

Essential
Trauma
Informed
Practices in
Schools

Shannon Cronn, N.C.S.P.
Barb Iversen, M.C.

Objectives:

Participants attending this session will be able to:

- Define trauma
- Explain how trauma may impact child/teen behavior and learning
- Identify characteristics of trauma-informed practices in a school setting

Prevalence

- Research suggests that approximately 25% of U.S. children will experience at least one traumatic event by age 16.
- In a nationally representative U.S survey, 39% of 12 -17 year-olds reported witnessing violence, 17% reported physical assault and 8% reported sexual assault.
- 75 - 93% of youth in the juvenile justice system are estimated to have experienced some type of trauma.

Healing Invisible Wounds: Why Investing in Trauma-Informed Care for Children Makes Sense
2010





What is trauma?

- Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life.

Judith Herman in *Trauma and Recovery*, 1997

- An exceptional experience in which powerful and dangerous stimuli overwhelm the child's capacity to regulate emotions.

Early Trauma Treatment Network



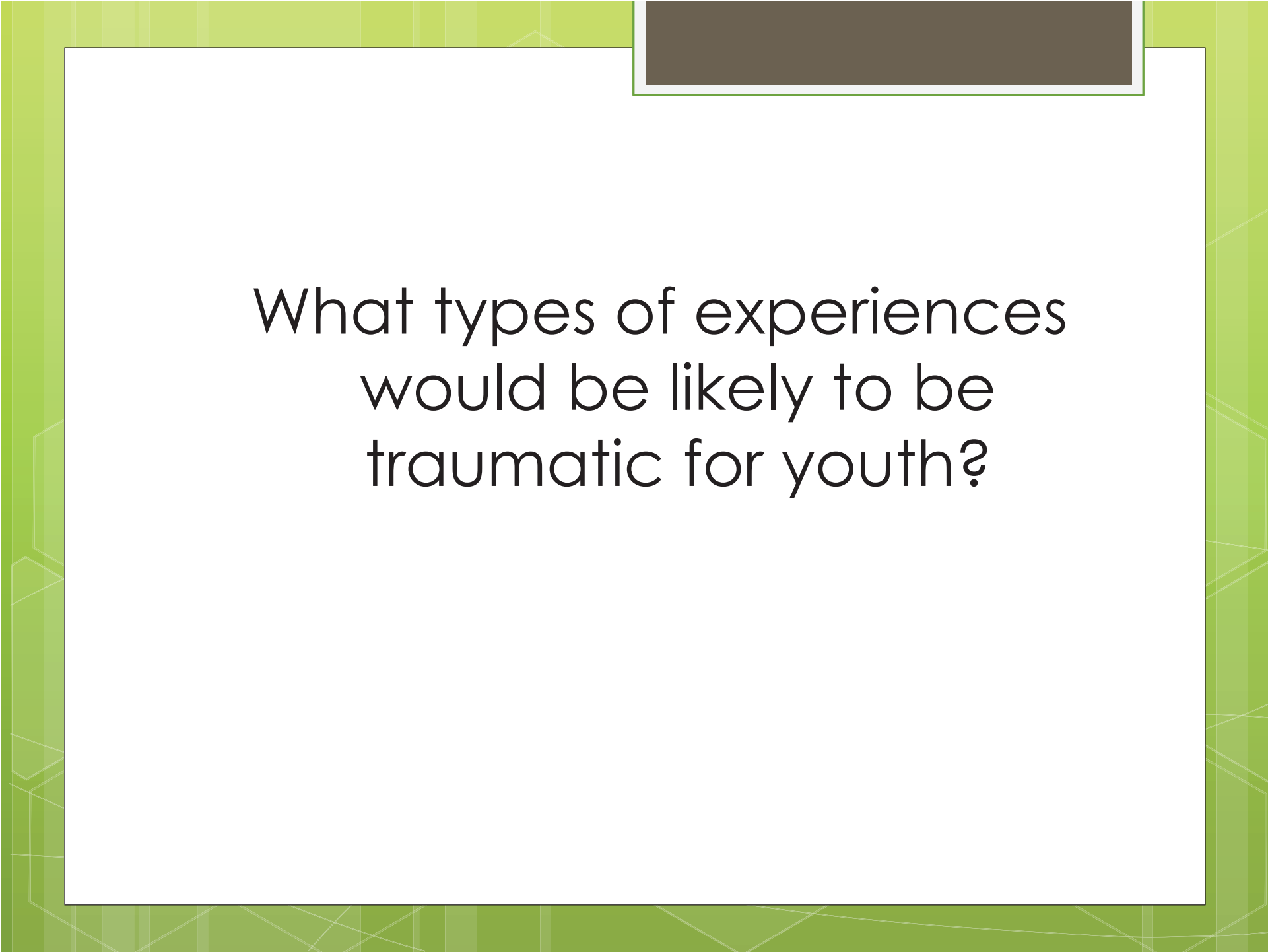


- Trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically and emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.

SAMSHA, 2012

- Not all experiences of trauma lead to a trauma response. Many variables impact the process.
- Child Traumatic Stress is when children are exposed to traumatic events/experiences and the exposure overwhelms their ability to cope.





What types of experiences
would be likely to be
traumatic for youth?

- Natural Disasters
- Forced Displacement
- War / Terrorism
- Emotional, Physical, or Sexual Abuse or Assault
- Serious Accident or Illness /Medical Procedure
- Victim / Witnessing
 - Domestic Violence
 - Community Violence
 - School Violence
 - Interpersonal Violence

Adapted from National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008 www.ecmhc.org/tutorials/trauma

Types of Trauma

- *Acute trauma (one-episode)*
 - Results from a single, sudden, usually unexpected event such as a rape, a bad car accident, or witnessing violence
- *Chronic trauma (repeated trauma)*
 - Arises from long-standing, repeated events, such as sexual or physical abuse

for info on evidence-based treatment, see www.nctsnet

Types of Trauma

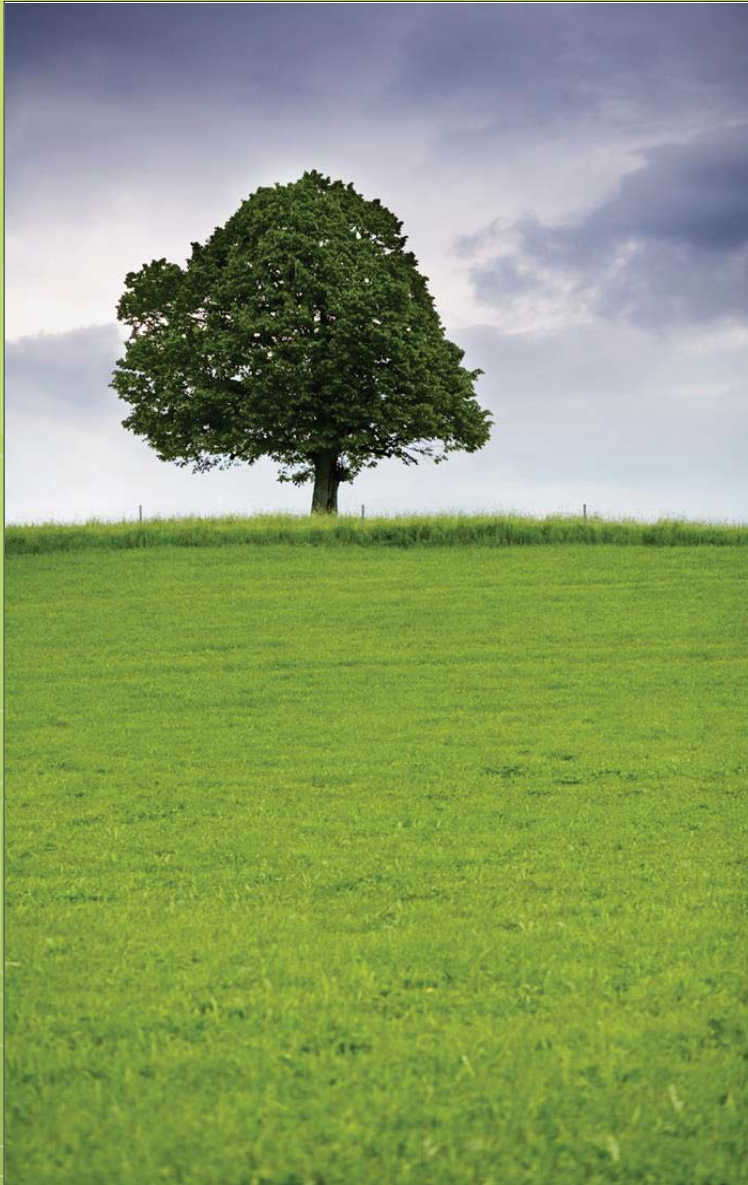
- **Complex trauma** describes exposure to multiple or prolonged traumatic events and the impact of this exposure on youth's development.
 - Involves the simultaneous or sequential occurrence of psychological maltreatment, neglect, physical and sexual abuse, domestic violence...
 - that are chronic and begin in early childhood.
- Trauma is cumulative.



Impact of Trauma on School Performance

- Trauma can impact school performance
 - Decreased reading ability
 - Lower GPA
 - Higher rate of school absences
 - Increased drop-out
 - More suspensions and expulsions
 - Decreased reading ability





*Impact of trauma
on child and
adolescent
development:*

Accomplishing
developmental tasks
requires a child to
'be present' in order
to process, learn and
grow from their
experiences

Impact of Trauma on Learning and Development

- Trauma can impair the acquisition of developmental competencies in
 - cognitive functioning
 - emotional regulation
 - Interpersonal relationships
- Brain is activated (alarm state); children feel vulnerable and unsafe. Cannot shift to calm state necessary for learning.
- Children develop coping strategies that are not understood by the adults in their lives, or by themselves, which often contribute to secondary problems, like disciplinary actions.

Impact of Trauma on Learning and Development

- Acute trauma can impair concentration & memory
 - intrusive thoughts, interrupted sleep, nightmares
 - moodiness, frustration, anger, social withdrawal
- Chronic trauma can result in
 - executive functioning deficits impacting goal setting, organizing, planning, anticipating consequences
 - lack of 'internal maps; distorted inner representations of world
 - poor relationships with school staff and peers that impact learning



- “I found it difficult to hear Mrs. Patterson when she spoke in the classroom. I felt as if she were speaking from beneath tumbling water, or from the end of long tunnel. She assumed I was daydreaming...”

From Too Scared To Learn, J. Horsman

- “I could see the math teacher’s mouth moving...but couldn’t hear a thing. It was as if I were in a soundless chamber... I just couldn’t process a word of it.”

Task Force on Children Affected by Domestic Violence

Cited in Helping Traumatized Children Learn, Massachusetts Advocates for Children 2005

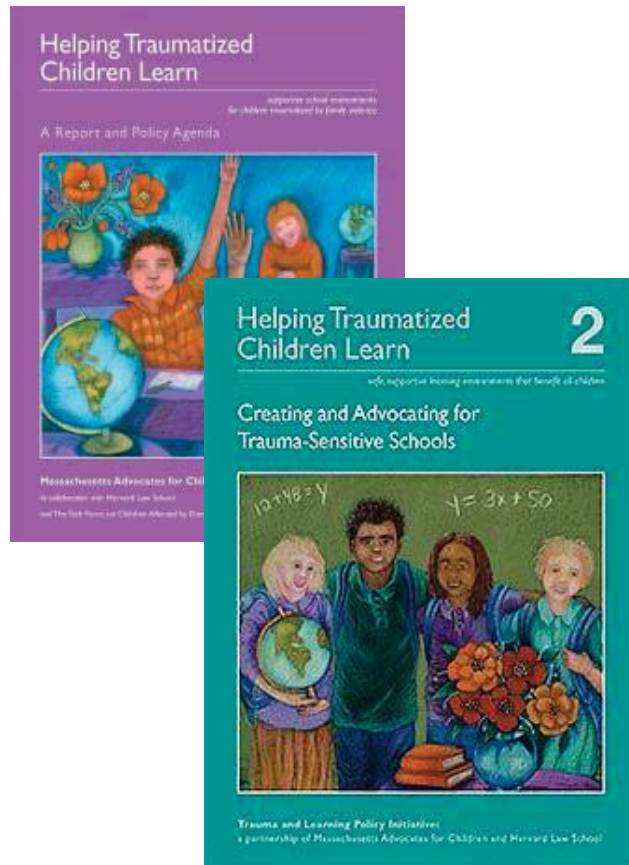
Impact of Trauma on Learning and Development

- Trauma in early childhood can have a detrimental effect of the developing brain.
- Brain structures that regulate emotion, memory, and behavior can be smaller in size; decreased integration of brain hemispheres and irregular brain activity correlated with poor emotional control & aggression.
- Abnormally high levels of stress hormones.

Healing Invisible Wounds: Why Investing in Trauma-Informed Care for Children Makes Sense 2010



Resources



• <http://traumasensitiveschools.org>

Purchase or download

Trauma and Learning
Policy Initiative

Massachusetts Advocates for
Children & Harvard Law School

Impact of Trauma on Behavior

- Anxious, withdrawn
- Difficulty with impulse control
- Impaired short term memory
- Confusion, disorientation
- Acting out
- On edge
- Day dreaming

Be aware of both the children who act out AND the quiet children who don't appear to have behavioral problems.



Impact of Trauma: Behavior Over Time

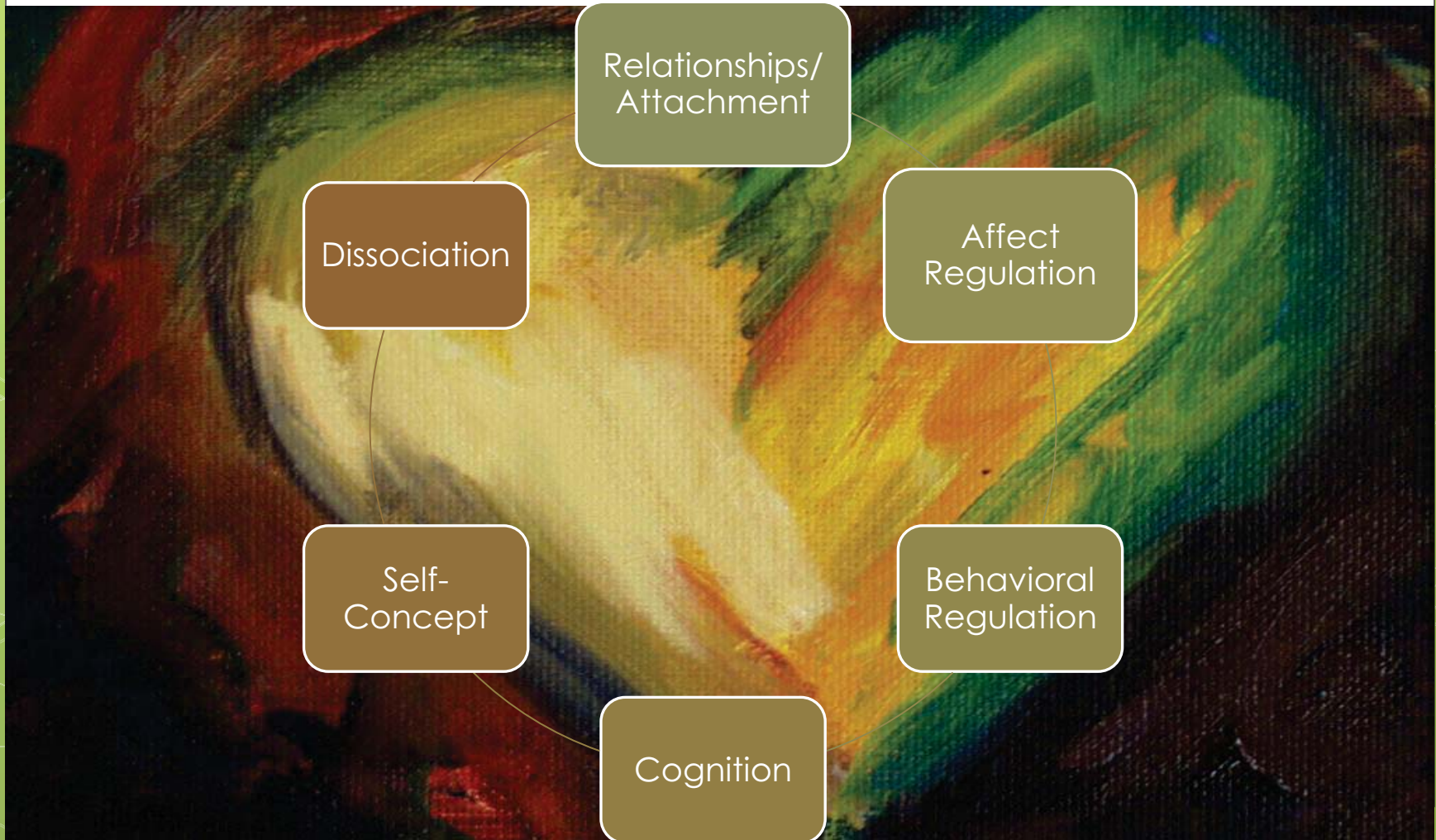
- Poor hygiene, appearance
- Deterioration in relationships
- Sleeping/eating
- Academic failure
- Use of drugs or alcohol
- Avoidance of people or places
- Increase in discipline issues
- Absenteeism



Resource:

Complex Trauma in Children & Adolescents Article

Research and Training Center on Family Support & Children's Mental Health





Helping

Based on your understanding of trauma, what do you think children and teens who've experienced trauma need?

Why Should Schools be Trauma Informed?

- Children are more likely to access mental health services through primary care and schools than through specialty mental health clinics. (Costello et. al., 1998)
- A longitudinal study of children in the community found that mental health services are most often provided by the education system. (Farmer et. al., 2003)
- Children with mental health disorders struggle in a school environment and are less likely to succeed academically. (Mental Health America of Greater Houston, 2011)





Using Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Framework to Support Students Affected by Trauma

Strategies for creating trauma-informed schools fit well into existing initiatives such as PBIS. A trauma-informed school is most effectively created and maintained when positive universal supports and strategies are part of daily school programming.

Trauma Informed Practices in a School Setting

Trauma- informed practices often involve a fundamental shift in thinking and practice.



Embracing a trauma informed school culture requires:

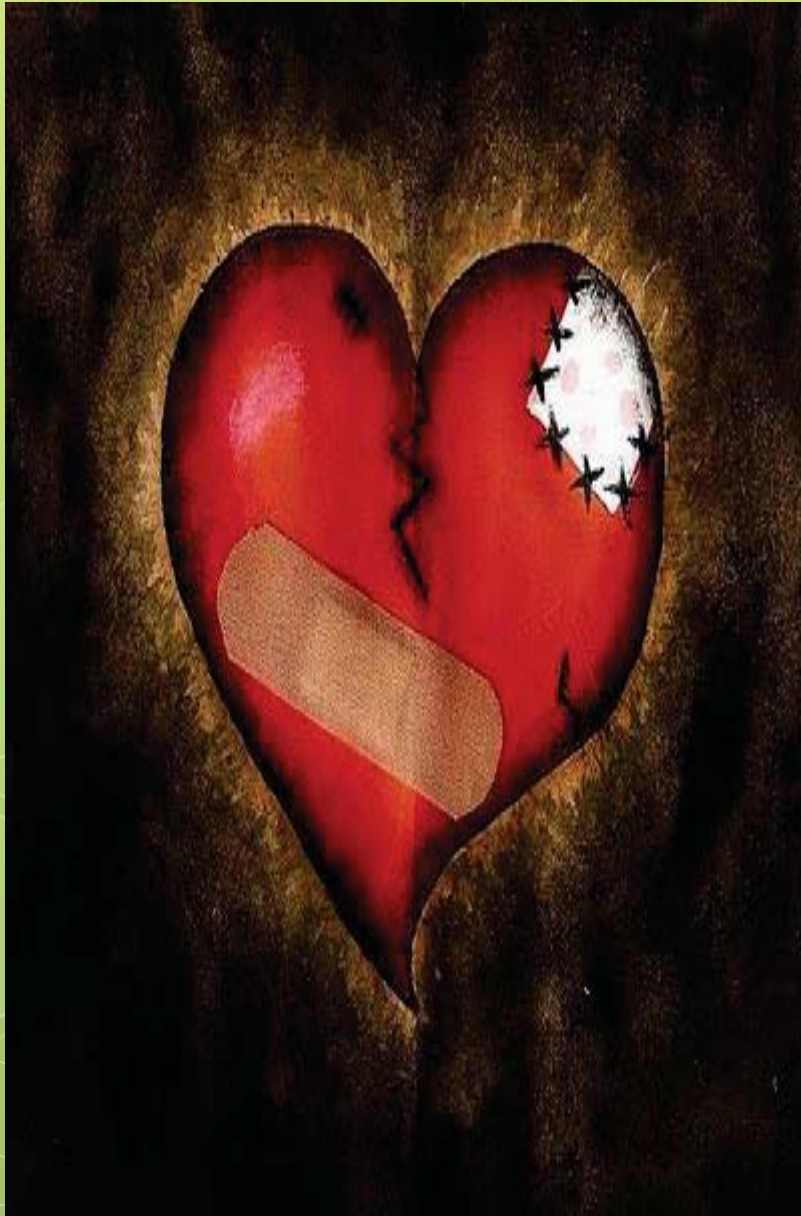
- Understanding of how trauma impacts the individual
- Understanding symptoms as attempts to cope
- Avoidance of re-traumatization
- Trauma-Informed practices

Trauma Informed Practices in a School Setting

Increase trauma awareness by ensuring school staff, educators, and administrators:

- Recognize the potential effects of trauma on education
 - attendance, grades, test scores, classroom behavior, etc.
- Identify students who are in need of help due to trauma
- Consider students' trauma histories and needs in every aspect of service delivery





Counselors & School Psychologists.....

- Help the school community understand trauma and its impact on individuals
- Focus on prevention of future trauma exposure
- See learning-interfering behaviors as coping with trauma symptoms
- Promote skill building and resiliency
- Support student empowerment
- Build on student strengths

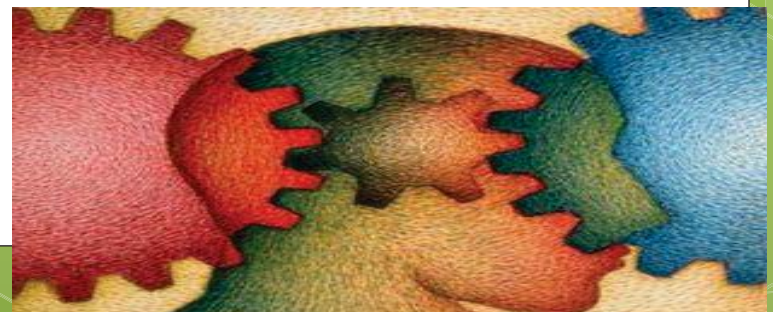
Avoiding Re-Traumatization



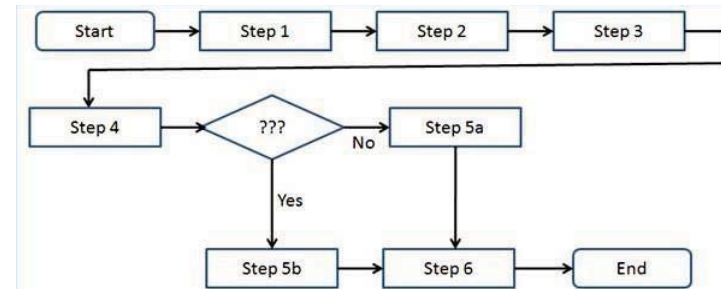
- The extent to which students will be affected by a traumatic event may depend on how often they are reminded of the trauma and the nature and severity of secondary stresses.
- Trauma-sensitive schools acknowledge the prevalence of traumatic occurrence in students' lives & create a flexible framework that provides universal supports, is sensitive to unique needs of students, & is mindful of avoiding re-traumatization.

Avoiding Re-Traumatization

- Help teachers understand that children may not be able to express their suffering in ways that adults can understand.
- Emphasize the importance of helping children feel safe.
- Create support systems for teachers to develop classroom strategies for addressing the needs of traumatized children.
- Adapt school curricula and procedures to respond to the needs of traumatized children.
- Develop protocols for early identification and services before children are at risk for discipline or school failure.



Trauma Informed Practices: Have a Plan



- Being *trauma informed* includes having a plan for when you feel a child is in need of treatment, is receptive to help, or self-discloses trauma or abuse to you.
- What's your comfort level in talking with young people about trauma they may have experienced?
- Do you know referral sources for mental health treatment, how to make referrals, connect the youth to the resources, and follow up if appropriate?

Trauma/Crisis Postvention: District Leadership

- There are times when a crisis or traumatic situation is traumatizing for school personal. In these situations, district professionals from outside the immediate school community may be necessary to help restore a sense of stability and community.
- The district team functions as a resource for materials, training, etc., for school support team members.
- The district team also communicates important policies and procedures regarding postvention support as well as best practice interventions.



Trauma / Crisis

Postvention Team Responsibilities

- Verify the facts of the crisis.
- Determine the appropriate scope of the crisis response.
- Determine how the facts will be communicated to the school.
- Write a statement that can be used by classroom teachers to be read to students.
- Identify a family liaison and work closely with affected families.
- If needed, work with, or identify, the media liaison.
- Design supports for the first day back to school.
- Identify students and faculty that need critical incident stress debriefing, individual counseling, or counseling referrals.
- Maintain and update faculty and all staff telephone chains.
- Offer assistance to teachers in helping children talk about and cope with traumatic events and losses.



Arizona Department of Education
School Safety and Prevention
www.azed.gov/prevention-programs

Barb Iversen

barb.iversen@azed.gov

602-542-8712



Shannon Cronn

scronn@susd.org

480-484-7130