



CONSIDERATIONS FOR BUILDING TRAUMA-SENSITIVE ENVIRONMENTS

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INTRODUCTION



School districts need to ensure that staff, particularly instructional staff, are receiving an appropriate level of support and are experiencing a trauma-sensitive environment in considering the unique challenges of beginning the 2020-21 school year. To support its member districts, with Hanover Research (Hanover) to conduct a secondary research study to identify best practices and exemplary considerations for building trauma-sensitive environments to support both staff and students districtwide. The following report synthesizes the secondary literature on implementing trauma-sensitive school environments and examines strategies for supporting both staff and students. The report also includes spotlights of exemplary districts implementing trauma-supportive environments for staff and students, as well as strategies for creating trauma-sensitive environments in virtual settings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings, Hanover Research recommends that districts consider the following recommendations:

-  Establish a team comprised of staff from across the district to evaluate district and school policies and procedures from a trauma-sensitive lens.
-  Provide staff with professional learning for recognizing signs of trauma in themselves, other staff, and students, as well as strategies for addressing trauma and implementing self-care.
-  Gather district and school staff perceptions of how school environments can best address trauma by partnering with Hanover to conduct a staff survey and virtual focus groups.

KEY FINDINGS

-  **Establishing trauma-sensitive environments for staff and students requires taking a comprehensive, whole-school approach that integrates trauma-sensitive approaches into school climate, culture, practices, and policies.** A trauma-sensitive school environment for staff and students focuses on positive relationships among and between staff and students; creates a safe, positive, and welcoming school climate; supports the physical, mental, social, emotional, and academic needs of all students and staff; and creates structures and environments that reduce unnecessary trauma or experiences of re-traumatization. District policies, such as codes of conduct, discipline, safety, and communication policies, should consider a trauma-sensitive approach and reduce components that could retraumatize stakeholders.
-  **To effectively support teachers who have experienced trauma, district and school leaders must first start by ensuring that all staff can recognize, identify, and address the signs and symptoms of trauma and secondary traumatic stress/compassion fatigue.** Implementing preventative awareness by ensuring that staff can identify signs of trauma in themselves and others requires that schools offer training and professional learning to teach staff to understand the signs of and ways to prevent secondary traumatic stress and burnout. Districts should also set expectations and provide opportunities for educators to prioritize and practice self-care as a means to both prevent and address traumatic stress. School leaders should also ensure staff have access to resources and in-school support services (e.g., peer supports, check-ins, and stress-management strategies) as well as out-of-school supports (e.g., Employee Assistance Programs).



Supporting students experiencing trauma includes requires creating a safe, supportive, and trauma-sensitive classroom environment. The physical classroom environment should create a welcoming and organized space that reduces environmental triggers and avoids overstimulation through warm colors and natural and dimmable lights. The classroom environment should also include a supportive psychological environment with clearly communicated expectations and consistency and predictability in classroom procedures, daily structures, and transitions.



Instruction that supports the learning and academic development of students coping with trauma is predictable and sequential; offers repetition and encouragement; and includes concrete examples, physical manipulatives, and visual organizers. Students experiencing trauma also benefit from differentiated instruction that meets their learning needs and from receiving additional support to ensure grade-level academic development. Teachers can further support students coping with trauma by establishing meaningful, positive teacher-student relationships, as students who have experienced trauma benefit from positive relationships with teachers that make them feel safe and supported to learn. Developing positive connections with students experiencing trauma requires teachers to model and teach strong social-emotion skills (e.g., self-monitoring and self-regulation skills).

CREATING A TRAUMA-SENSITIVE WHOLE-SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Creating a trauma-sensitive environment for staff and students requires that districts and schools take a comprehensive, whole-school approach to school climate, culture, practices, and policies.¹ A trauma-sensitive school environment for staff and students focuses on positive relationships among and between staff and students; creates a safe, positive, and welcoming school climate; supports the physical, mental, social, emotional, and academic needs of all students and staff; and creates structures and environments that reduce unnecessary trauma or experiences of re-traumatization.² Indeed, a trauma-sensitive whole school environment “is one in which all administrators, staff, students, families, and community members recognize and respond to the potentially negative behavioral, relational, and academic impact of traumatic stress on those within the school system including children, caregivers, teachers, other school staff, as well as on the system itself.”³ Figure 1, below, presents essential components of a trauma-sensitive schools.

Figure 1: Essential Components Of A Trauma-Sensitive Schools



Source: *School Social Work Journal*⁴

Additionally, creating trauma-sensitive environments requires commitment from both staff and district and school leaders. For example, district and school leaders can craft vision statements that focus on trauma-sensitivity and promote safe, supporting school environments for students and staff.⁵ Similarly, leaders can reflect on the following questions to help implement trauma-sensitive environments:⁶

- How will our school be conscious of signs of trauma? What will we do when we suspect trauma? What is our procedure for making referrals? How do we handle abuse and neglect referrals?

¹ Guarino, K. and E. Chagnon. “Leading Trauma-Sensitive Schools Action Guide.” National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, 2018. p. 1.

https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/TSS_Training_Package_Action_Guide_0.pdf

² [1] “Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A System Framework.” The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2017. p. 4.

https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/creating_supporting_sustaining_trauma_informed_schools_a_systems_framework.pdf [2] Harper, K. and D. Temkin. “Responding to Trauma through Policies That Create Supportive Learning Environments.” *Child Trends*, 2019. p. 2.

https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/RespondingTraumaPolicyGuidance_ChildTrends_January2019.pdf

³ “Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A System Framework,” Op. cit., p. 4.

⁴ Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Plumb, J.L., K.A. Bush, and S.E. Kersevich. “Trauma-Sensitive Schools: An Evidence-Based Approach.” *School Social Work Journal*, 40:2, 2016. p. 47.

<http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/TSS.pdf>

⁵ [1] Harper and Temkin, Op. cit., p. 4. [2] Guarino and Chagnon, Op. cit., p. 4.

⁶ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: “Creating Trauma-Sensitive Schools: Speaker Notes Part One – What Is Childhood Trauma & How Does It Affect Children?” Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. p. 9.

<https://www.acesconnection.com/g/aces-in-education/fileSendAction/fcType/5/fcOid/431821476959695511/fodoid/431821476959695510/CreatingTraumaSensitiveSchoolWINotes.pdf>

- How do we reach out to families that need help? How do we maintain the dignity and confidentiality of a child’s family?
- How do we interface with the community in a way that communicates that we are a safe and respectful place?
- How will we be conscious of this in the academic, disciplinary and social arenas of our school culture?
- What is our shared vision for creating a trauma-sensitive school? How will we evaluate our effectiveness?

Furthermore, the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) offers guidance for implementing trauma-sensitive environments and approaches. Across industries and settings, including schools, trauma-sensitive approaches follow six key principles of safety, trustworthiness and transparency, collaboration and mutuality, empowerment, voice and choice, and responsiveness to culture, historical, and gender issues (Figure 2). SAMHSA notes that it is these principles, rather than strict procedures and practices, that comprise a trauma-sensitive environment and approach, for both staff and students.⁷

Figure 2: Six Key Principles of Trauma-Sensitive Environments



⁷ “SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach in Youth Settings.” Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2015. p. 34. <https://www.acesconnection.com/g/washington-state-ace-s-group/fileSendAction/fcType/5/fcOid/470108789119162303/fodoid/470108789119162302/trauma-informedinyouthsettings.pdf>

Voice and Choice

- The organization aims to strengthen the experience of choice for clients, family members, and staff. It recognizes that every person's experience is unique and requires an individualized approach.

Responsiveness to Culture, Historical, and Gender Issues

- The organization incorporates policies, protocols, and processes that are responsive to the racial, ethnic, and cultural needs of individuals served, that are gender-responsive, and that incorporate a focus on historical trauma.

Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration⁸

Trauma-sensitive districts and schools support trauma-sensitive environments for staff and students through district and school policies that consider a trauma-sensitive approach and reduce components that could retraumatize stakeholders. For example, districts can craft trauma-sensitive codes of conduct by ensuring the policy “promote[s] positive student behaviors and include[s] graduated systems of developmentally appropriate responses to student misconduct that hold students responsible for their actions [such as] making sure interventions are culturally appropriate, engaging students in efforts to improve the code of conduct, making use of restitution, employing cooling off periods, and ensuring that students continue to receive quality instruction when they are removed from the classroom for disciplinary reason.”⁹ While districts can establish policies that specifically address trauma prevention and response, adapting policies in areas such as discipline, communication, and safety can make significant impact on creating a trauma-sensitive environment. Figure 3 examines effective trauma-sensitive policy components, guiding questions, and essential practices for trauma-sensitive discipline, communication, and safety policies. Additional areas where policies may already consider trauma include school climate, MTSS, and staff training.¹⁰

Figure 3: Policies for a Trauma-Sensitive School

DESCRIPTION	GUIDING QUESTIONS	ESSENTIAL PRACTICES
Discipline		
For students affected by trauma, traditional school discipline practices that include harsh language, negative interactions, and removal from the community may mimic traumatic experiences, trigger trauma-related responses, and reinforce the belief that adults are not predictably safe and trustworthy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is our primary approach to discipline? ▪ How effective is this approach for students exposed to trauma? ▪ How does our approach to discipline align with the core principles of trauma sensitivity (i.e., trauma awareness; safety; choice, control, and empowerment; relationship driven; culturally competent; collaborative; holistic)? ▪ How do our discipline policies and practices facilitate or hinder student, family, and staff well-being? For example, are there practices that could be retraumatizing to students and families? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Engage in proactive planning. ▪ Identify the reasons behind behaviors. ▪ Hold students accountable but in clear, understandable, and respectful ways. ▪ Implement positive behavioral supports. ▪ Minimize isolation and disconnection from the community. ▪ Use restorative approaches. ▪ Model respectful, nonviolent relationships and restorative practices

⁸ Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Ibid.

⁹ “Creating Trauma-Sensitive Schools: Supportive Policies and Practices for Learning.” National Association of School Psychologists, 2015. p. 5.

https://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Research%20and%20Policy/Research%20Center/Trauma_Sensitive_Schools_2015.pdf

¹⁰ Ibid.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who is involved in developing discipline policies and procedures? What do we need to do differently to ensure a trauma-sensitive approach? 	
Communication		
<p>Trauma-sensitive schools establish communication policies that consider the potential impact of trauma on students and families. In all cases, how information is communicated is as important as what information is communicated and can make a critical difference in whether a situation escalates or becomes a learning opportunity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do we currently consider trauma as it relates to our communication policies and procedures? How does our approach to communication with students and families align with the core principles of trauma sensitivity (i.e., trauma awareness; safety; choice, control, and empowerment; relationship driven; culturally competent; collaborative; holistic)? How do our communication policies and procedures facilitate or hinder student, family, and staff well-being? For example, are there practices that could be retraumatizing to students and families? Who is involved in developing communication policies and procedures? What do we need to do differently to ensure a trauma-sensitive approach? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain privacy and confidentiality in all communication with students, parents, and community partners. Communicate information in clear language. Communicate information in the family's home language. Ensure all communication processes are respectful of students and families. Consider potential trauma triggers for families in all communication (e.g., letters home, calls, meetings and conferences). Create formal structures for family feedback. Develop trauma-sensitive processes for communicating with families regarding difficult issues, such as filing abuse and neglect reports or discussing their child's trauma-related difficulties
Safety		
<p>In a trauma-sensitive school, policies and procedures are in place to ensure safety for students and families. Trauma-sensitive schools also ensure that staff members feel safe at their jobs and that emergency procedures take trauma into account.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do we currently consider trauma in our policies and procedures related to school safety? How do we currently consider trauma in our policies and practices related to emergency planning? How does our approach to safety and emergency planning with students and families align with the core principles of trauma sensitivity (i.e., trauma awareness; safety; choice, control, and empowerment; relationship driven; culturally competent; collaborative; holistic)? How do our safety procedures facilitate or hinder student, family, and staff well-being? For example, are there practices that could be retraumatizing to students and families? Who is involved in developing safety procedures? What do we need to do differently to ensure a trauma-sensitive approach? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create procedures for ensuring physical and emotional safety for all students. Create procedures for ensuring physical and emotional safety for all staff. Develop policies related to maintaining confidentiality and privacy as it relates to student, family, and staff safety issues (e.g., custody issues, experiences of domestic violence, restraining orders). Develop and uphold policies related to bullying, harassment, and other forms of violence in the school. Incorporate trauma-sensitive practices into emergency procedures to address and mitigate the impact of acute traumatic events on students and staff.

Source: National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environment¹¹

In addition to adding policies about reducing and addressing trauma and modifying existing policies to take a trauma-sensitive approach, districts and schools may also eliminate existing policies that can retraumatize students, families and staff, such as:¹²

¹¹ Figure contents quoted verbatim from: "Building Trauma-Sensitive Schools Handout Packet." National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments. pp. 58–60.

https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/Building%20TSS%20Handout%20Packet_ALL.pdf

¹² Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Ibid., p. 58.

- Rigid, punishment-driven environments;
- Harsh discipline practices that mimic abusive experiences for youth;
- Crisis intervention practices or emergency procedures that further traumatize students;
- Communication with parents and community partners that disregards student and family privacy and confidentiality;
- Disrespectful treatment of students and families;
- Diminished student and family voice;
- Policies that minimize choice and control; and
- Seclusion and restraint.

Furthermore, in implementing a trauma-sensitive environment for staff and students, districts should also provide staff with professional learning and training on trauma and trauma-sensitive practices. Topics for trainings can include increasing staff understanding of the prevalence, impact, and signs of trauma; strategies for taking a trauma-sensitive approach to interacting with students and peers and teaching, and cultural competency and implicit bias in relation to trauma-sensitive practices.¹³ Notably, increasing staff understanding on how trauma impacts students, staff, schools and communities helps to initiate a perspective shift where staff will better understand how to create a trauma-sensitive school as well as how experiencing trauma impacts student and staff behaviors.¹⁴



Spotlight: Milwaukee Public Schools

Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) implement trauma-sensitive schools using the principles of trauma-sensitive care and positive behavioral interventions and supports. At MPS, Trauma Sensitive Schools:¹⁵

- Realize the prevalence of trauma in students' lives;
- Recognize the impact of trauma on academic and behavioral functioning;
- Respond by providing universal and multi-tiered supports that are sensitive to each student's unique needs; and
- Are mindful of creating policies, procedures, and practices that avoid re-traumatization.

On the “Social, Emotional, and Mental Health Supports” page of their website, MPS defines childhood trauma and offers examples of traumatic experiences for children and symptoms children who have experienced trauma frequently display.¹⁶ This page also presents information on local supports and provides additional resources for parents or teachers with children experiencing trauma. MPS further follows the principles in Figure 4 (on the following page) to take a trauma-sensitive approach to support both staff and students.

¹³ Harper and Temkin, Op. cit., p. 6.

¹⁴ Plumb, Bush, and Kersevich, Op. cit., p. 52.

¹⁵ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: “Trauma & Mental Health.” Milwaukee Public Schools. <https://mps.milwaukee.k12.wi.us/en/Families/Family-Services/Intervention---PBIS/Trauma.htm>

¹⁶ “Trauma-Sensitive Schools.” Milwaukee Public Schools. <https://mps.milwaukee.k12.wi.us/en/Families/Family-Services/SEL-Supports/Trauma-Informed-Care.htm>

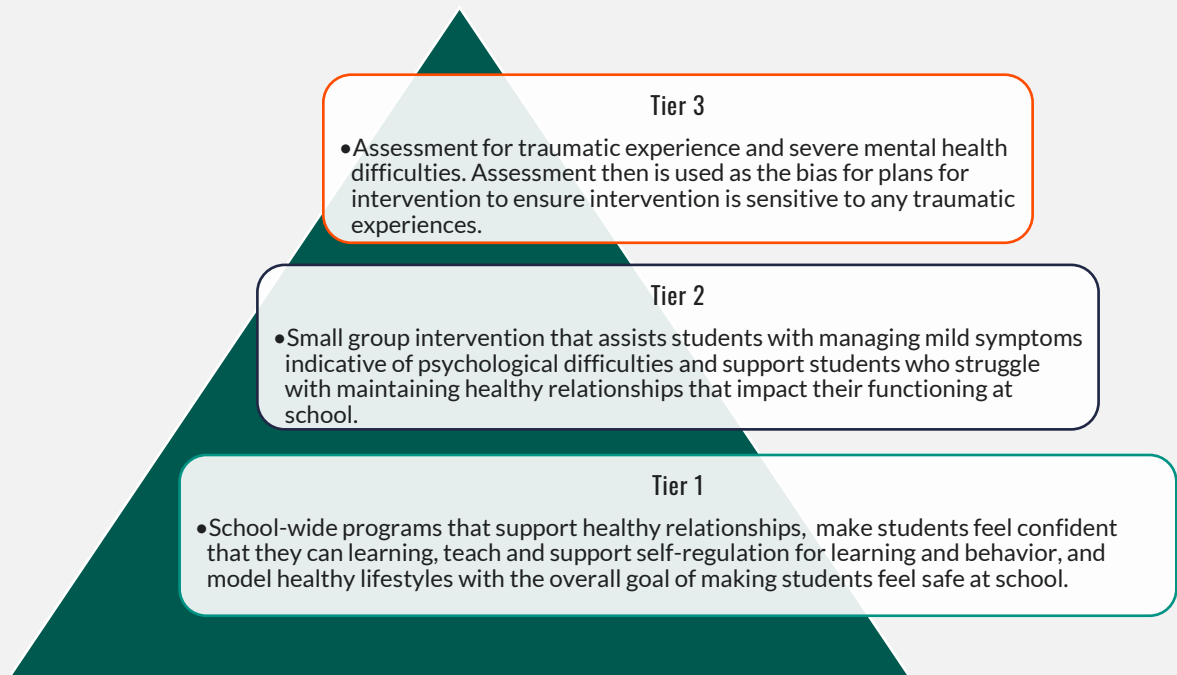
Figure 4: MPS' Principles for Trauma-Sensitive Schools

- School staff members must **understand the prevalence of trauma** for young people and the impact it can have on their behavior and learning.
- Staff members working in TSS adopt a **perspective shift** that enables them to see the behaviors of their students as a way to get a need met, rather than being compliant or disobedient. Only after this perspective shift is one truly trauma-informed.
- Staff members of TSS **understand that relationships heal and build school connectedness**. Relationships are also an important strategy for building trust with students who have been traumatized so that they feel safe in school. Staff takes the time to get to know all students, regardless of their behaviors, in an effort to help them heal from difficulties or make them feel that they belong in school. TSS also understand that academic and personal achievement is optimal when students have healthy relationships with adults and peers.
- **Caregiver capacity** also needs to be addressed in providing a collaborative staff climate in which the staff is supportive of one another and works as a team. Staff at TSS are also encouraged to engage in regular self-care to remediate the effects of vicarious trauma and teacher burnout in order to prevent compassion fatigue, the loss of empathy for those in your care.
- TSS **encourage empowerment and resiliency** to make students feel safe in school through interventions that teach students how to use sensory input to stay calm, using sensory calming strategies in a self-regulated way. They also use programs school-wide that incorporate four domains of resiliency: relationships, self-regulation, academic competence, and health and wellness. TSS ensure that all prevention and intervention strategies or programs incorporate these four areas, focusing on educating the whole child, rather than just focusing on academic instruction. Educators working in TSS also take the time to personally reflect on the cultural relevance and sensitivity of their practices to ensure that school programs and interventions do not traumatize or retraumatize students.

Source: Milwaukee Public Schools¹⁷

MPS' interventions for preventing and addressing trauma use a multi-tiered PBIS framework:

Figure 5: MPS' Multitiered Framework for Trauma-Sensitive Schools



Source: Milwaukee Public Schools¹⁸

SUPPORTING TEACHERS

IDENTIFYING AND ACKNOWLEDGING TRAUMA



In addition to primary self-experiences of trauma, educators are also impacted through their interactions with students who experience trauma.¹⁹ The emotional and physical impacts of experiencing others' trauma are known as secondary traumatic stress (STS), defined as "the emotional distress that results when an individual hears about the traumatic experiences of another individual. Distress may result from hearing someone's trauma stories, seeing high levels of distress in the aftermath of a traumatic event, needing to retell a student's story, and/or seeing photos or images related to the trauma."²⁰ STS can also be referred to as compassion fatigue.²¹ Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting quarantines and shutdowns require school staff to help children and families cope with crisis, and staff often find themselves providing supports that extend beyond an educator's standard training and expertise. School personnel, particularly those who fail to engage in self-care or monitor their own response to the crisis, are therefore at increased risk of burnout or secondary traumatic stress.²² Educators may also be experiencing primary trauma from health concerns for themselves and family members, economic insecurity, or public cases of institutional racism and police brutality in the media over the spring and summer, where "these layered issues have the potential to contribute to anxiety, depression, or symptoms of secondary traumatic stress."²³ As the NEA explains, "educators are burned out, they are stressed, they are fatigued, they are demoralized, and many are now coping with trauma—all conditions with similar symptoms that require proper diagnosis to treat effectively. The trauma could be their own - or their students'."²⁴

To support educators experiencing trauma, both school leaders and staff themselves must be able to recognize the signs and symptoms. Educators experiencing trauma, either primary or secondary, can experience a variety of physical, emotional, and social symptoms, including increased anxiety, negative thoughts related to their own or students' traumatic experiences, trouble concentrating, and feeling fatigued, numb and detached, powerless, and socially and emotionally withdrawn from others.²⁵ While anyone who works with adults or students exposed to trauma is at risk for secondary trauma, features of those who are at higher risk include staff with prior traumatic experience, less experience teaching, as well as being female and young.²⁶ Specifically, education leaders and staff should look out for the warning signs of secondary stress and vicarious trauma (Figure 6, on the following page).

Click [here](#) to access a webinar on secondary traumatic stress for educators from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network.

¹⁷ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: "Trauma & Mental Health," Op. cit.

¹⁸ Figure reproduced verbatim from: Ibid.

¹⁹ Walker, T. "I Didn't Know It Had a Name': Secondary Traumatic Stress and Educators." National Education Association, October 2019. <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/i-didnt-know-it-had-name-secondary-traumatic-stress-and>

²⁰ "Secondary Traumatic Stress and Self-Care Packet." National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments. p. 1. https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/Building_TSS_Handout_2secondary_trauma.pdf

²¹ Baicker, K. "The Impact of Secondary Trauma on Educators." *ASCD Express*, March 2020. <http://www.ascd.org/ascd-express/vol15/num13/the-impact-of-secondary-trauma-on-educators.aspx>

²² "Care for the Caregiver: Guidelines for Administrators and Crisis Teams." National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/mental-health-resources/care-for-caregivers-tips-for-families-and-educators/care-for-the-caregiver-guidelines-for-administrators-and-crisis-teams>

²³ Halladay Goldman, J. et al. "Trauma-Informed School Strategies during COVID-19." The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2020. p. 1. https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/resource-guide/trauma_informed_school_strategies_during_covid-19.pdf

²⁴ Walker, Op. cit.

²⁵ "Secondary Traumatic Stress and Self-Care Packet," Op. cit., p. 1.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 2.

Figure 6: Warning Signs of Secondary Traumatic Stress and Vicarious Trauma

HYPERVIGILANCE	Excessive alertness for potential threats or dangers at and outside of work. Always being “on” and “on the lookout.”
POOR BOUNDARIES	Lacking a balanced sense of your role so that you take on too much, step in and try to control events, have difficulty leaving work at work, or take the work too personally.
AVOIDANCE	Coping with stress by shutting down and disconnecting.
INABILITY TO EMPATHIZE/NUMBING	Unable to remain emotionally connected to the work.
ADDICTIONS	Attaching to distractions to check out from work, personal life, or both.
CHRONIC EXHAUSTION/ PHYSICAL AILMENTS	Experiencing physical, emotional, and spiritual fatigue or inexplicable aches and pains exceeding what you expect for an ordinary busy day or week.
MINIMIZING	Trivializing a current experience by comparing it with another situation that we regard as more severe.
ANGER AND CYNICISM	Using cynicism or anger to cope other intense feelings that we may not understand or know how to manage.
FEELINGS OF PROFESSIONAL INADEQUACY	Becoming increasingly unsure of yourself professionally, second-guessing yourself, feeling insecure about tasks that you once felt confident to perform.

Source: National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments²⁷

Notably, additional responses to trauma that share elements of secondary traumatic stress and can impact educators include:²⁸

- **Burnout** is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a sense of reduced personal accomplishment. Although burnout is also work related, burnout develops as a result of general occupational stress; the term is not used specifically to describe the effects of indirect trauma exposure.
- **Compassion fatigue** is a less stigmatizing way to describe STS and is sometimes used interchangeably with the term STS.
- **Vicarious trauma** refers to internal changes in teachers and staff members who engage empathetically with students affected by trauma. It is a theoretical term that describes the cumulative effects of secondary exposure to trauma.
- **Compassion satisfaction** describes the positive feelings derived from competent performance as a professional working with trauma survivors. It is characterized by positive relationships with colleagues and the conviction that one’s efforts contribute in a meaningful way to students, their families, and the community.

As part of a trauma-sensitive environment, schools have the responsibility to enable staff to identify and acknowledge when they are experiencing primary or secondary traumatic stress or burnout.²⁹ Not having the ability to identify or name these conditions can be extremely isolating for teachers and further the negative

²⁷ Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Ibid., p. 3.

²⁸ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Ibid., p. 1.

²⁹ Plumb, Bush, and Kersevich, Op. cit., p. 52.

consequences, as without school-wide acknowledgement, training, and support for secondary traumatic stress and self-care, educators can feel that it is an individual problem that they alone experience and that it's their responsibility alone to address.³⁰ Additionally, recognizing how supporting students who have experienced trauma can impact their own well-being can help staff recognize the importance of self-care and seeking help when needed.³¹ An NEA article on secondary traumatic stress with input from Steve Hydon, clinical professor and director of the School Social Work Program at the University of Southern California as well as teachers throughout the country, explains that:³²

"[I]t is also the school's responsibility to understand that trauma is inevitable and can impact anyone, [...] If we want healthy teachers in our classrooms, schools must acknowledge the importance of things like staff appreciation, involvement in decision-making, vacation time, mental health awareness and professional development training on ways to build and value self-care," thus, "It's critical that these efforts are school or district-wide [...] because an inordinate emphasis on self-care or 'resilience' without adequate supports places too much of the burden on the individual educator."

Implementing preventative awareness by ensuring that staff can identify signs of trauma in themselves and others requires that schools offer trainings that teach staff to understand the signs of and ways to prevent secondary traumatic stress and burnout. Professional learning sessions should also train staff on the social and emotional skills to support an overall supportive and trauma-sensitive school climate as well as support the social, emotional, academic, and physical well-being of all staff and students.³³



Spotlight: Los Angeles Unified School District

Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) takes a multi-tiered, trauma-sensitive approach to school-based mental health to support positive outcomes for students and staff.³⁴ To support staff, LAUSD provides staff with access to trainings, resources for promoting positive mental health and social-emotional well-being in themselves and students, and recommendations, and books on self-care.³⁵

ADDRESSING TRAUMA AND CREATING A TRAUMA-SENSITIVE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Providing opportunities for and expectations that educators will engage in self-care is critical for creating trauma-sensitive environments for staff, as well as ensuring that staff can continue to appropriately support students.³⁶ A report from WestEd explains that "The key to self-care is to give yourself time to recharge your batteries on a regular basis as well as set reasonable and solid boundaries for yourself. We cannot always fix everything we encounter with others, so sometimes the goal is to give the person a brief respite from their problems. You cannot take care of others if you are not taking care of yourself."³⁷ Examples of self-care activities for educators can include finding ways to relax and "blow off steam," ensuring appropriate nutrition, activities that promote physical fitness, engaging in spiritual



³⁰ Walker, Op. cit.

³¹ Plumb, Bush, and Kersevich, Op. cit., p. 52.

³² Walker, Op. cit.

³³ "Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A System Framework," Op. cit., pp. 10–11.

³⁴ "School Mental Health: Educators/Schools." Los Angeles Unified School District. <http://www.lausd.net/site/default.aspx?PageID%3D15484>

³⁵ [1] Ibid. [2] "School Mental Health: Staff Resources." Los Angeles Unified School District. <http://www.lausd.net/site/default.aspx?PageID%3D12149> [3] "School Mental Health: Self-Care." Los Angeles Unified School District. <http://www.lausd.net/site/default.aspx?PageID%3D12146>

³⁶ [1] "What Are the Basics of a Trauma-Informed Environment?" KnowledgeWorks. <https://knowledgeworks.org/resources/basics-trauma-informed-environment/> [2] "Creating Trauma-Informed Learning Environments." WestEd, 2019. p. 2. <https://www.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/TIP-K-3-TIP-SHEET.pdf>

³⁷ Ibid.

wellness, and spending time with friends.³⁸ Additionally, self-care is also important as a preventative measure, as “[t]eachers who are unable to regularly attend to their own care and develop burnout, compassion fatigue, or vicarious trauma may be unable to adequately respond to their students.”³⁹

District and school leaders can use the checklists in this School Self-Care Plan from the National Center for Safe Supportive Learning Environments to recognize the signs of secondary traumatic stress in educators and implement school-wide strategies to support self-care and educator well-being.

School leaders should also ensure staff have access to in-school and external support services. Examples of in-school supports include peer supports, check-ins, and stress-management strategies in school. Schools should also provide staff with access to resources such as support services and Employee Assistance Programs, and try to provide use and access in a way that reduces stigma associated with utilizing these resources.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Figure 7 below presents both school-wide and individual staff strategies for supporting staff experiencing traumatic stress.

Figure 7: School-wide and Individual Strategies for Addressing Traumatic Stress

WHAT THE SCHOOL CAN DO	WHAT A TEACHER CAN DO
Educate staff about the effects of trauma, STS, and related conditions and provide regular opportunities for staff to address potential issues related to STS.	Increase your knowledge and awareness of the effects of trauma and STS.
Identify and monitor STS and related conditions among staff. Here are two tools that may be helpful: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Compassion fatigue self-test ○ Professional quality of life scale, ProQOL 5 	Assess your current level of burnout, STS, and vicarious trauma.
Encourage and develop formal strategies for peer support and mentorship.	Stay connected to other people and groups that are supportive and nourishing.
Create a culture that fosters staff resilience that includes: fair leave policies, adequate benefits, a physically safe and secure working environment, sufficient supervision, support and resources to do the work, and processes for shared decision making.	Identify and incorporate specific self-care strategies for promoting resilience and maintaining a healthy work-life balance (e.g., exercise, good nutrition, supportive networks).

Source: National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments⁴¹

Additionally, schools working to implement trauma-sensitive environments for staff should follow the following five steps:⁴²

- **Listen:** Create a safe space for teachers to share their stories with one another.
- **Protect:** Preserve that teacher's confidentiality and work to keep them safe from their stressors.
- **Connect:** Connect with the teacher's experience and use that to help provide them with resources for stress management.
- **Model:** Develop systems and plans for stress management.
- **Teach:** Using these steps, help one another in your teacher capacities, continue to learn more about STS, and share your experiences.

Overall, creating a trauma-sensitive environment that reduces chances of burnout and secondary traumatic stress and appropriately responds to and supports staff experiencing trauma requires shared commitment

³⁸ Plumb, Bush, and Kersevich, Op. cit., p. 52.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ “Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A System Framework,” Op. cit., pp. 10–11.

⁴¹ Figure contents quoted verbatim from: “Secondary Traumatic Stress and Self-Care Packet,” Op. cit., p. 4.

⁴² Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Baicker, Op. cit.

from school leaders and staff, as well as both school-wide and individual strategies.⁴³ The following figure offers strategies for educators as well as school administrators.

Figure 8: Trauma-Sensitive Strategies for Educators and Administrators to Support Staff Wellness

STRATEGIES FOR EDUCATORS AND SCHOOL STAFF TO REDUCE THE IMPACT OF STRESSORS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Practice self-compassion: remember that it is best to take care of yourself before you try to take care of others. ▪ Take time to check in with yourself to gain insight into any areas where you may be struggling. Once you identify the issues, create a plan to address the issues you can control and work on letting go of the ones you cannot. ▪ Utilize social supports as needed. Consider planning a virtual coffee break or lunch hour with colleagues or other educators. During these sessions, you might share strategies that are or are not working, talk about what you're cooking or watching on Netflix, and experience a much-needed sense of community. ▪ Create a routine that includes getting up at a regular time, then getting ready and dressed for the day, and following a work schedule. Incorporate into your day some physical movement, as well as some breaks to connect with others. ▪ Remember that, as adults, we can be the best guides for how our students and children will do. They are watching and listening to us, so when we take care of ourselves, we're modeling how they can take care of themselves, too. ▪ Be safe and follow the latest public health recommendations related to hygiene and protective equipment if you must go to the school or into the community for teaching supplies.
STRATEGIES FOR ADMINISTRATORS TO SUPPORT STAFF WELL-BEING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prioritize the physical safety of the entire school community when making decisions related to re-opening the school or holding any in-person events. ▪ Ensure the physical safety of all of your staff by following the latest public health recommendations related to hygiene and protective equipment, minimizing exposure as much as possible. Make sure that any staff on the school grounds or conducting school business are provided with the equipment, policies, and enforcement tools they need to maximize their physical safety. ▪ Check in with your staff both collectively and individually. Encourage them to take time during the school day to manage their stress and take care of themselves and their families. ▪ Identify and distribute resources for staff who may need additional screening, assessment, and/or treatment for stress, mental health issues, or secondary traumatic stress symptoms. Many mental health resources are now available via tele-health platforms. Identify a range of resources that you can provide for your staff. ▪ Consider virtual professional development sessions that promote positive ways to cope with stress, and that help staff to understand the signs of secondary traumatic stress and the ways to prevent and address it. Offer wellness activities and promote routine health care and safety. ▪ Validate your staff members' concerns about their students. Communicate your district's plan for identifying students who need to be located, for helping families who need internet access or hotspots, and for reaching students who may need additional services during this time. It's important for staff to understand the expectations around their roles in reaching students as well as the limits of their responsibilities, and what other supportive methods and resources are available. ▪ Create opportunities for staff to connect to one another, through peer check-ins or using professional development time to reflect and process.

Source: The National Child Traumatic Stress Network⁴⁴

⁴³ "Secondary Traumatic Stress and Self-Care Packet," Op. cit., p. 4.

⁴⁴ Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Halladay Goldman et al., Op. cit., p. 2.



Spotlight: San Lorenzo Unified School District

San Lorenzo Unified School District (San Lorenzo USD) offers a webpage within their “Student Support Services” division dedicated to providing trauma-informed care resources for staff. The site defines vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue, and notes that “To avoid or address the impact of Compassion Fatigue it is essential that educators attend to the ABCs of self-care: Awareness, Balance, and Connection.” San Lorenzo USD offers a wide variety of resources, tools, and articles for staff on managing trauma, self-care, and addressing compassion fatigue.⁴⁵

STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING STAFF WELLBEING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In addition to the strategies described above, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, managers should check-in with all school staff at least once a week. In a remote environment, these check-ins can take the form of individual video check-ins, online office-hours, and/or regular team conference calls.⁴⁶ Managers with limited time or capacity should consider monitoring employee well-being through the establishment of a “buddy system.”⁴⁷ Recommendations for the content of these conversations is below.⁴⁸

Figure 9: Recommendations for Checking-In with Staff During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Ask how they are doing and feeling and ask how their families are doing. Make sure they feel heard and understood.

Find small ways to show your support and care. Help them identify solutions to problems and find

Learn who is in their support network is and how they access their network during times of social

Check that they are taking care of themselves: eating, sleeping, taking breaks, finding time for

Source: American Health Care Association (AHCA) and the National Center for Assisted Living (NCAL)⁴⁹

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs recommends that managers **use the Stress First Aid (SFA) model to support employees experiencing challenges to well-being** as a result of COVID-19.⁵⁰ The SFA model provides guiding questions that managers can use to assess employees’ stress reactions along a continuum.⁵¹ The SFA model includes five components, and the Department of Veterans Affairs recommends that managers use the questions listed below to assess each component (Figure 10).

⁴⁵ “Trauma Informed Care Resources.” San Lorenzo Unified School District.

https://www.slzUSD.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=1208514&type=d&pREC_ID=1446492

⁴⁶ Nawaz, S. “How Managers Can Support Remote Employees.” *Harvard Business Review*, April 1, 2020.

<https://hbr.org/2020/04/how-managers-can-support-remote-employees>

⁴⁷ “NIOSH Fact Sheet: The Buddy System.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, March 28, 2018.

<https://www.cdc.gov/index.htm>

⁴⁸ “Tips on Supporting Staff During the COVID-19 Pandemic.” American Health Care Association (AHCA) and the National Center for Assisted Living (NCAL). https://www.ahcancal.org/facility_operations/disaster_planning/Documents/Emotional-Support-HCW.pdf

⁴⁹ “Tips on Supporting Staff During the COVID-19 Pandemic.” American Health Care Association (AHCA) and the National Center for Assisted Living (NCAL). https://www.ahcancal.org/facility_operations/disaster_planning/Documents/Emotional-Support-HCW.pdf

⁵⁰ “For Leaders: Supporting Your Staff During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic - PTSD: National Center for PTSD.” General Information. https://www.ptsd.va.gov/covid/COVID_leaders_support_staff.asp#two

⁵¹ “Stress First Aid Self Care / Organizational Support Model.” U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for PTSD. p. 2. <https://www.theschwartzcenter.org/media/Stress-First-Aid-Self-Care-Organizational-NCPTSD10.pdf>

Figure 10: Stress First Aid Model

COMPONENT	QUESTIONS
Cover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How has the pandemic affected your sense of safety? If it has, what can we do to help?
Calm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are you doing? What changes have you experienced regarding sleep, feelings of being on edge, or ability to stay calm? If you're having trouble staying calm, is there anything we can do to help?
Connect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has there been an impact on how you talk with each other, work morale, or connecting with family and friends? Is there someone you feel comfortable talking with about this? Has anyone you know done or said something that really helped? Do you feel the need for practical support right now?
Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you have any concerns about being able to handle what's going on in your life, deal with your stress reactions, or do your work? What are some things that you have done to cope that have been helpful in the past, or have been helpful recently? What else could we do that would help?
Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have you noticed any change in your confidence in your ability to do your job the same way as before the outbreak or your confidence in leadership? Are you feeling guilty or wish you could do something differently? Does the outbreak hold special meaning or connect with other experiences in any way? What else could help?

Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for PTSD⁵²

Managers should encourage staff to engage in self-care, debrief with other school staff members about their experience, and take advantage of available resources, such as Employee Assistance Programs.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS

CREATING A TRAUMA-SENSITIVE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT



Teachers can support students experiencing trauma by creating a safe, supportive, and trauma-sensitive classroom environment.⁵³ A trauma-sensitive classroom environment is predictable and minimizes reminders and triggers of student trauma.⁵⁴ Indeed,

⁵² Chart contents taken verbatim from: "For Leaders," Op. cit.

⁵³ [1] Buckwalter, K.D. and C. Powell. "Beyond the Basics: Creating Trauma-Informed Classrooms." Chaddock, January 4, 2018. p. 5. <https://creatingtraumasensitiveschools.org/wp-content/uploads/Buckwalter-Handouts.pdf> [2] Call, C. et al. "Creating Trauma-Informed Classrooms." National Council for Adoption, September 2014. <https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/files/large/4b9294d4e0fc351> [3] "Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A System Framework," Op. cit., p. 9. [4] Pickens, I.B. and N. Tschopp. "Trauma-Informed Classrooms." National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 2017. pp. 10–12. https://www.ncjfcj.org/sites/default/files/NCJFCJ_SJP_Trauma_Informed_Classrooms_Final.pdf

⁵⁴ [1] Buckwalter and Powell, Op. cit., p. 5. [2] "Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A System Framework," Op. cit., p. 9.

While safety encompasses ensuring the physical well-being of students, it also extends to ensuring that psychological safety is bolstered through creating a predictable classroom environment where every member feels respected, validated, and heard.⁵⁵

The physical classroom environment should be organized, not overstimulating, and create a welcoming space that reduces environmental triggers.⁵⁶ Teachers should consider the physical features of the classroom when creating a trauma-sensitive classroom environment, such as the lighting, furniture, and materials:⁵⁷



In addition to the physical classroom environment, a trauma-sensitive classroom includes a supportive psychological classroom environment and culture.⁵⁸ Characteristics and actions that promote psychological safety within a trauma-sensitive classroom environment include:⁵⁹

- Clear expectations for behavior;
- A defined process for addressing behavioral concerns that students understand; and
- Mechanisms for helping students communicate about experiences that undermine feelings of safety.

Specifically, at the beginning of the school year, teachers should discuss with students how they can express feelings of anger, frustration, or sadness in a safe and respectful manner and communicate expectations that students will not bully one another.⁶⁰

Furthermore, teachers can establish a safe space for students experiencing trauma to calm themselves both within the classroom and elsewhere in the school building.⁶¹ Safe spaces “provide opportunities for students to self-regulate when experiencing behavioral and emotional challenges.”⁶² These spaces should have a relaxing, sensory-friendly environment and include comfortable furniture (e.g., beanbags, rocking chairs), music, sensory toolkits, and books.⁶³

PROMOTING CONSISTENCY AND PREDICTABILITY

Students who have experienced trauma benefit from consistency in the classroom environment, classroom procedures, and instruction, as they can be triggered by sudden changes in routine, a lack of structure, or unclear boundaries.⁶⁴ **Teachers should work to implement consistency in their classrooms by implementing similar daily structures, reliable warmth, clear and consistent expectations, and predictability.**⁶⁵ Providing students with some choices can help students develop a sense of self-control over their environment, which

⁵⁵ Pickens and Tschopp, Op. cit., p. 10.

⁵⁶ [1] Buckwalter and Powell, Op. cit., p. 5. [2] Call et al., Op. cit., pp. 7–9.

⁵⁷ [1] Call et al., Op. cit., pp. 7–9. [2] Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Buckwalter and Powell, Op. cit., p. 5.

⁵⁸ Pickens and Tschopp, Op. cit., p. 10.

⁵⁹ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ “Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A System Framework,” Op. cit., p. 9.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Buckwalter and Powell, Op. cit., p. 6.

⁶⁴ “Trauma-Informed Teaching Tips for Educators & Traumatized Students.” Concordia University. <https://education.concordia.edu/blog/classroom-resources/trauma-informed-teaching-tips/>

⁶⁵ [1] Ibid. [2] Wright, T. “Supporting Students Who Have Experienced Trauma.” *The NAMTA Journal*, 42:2, 2017. p. 147. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1144506.pdf>

may be impacted by trauma.⁶⁶ Additionally, teachers can implement the strategies in Figure 11 below for integrating predictability and consistency into the classroom.

Figure 11: Strategies for Integrating Predictability and Consistency into the Classroom

- Discuss, rehearse, and frequently revisit rules, expectations, and rewards;
- Discuss the rationale for rules, expectations, and rewards;
- Avoid threats, intimidation, and battles for control;
- Reinforce that schools are a nonviolent and safe place for children, both physically and emotionally; and
- Integrate safety and conflict resolution skills throughout the curriculum.

Source: *Phi Delta Kappan*⁶⁷

Students also benefit from knowing ahead of time what is going on and what is expected of them.⁶⁸ Accordingly, “Implementing even small classroom systems can greatly alleviate emotional stressors and prevent behavioral incidents.”⁶⁹ One strategy includes clearly posting or presenting students with visual icons to represent the major events and activities of the day, so that students can anticipate their routine and know what to expect.⁷⁰ For older students, sharing a clear agenda for the day increases predictability and decreases student stress.⁷¹

Often, transitions between activities and beginning new assignments can create stress and uncertainty for students who experience trauma. By implementing consistent practices for these occasions, students experience less stress and fewer negative reactions.⁷³

For example, leading up to transitions, provide students with a warning, such as:⁷²

- “Five minutes until we go to lunch,”
- “Three minutes until we go to lunch,”
- “One minute until we go to lunch.”



USING TRAUMA-INFORMED INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES



Teachers can implement instructional practices that support the learning and academic development of students experiencing trauma, as traumatic experiences can make the skills necessary for learning (e.g., engagement, attention, memory, organization) difficult for students.⁷⁴ Thus, in addition to creating a trauma-sensitive environment, building relationships, and anticipating and de-escalating behavioral incidents, teachers can implement instructional practices to support the learning and academic development of students experiencing trauma. Teachers should provide students who have experienced trauma with additional support when needed and differentiated instruction to ensure that students experiencing trauma maintain academic development with their grade level.⁷⁵

As with the classroom environment, students who have experienced trauma benefit from instruction and lessons that are predictable.⁷⁶ Teachers can break lessons up into multiple parts so they are less

⁶⁶ “Trauma-Informed Teaching Tips for Educators & Traumatized Students,” Op. cit.

⁶⁷ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Wright, Op. cit., p. 147.

⁶⁸ Craig, S.E. “The Trauma-Sensitive Teacher.” *Educational Leadership*, September 2016. http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/sept16/vol74/num01/The_Trauma-Sensitive_Teacher.aspx

⁶⁹ “Trauma-Informed Teaching Tips for Educators & Traumatized Students,” Op. cit.

⁷⁰ Craig, Op. cit.

⁷¹ “Trauma-Informed Teaching Tips for Educators & Traumatized Students,” Op. cit.

⁷² Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Call et al., Op. cit., pp. 7–9.

⁷³ “Trauma-Informed Teaching Tips for Educators & Traumatized Students,” Op. cit.

⁷⁴ Wright, Op. cit., p. 149.

⁷⁵ “Strategies and Resources to Create a Trauma-Sensitive School.” Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. p. 1. <https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sspw/pdf/traumastrategies.pdf>

⁷⁶ Craig, Op. cit.

overwhelming and warn students of any changes or transitions.⁷⁷ For example, one strategy includes “designing lessons so that they follow the same sequence of steps with a standard format and cues.”⁷⁸ Additionally, teachers can use the following strategies, which support the academic development of students who have experienced trauma, during classroom instruction:⁷⁹

- Emphasize causal and sequential relationships in classroom activities;
- Divide tasks and instruction into parts to help students feel less overwhelmed;
- Present information in multiple ways in order to reduce the likelihood of children missing important pieces of information and lessen the anxiety they experience when uncertain of classroom expectations;
- Because traumatized children often struggle to think abstractly, provide concrete examples, and use visual cues, physical movement, and recall activities during instruction to help children stay focused and engaged;
- Utilize graphic organizers and physical manipulatives in academic lessons to help children organize new information;
- Create opportunities for children to repeat and rehearse instructions; and
- Offer ongoing support and encouragement to support children in staying on task.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS



Students who have experienced trauma benefit from positive, connected relationships with teachers that make them feel safe and supported to learn.⁸⁰ Nurturing positive connections with students who have experienced trauma requires deliberate action from teachers, including through strategies such as:⁸¹

- Making eye contact using soft eyes when speaking with students or making a request;
- Encouraging healthy positive touch into the classroom routine, such as handshakes, high fives, and fist bumps; and
- Taking an interest in students’ lives:
 - Ask questions.
 - Listen.
 - Incorporate a journaling activity in class. Read and respond to entries.
 - Recognize emotional states; e.g., when a student looks like they are upset or angry.
 - Have a check-in question at the beginning of each class; e.g., “On a scale of 1 to 10, my stress level is a ___” or “The best gift I ever received was ____.”

Intentionally forming positive relationships with students who experience trauma requires teachers to model and teach strong social-emotion skills, especially self-monitoring and self-regulation skills.⁸²

Students who have experienced trauma also benefit from positive relationships with other students, and as discussed in the previous section, may struggle with social situations. Teachers can facilitate the peer

⁷⁷ Wright, Op. cit., p. 149.

⁷⁸ Craig, Op. cit.

⁷⁹ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Wright, Op. cit., p. 149.

⁸⁰ [1] Ibid., p. 6. [2] Wright, Op. cit., p. 42. [3] Call et al., Op. cit., pp. 7–9. [3] “Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A System Framework,” Op. cit., pp. 8–9.

⁸¹ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Call et al., Op. cit., pp. 7–9.

⁸² [1] “Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A System Framework,” Op. cit., pp. 8–9. [2] Craig, Op. cit. [3] “Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A System Framework,” Op. cit., pp. 8–9.

relationships of students who have experienced trauma through the following strategies, which “can help to honor children who may be afraid to trust or who are overwhelmed by feelings of closeness, while allowing them opportunities to practice connecting with others and space for respect and interdependence to emerge.”⁸³

Offering structured opportunities for both group and individual play;	Creating quiet spaces for children to “take a break” throughout the day;	Modeling and role-playing strategies for joining in play and resolving conflicts; and	Recognizing and naming moments of positive social interaction.
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Spotlight: Schenectady City School District

Over the past few years, Schenectady City School District (SCSD) has prioritized shifting to a framework for trauma sensitive schools. This initiative stems from the district’s comprehensive education plan, which included a commitment to “leading the development and implementation of pro-social curriculum to support social and emotional developmental health of students,” which includes implementing trauma-sensitive schools. SCDS aims to support both students and staff through trauma-sensitive environments, noting that “[i]n a trauma-sensitive school, there is not only an understanding that students have to feel safe to learn but teachers also have to feel safe to teach.”⁸⁴ SCDS’ efforts to develop trauma sensitive schools include creating a supportive and respectful school culture, preparing school staff to recognize and support those experiencing trauma, and setting clear expectations for students.⁸⁵ Figure 12, on the following page, presents additional activities to support trauma-sensitive approaches throughout the district.

Figure 12: Activities and Collaborations Across SCSD to Develop and Support Trauma-Sensitive Schools

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Restorative Circles as a method of resolving conflict ▪ Mindfulness in the school routine ▪ Sensory Rooms as calm spaces ▪ Book Studies ▪ Turn Around Rooms for De-Escalation ▪ Infusion of strategies in elementary literacy centers (TSS theme) ▪ Restorative Questions & Reflections In the Classroom ▪ Social-Emotional Curriculum infused in class schedule ▪ Crisis Response Planning ▪ Family and Staff Engagement in TSS Work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partnerships around TSS ▪ Community Collaboration with Mental Health Providers ▪ Professional Development within the school ▪ School Staff Collaboration and Planning on TSS Initiatives ▪ Collaboration of work with efforts to address disproportionate student outcomes (TAC-D Work) ▪ Building wide planning to address compassion, fatigue & burn out ▪ Support Groups for Staff ▪ Development of Measurement Tool for Plan Evaluation |
|--|--|

Source: Schenectady City School District⁸⁶

⁸³ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Wright, Op. cit., p. 146.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

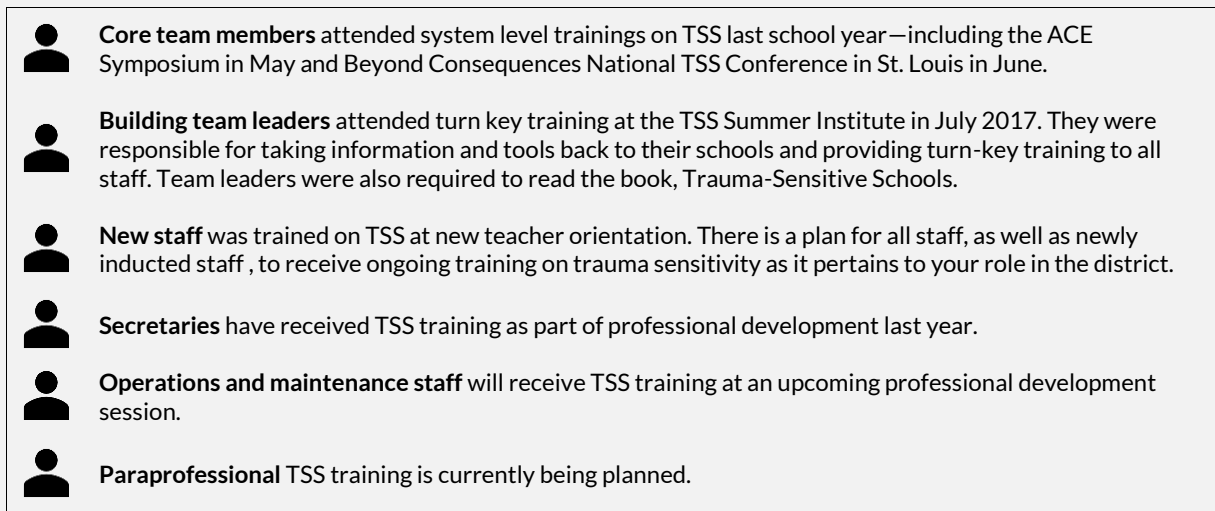
⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ “Trauma Sensitive Schools.” Schenectady City School District, January 2018. p. 3.
http://www.schenectady.k12.ny.us/UserFiles/Servers/Server_412252/Image/Initiatives%20Page/TSS/01-TSS%20Communication%20-%20Winter%202017-Staff-%20JANUARY%202018.pdf

A key strategy SCSD is using to support trauma-sensitive schools is through staffing. First, the district formed a “TSS Core Team” of 15 central office administrators, principals, social workers, behavioral specialists and an instructional coach who worked “to create the framework, timeline for district-wide implementation and guidance for the work that is underway and ahead of us.”⁸⁷ Next, every school within the district formed an 8-14 member building-level implementation team comprised of teachers, paraprofessionals, clinicians, parent liaisons, and cafeteria staff “to identify training needs, provide school culture assessments, conduct book clubs and events, communicate district activities to the school and serve as TSS ambassadors in the building.” Then, each school identified three building team to serve as building leaders.⁸⁸

Also to support staff, SCSD has prioritized targeted trainings for all staff to ensure they can implement and support trauma-sensitive approaches and environments, noting that “[t]here is a plan for all staff, as well as newly inducted staff, to receive ongoing training on trauma sensitivity as it pertains to your role in the district.”⁸⁹ Notably, the district has offered different trainings to different groups of staff. For instance, all new staff receive training on trauma-sensitive schools during new teacher orientation. The figure below shows how SCSD supports various staff groups with trainings on implement trauma-sensitive approaches. Additionally, the district offered a book study, where all staff received the book *Hope for Billy* and participated in book studies at locations across the district.⁹⁰

Figure 13: SCSD Professional Learning for Trauma-Sensitive Schools



Source: Schenectady City School District⁹¹

SCSD also highlights the impact of compassion fatigue for educators working with students experiencing trauma and recommends that school staff engage in self-care. The district offers the following suggestions for engaging in self-care:⁹²

- Guard against your work becoming the only activity that defines who you are;
- Keep perspective by spending time with children who are not experiencing traumatic stress;
- Be sure to eat well, exercise, engage in fun activities, take a break during the day and find time to self-reflect; and

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 2.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Ibid.

⁹² Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Ibid., p. 4.

- Mindful Identity and Connection (meditation).

STRATEGIES FOR CREATING TRAUMA-SENSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS DURING REMOTE LEARNING

Using a trauma-sensitive approach during the COVID-19 pandemic is especially crucial for supporting students' positive academic and social-emotional outcomes.⁹³ Educators can use the following strategies to create trauma-sensitive learning environments for students during remote learning.

Create Consistency, Predictability, and Routines During Virtual Learning

Especially during distance learning, educators should strive to implement structures, communications, and lessons that promote consistency and routines.⁹⁴ Strategies for creating a sense of consistency and predictability for students during remote learning include:



Explain any changes or shifts in routines to students, do not assume they will understand why routines change⁹⁵



Make sure students know how they can communicate with their teacher and when their teacher will be available to respond.⁹⁶



Create an online calendar or agenda that displays the day's lesson, start and stop times, and due dates.⁹⁷

Design a Trauma-Sensitive Virtual Classroom

Educators can create a trauma-sensitive virtual classroom environment, just as they would in a physical classroom. Trauma-sensitive virtual classrooms and teaching environments should offer a visually comforting environment. For instance, having familiar items from the classroom (e.g., a class pet), books, or posters in the background can provide students with a sense of comfort during an otherwise stressful time.⁹⁸ Similarly, educators should also take a trauma-sensitive approach to designing their virtual classroom platform online. Trauma-sensitive online platforms are easy for students to navigate and use soft, muted colors and avoid bright or distracting colors. Indeed, educators can strive to make their virtual teaching platforms "visually pleasant, simple, and easy to use."⁹⁹

⁹³ Halladay Goldman et al., Op. cit., p. 1.

⁹⁴ Stoltzfus, K. "5 Essential Trauma-Informed Priorities for Remote Learning." ASCD Inservice, April 7, 2020. <https://inservice.ascd.org/5-essential-trauma-informed-priorities-for-remote-learning/>

⁹⁵ "A Trauma-Informed Approach to Teaching Through Coronavirus." Teaching Tolerance, March 23, 2020. <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/a-trauma-informed-approach-to-teaching-through-coronavirus>

⁹⁶ "Priority for Trauma-Sensitive Remote Learning: Keeping Connections Strong." Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (A Collaboration of Massachusetts Advocates for Children and Harvard Law School), 2020. p. 4. <https://traumasensitiveschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Trauma-Sensitive-Remote-Learning.pdf>

⁹⁷ Pate, C. "Strategies for Trauma-Informed Distance Learning." WestEd Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety, 2020. https://selcenter.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/05/SEL_Center_Strategies_for_Trauma_Informed_Distance_Learning_Brief.pdf

⁹⁸ Stoltzfus, Op. cit.

⁹⁹ Banks, A. "Teaching With Compassion: A Guide to the Trauma-Informed Virtual Classroom." Insights to Behavior, July 31, 2020. <https://insightstobehavior.com/blog/teaching-compassion-guide-trauma-informed-virtual-classroom/>

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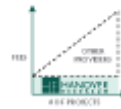
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