

# Developing a Trauma-Informed School



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# Key Components of a Trauma-Informed School

- Establishing a shared definition “trauma-informed school”
- Enhancing trauma awareness throughout the school community
- Conducting a thorough assessment of the school climate
  - Inclusiveness
  - Respect for diversity
  - Identifying risk factors
  - Identifying protective factors
- Developing trauma-informed discipline policies
- Awareness of the prevalence and impact of secondary traumatic stress on teachers and staff



# Overview

- What is a trauma informed school? What are the criteria?
- Who are the populations and groups for which it is relevant?
- What are the important elements? Core concepts as an organizing framework, educational policy, practice of teaching, enhancing assessment and intervention skills, creating the pyramid of programs and services, discarding widely held assumptions, understanding trauma generated behavior in the context of the need for safety



# Trauma-Informed Schools: Educational Perspective

Students ready to learn – behavior viewed through the trauma lens

- Attachment: the student-teacher relationship
- Emotional regulation
- Isolation/Social interaction
- Lack of academic interest or progress
- Absenteeism/Dropout
- Suspension/Expulsion



# Services and Programs

- Psychological First Aid: Listen Protect Connect
- Support to Students Exposed to Trauma (SSET)
- Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS)
- Restorative Justice
- Range of activities – student interest groups
- Community internships
- Crisis intervention
- Mental health services
- Threat and risk assessment teams:
  - Intimidation and bullying
  - Stalking
  - Relationship violence
  - Weapons possession
  - Suicidal behavior
  - Physical assault



# Discipline Policies

- Suspension from school often intensifies misbehavior by increasing shame, alienation, and rejection.
- Grounding discipline policies in Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and concepts of Restorative Justice helps address the underlying problems students bring to the classroom.



# 12 Core Concepts of Child Trauma: An Organizing Framework

- Based on a traumatized child's preoccupation with danger and need for safety
- Change in priorities for teaching
- Teaching strategies and coordinated interventions which provide both stability in the external environment and a reduction of internal arousal in order for the child to feel safe
- Willingness to assess changes in the child's behavior and to help the child understand those changes



# 12 Core Concepts

## Understanding the Nature and Context of Trauma and Traumatic Experience Outside of School

- Trauma often occurs within a context outside of school that includes children's life experiences, family history, and current circumstances. (#1)
- Brain development and brain function underlies children's reactions to traumatic experiences. (#2)
- Culture and social norms and values are closely interwoven with traumatic experiences, response, and recovery. (#3)



# 12 Core Concepts, cont.

## Understanding the Effects of Trauma on Children in School

- Children exhibit many reactions to trauma and loss which affect their ability to learn. (#4)
- Danger and safety are core concerns of traumatized children even in mostly safe places like school. (#5)
- Traumatic events outside school generate distressing reminders at school that can interfere with a student's ability to regulate emotions and to learn. (#6)
- Protective factors like positive teacher and peer relationships can reduce the adverse impact of trauma. (#7)
- Trauma plays a major role among at risk and special populations. (#8)



# 12 Core Concepts, cont.

## Understanding the Implications of Child Trauma for Teachers, Administrators, and School Staff

- Trauma-generated behaviors are complex but can be understood and addressed by educators. (#9)
- A positive teacher-student relationship takes more time investment with a traumatized child. (#10)
- Student-teacher trust must be established before the process of teaching and learning can truly begin. (#11)
- Working with trauma-exposed children can evoke distress in providers that makes it more difficult for them to teach and manage the classroom. (#12)

