

Strategies and Resources to Support Trauma-Informed Schools

Create and maintain trauma-informed schools to promote student well-being and safe, supportive learning environments.

Trauma and traumatic stress can have significant and lasting impacts on many aspects of a child's life, including their emotional well-being, mental health, and academic experiences at school. Children who have experienced trauma can [have difficulty expressing and managing their emotions or relating to others](#), struggle to concentrate, feel sad or anxious, or demonstrate signs of withdrawal, disconnection, and sometimes anger. Educators who encounter the emotional distress of traumatized students can experience effects on their own mental and emotional well-being, potentially resulting in issues such as 'compassion fatigue' or secondary traumatic stress.

Children in the United States are exposed to trauma at a high rate. In fact, more than [two-thirds of children](#) reported at least one traumatic event by age 16. Potentially traumatic events can include:

- Psychological, physical, or sexual abuse and exploitation
- Community, school, or domestic violence
- Natural disasters or terrorism
- Sudden or violent loss of a loved one
- Refugee or war experiences
- Military family-related stressors
- Physical or sexual assault
- Neglect
- Serious accidents or life-threatening illness

Schools play a critical role in supporting students who have experienced trauma.

Creating and maintaining a trauma-informed school can promote a sense of safety, support, and inclusivity; lessen the escalation of mental health issues associated with trauma; and better position students for success. Prompt identification and early intervention, combined with appropriate support services, can also help protect students from engaging in potentially harmful or destructive behaviors.

A trauma-informed school promotes a safe and welcoming environment while also recognizing the widespread impact of trauma. This approach includes the integration of trauma-informed principles with various aspects of a school's policies and actions, including social, emotional, and behavioral learning practices; disciplinary procedures; classroom management and activities; and support systems and services for students and school personnel.



Strategies to Create and Maintain a Trauma-Informed School

Educators, school staff, and administrators can consider implementing a range of strategies and practices to foster trauma-informed schools. Some of these actions can include:



Recognizing and understanding the signs of traumatic stress

Traumatic stress can have a significant impact on a child's development, including their physical health, cognitive learning, and social/emotional well-being. By understanding how children express the lingering impacts of traumatic experiences, schools can create more conducive learning environments and better respond to and support affected students.

[Signs of traumatic stress](#) can include:

- Expressions of hopelessness or uncertainty about an ongoing danger
- Physical ailments such as stomachaches
- Problems with self-control
- Feelings of shame and guilt about the traumatic event
- Self-destructive or accident-prone behaviors

A trauma-informed school values identifying students who may be experiencing trauma-related problems and works to ensure school personnel routinely consider whether students have been exposed to trauma, how it might relate to their academic performance or behavior, and steps that can be taken to support affected students and families. As part of this, school leaders can promote information about the signs of traumatic stress, as well as available support services such as screenings and assessments.

Offering continuous professional development and training opportunities for educators, administrators, and school staff can also help raise awareness of the different types of traumas and how best to support children facing these challenges.



Mental health literacy training programs can empower school staff with skills to recognize and assist students experiencing mental health challenges associated with trauma and better prepare them to make appropriate referrals. These programs can also help change attitudes and perceptions about trauma and reduce the stigma associated with mental health needs and services.

Related Resources

- ✓ [Classroom WISE](#)
This training package assists K-12 educators and school staff in supporting the mental health of students in the classroom and offers evidence-based strategies and skills to engage and support students experiencing adversity and distress.
- ✓ [Helping Youth After Community Trauma: Tips for Educators](#)
This tip sheet lists common reactions educators might see in students following a community trauma. It describes how traumatic events can affect students' learning, behavior, and relationships.
- ✓ [Introduction to Trauma-Informed Classrooms: Inclusive Learning Strategies for Educators](#)
This guide provides background on trauma and student trauma, recommendations on practices educators can use to create safe learning environments, and resources for additional strategies.

Sources: [Advancing Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems](#) | [Age-Related Reactions to a Traumatic Event](#) | [Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A System Framework](#) | [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#) | [Psychological First Aid for Schools Field Operations Guide](#) | [SchoolSafety.gov Mental Health Resources](#) | [Supporting Child and Student Social, Emotional, Behavioral, and Mental Health Needs](#) | [Understanding Child Trauma](#)



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Incorporating trauma-informed classroom practices and strategies

Educators can play a vital role in supporting children affected by trauma by creating a compassionate, positive, and supportive classroom environment. This type of setting can help students impacted by trauma form trusting and supportive relationships with others, better regulate their emotions and anticipate events, and grow confidence to engage in classroom learning.

Strategies such as providing a designated space for de-escalation, offering calming tools like stress balls, establishing positive and routine classroom schedules and norms, and integrating movement breaks to reduce stress and increase attention are just a few ways educators can help create a more trauma-informed and responsive atmosphere.

Developing trusting and caring interactions between students and adults within a school setting can also help support healing and resilience. Educators who demonstrate honesty and reliability, show empathy, actively listen without judgment, and empower students impacted by trauma with tools, guidance, and support can enhance student engagement and create a more effective environment for learning.

Related Resource

[✓ Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Toolkit](#)

This toolkit outlines a framework for implementing trauma-informed, resilience-oriented approaches in any school or school district. It includes a variety of materials to explain the concepts of trauma and toxic stress and offers individual and school-wide strategies for addressing trauma and fostering resilience, as well as assessing the impact of these adaptations throughout the school community.



Creating partnerships with families and community organizations

Establishing school partnerships with families and community organizations can enhance a student's well-being and chances for success, particularly for those children affected by trauma.

Schools can facilitate collaboration and partnership by creating a welcoming environment for families; promoting regular, meaningful communication about student progress; and empowering families to advocate for their children.

Forging partnerships with key community and local organizations can also enable schools to leverage the skills and expertise of individuals and organizations in the community, expanding access to resources and opportunities for students, families, and others impacted by a traumatic event. Integrated mental health services, for example, can offer convenient support for families and early intervention for students with emotional or behavioral needs. Additional wrap-around services can also offer tailored support for students and families, especially for students who may require additional services beyond what the school can provide.

Related Resource

[✓ Effective School-Community Partnerships to Support School Mental Health](#)

This document provides an overview of the key elements of school-community partnerships and specific action steps for states, districts, and communities to foster effective collaboration between schools and community health and behavioral health partners.



Additional Resources

SchoolSafety.gov features a range of resources schools and districts can use to adopt a trauma-informed approach and support student mental health. These include:

Guidance, Reports, and Fact Sheets

- ✓ [Advancing Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems: Guidance from the Field](#)
This report offers collective insight and guidance to local communities and states to advance comprehensive school mental health systems.
- ✓ [Psychological First Aid for Schools Field Operations Guide](#)
This resource provides guidance on responding to disaster, violence, or terrorism events using the Psychological First Aid intervention. It gives school administrators, educators, and staff practical assistance to meet immediate needs and concerns, reduce distress, and foster adaptive coping in the wake of a disaster.
- ✓ [Psychological First Aid: How to Help Students Recover After a Personal, Community, or School-Based Emergency](#)
This fact sheet provides information on the goals of Psychological First Aid models, when and how schools can implement Psychological First Aid, and the type of training school staff need to use this strategy effectively.

Trainings, Toolkits, and Websites

- ✓ [Creating Trauma-Informed Schools](#)
This webpage features tools and materials to help educators, school staff, and administrators understand and respond to the specific needs of traumatized children in a school setting.
- ✓ [Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences Training: Educator Module](#)
This online training provides information on how school professionals can create positive relationships and environments for children to prevent Adverse Childhood Experiences or lessen their harmful effects.
- ✓ [Supporting Children Living with Grief and Trauma: A Multidisciplinary Approach](#)
This training for victim advocates, mental health professionals, and law enforcement offers information to provide appropriate services for children experiencing trauma and grief as a result of violence.
- ✓ [Trauma-informed Care for Schools Before, During, and After Possible Emergency Events](#)
This recorded webinar provides information to help school practitioners lead trauma-informed schools, address trauma in their overall preparedness efforts, and plan for the provision of trauma-informed care.
- ✓ [Trauma-Sensitive Schools Training Package](#)
This resource package offers school and district administrators and staff a framework and roadmap for creating trauma-informed schools. It includes a variety of resources for educating school staff about trauma and trauma-informed practices and for providing school leaders with a step-by-step process for implementing a universal, trauma-informed approach.



Learn more and find additional resources on SchoolSafety.gov's [mental health page](#).



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