students' behaviours will support the student.

Understanding Internalizing Behaviours and how to begin identifying them will support educators to come alongside children and youth in trauma-sensitive ways through offering choice and control, two aspects essential for stress reduction. Understanding behavioural manifestations of trauma responses will also support educators to offer trauma-sensitive engagements tailored to students' needs.

For all references and more information please see the full report