

## What is trauma?

Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening, and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.

Trauma is a lens that changes how an individual constructs a sense of self, a sense of others, and of the world, affecting life choices and particular coping strategies. The impact of trauma is felt throughout an individual's life, often in areas far removed from the original trauma.

## What is complex trauma?

Complex trauma describes the experience of multiple, chronic, prolonged, developmentally adverse traumatic events, most often of an interpersonal nature and early life onset. (van der Kolk, no date). Exposure to extreme threat, particularly early in life, combined with a lack of adequate caregiving responses significantly affects the long-term capacity of the human organism to modulate the response of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems in response to subsequent stress. As a result, complex trauma is internal, interpersonal, neurodevelopmental, and representational in its implications.

→ A physically harmful or emotionally unsafe homebase that causes the child to develop a range of strategies in order to survive to the best of their ability (ages 0-5)

→ The child survives to an age where they leave the home regularly; schools are the most common out of home environment. The strategies the child developed at home are generally unproductive at school, causing the child to internalize responsibility; "I'm the problem." (ages 5-10)

→ Exacerbating this dynamic are Punitive and shaming interventions that alienate children from help and helpers, perhaps for the rest of their lives. (ages 10-15).

→ Needing safety and connection, children often turn to objectively unsafe dynamics that feel safe and accepting; examples include drug use, unsafe relationships, suicide, self-harm, isolation, dropping out of school. (Ages 15-20).

## Trauma-Informed Core Values:

Safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, empowerment

## Ten Principles of a Compassionate School

- Focus on culture and climate in the school and community.
- Train and support all staff regarding trauma and learning.
- Encourage and sustain open and regular communication for all.
- Develop a strengths based approach in working with students and peers.
- Ensure discipline policies are both compassionate and effective (restorative practices).
- Weave compassion strategies into school improvement planning.
- Provide tiered support for all students based on what they need.
- Create flexible accommodations for diverse learners.
- Provide access, voice, and ownership for staff, students, and community.
- Use data to identify vulnerable students, and determine outcomes and strategies for continuous quality improvement.

## What does it mean to be trauma-informed?

Trauma-informed schools acknowledge the impact of trauma on learning and relationships, and work to create a physically and emotionally safe environment. Trauma –specific refers to specific services whose primary task is to address the impact of trauma and to facilitate trauma recovery. All schools can become trauma informed; schools can also choose to become trauma specific.

## Three Key Goals of a Trauma-Informed School

- 1. Increase teacher's understanding of trauma's effects on the brain/learning**
  - Focus on student physical and emotional safety
  - Build on student's strengths by understanding the connection between behavior and physical/emotional safety
  - Managing behavior and setting limits through agreements and choices
- 2. Focus strategies on increasing student safety and self-regulation**
  - Helping students regulate emotions in order to master social and academic skills
  - Using choice to help students build a sense of control over their environment
- 3. Enhance administrative efforts to create safety and accountability**
  - Commitment to reduction/elimination from seclusion/restraint
  - Avoiding labeling and segmenting
  - Reducing bullying and harassment
  - Maintaining high academic standards for all students
  - Involving parents and creating a co-educational community

## Trauma Screening and Precautions

- If you screen one student for trauma, screen them all
- We ask, they do not have to tell
- Assume trauma, even if there is no evidence (universal precaution)
- Focus on increasing physical and emotional safety
- Remember that safety is a universal need

## Trauma-Informed Toolbox

1. Self-care
2. Grounding techniques and safe coping
3. Strengths-based approaches
4. Neurosequential model
5. Effectives school policies

## Web Resources

### SafePlace's Expect Respect® Program

<http://www.expectrespectaustin.org>

### Trauma Smart

[www.traumasmart.org](http://www.traumasmart.org)

[www.saintlukeshalthsystem.org/head-start-trauma-smart](http://www.saintlukeshalthsystem.org/head-start-trauma-smart)

### Learning to Be a Safe Harbor for Kids, Podcast with Margaret Blausten, PhD

[www.traumacenter.org/research/learning-safe-harbor-kids.html](http://www.traumacenter.org/research/learning-safe-harbor-kids.html)

### Calmer Classrooms: A guide to working with traumatized children

[www.education/qld.gov.au/schools/healthy/pdfs/calmer-classrooms-guide.pdf](http://www.education/qld.gov.au/schools/healthy/pdfs/calmer-classrooms-guide.pdf)

### UCSF HEARTS Program: Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools

[www.coe/ucsf.edu/coe/spotlight/ucsf\\_hearts.html](http://www.coe/ucsf.edu/coe/spotlight/ucsf_hearts.html)

### Principles of Working with Traumatized Children by Dr. Bruce Perry

[www.teacher.scholastic.com/professional/bruceperry/working\\_children.htm](http://www.teacher.scholastic.com/professional/bruceperry/working_children.htm)

### The Role of Educators in Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect, US Dept. of Health and Human Services

[www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/educator.educator.pdf](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/educator.educator.pdf)

## Further Reading

### *Born for Love*

Maia Szalavitz & Dr. Bruce D. Perry, M.D., Ph.D.

### *Creative Interventions with Traumatized Children*

edited by Cathy A. Malchiodi

### *Lost at School*

Ross W. Green, Ph.D.

### *Why Do They Act That Way?*

David Walsh, Ph.D.

### *Childism: Confronting Prejudice Against Children*

Elisabeth Young-Buehl

### *How Children Succeed*

Paul Tough