

## How Trauma Impacts Students and What You Can Do About It

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### Learning Objectives

- Have a basic understanding of the impact on childhood trauma on learning
- Have a basic understanding of the Responsive School Framework.
- Know basic strategies to initiate Responsive School structures, policies and procedures.

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**TRAUMATIC STRESS:** exposure to one or more traumas develop reactions that persist and affect daily living

- |                                       |                                  |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| • Physical Abuse                      | • Adoption                       |
| • Sexual Abuse                        | • Incarcerated parents           |
| • Domestic Violence                   | • Mentally ill parents           |
| • Natural disasters                   | • Deportation                    |
| • Car accidents                       | • Emotional Abuse                |
| • Painful procedures                  | • Exposure to community violence |
| • Life-threatening medical conditions | • Racism and discrimination      |
| • Homelessness                        | • Bullying                       |

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### Prevalence

- It is estimated that 26% of children in the United States will witness or experience a traumatic event before the age of 4 years. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), almost 60% of American adults say that they endured abuse or other difficult family circumstances during childhood.
- [www.samhsa.gov/children/SAMHSA\\_Short\\_Report\\_2011.pdf](http://www.samhsa.gov/children/SAMHSA_Short_Report_2011.pdf)

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### Prevalence of ACEs

ACES Items	WI
Drug addicted or alcoholic family member	27%
Loss of a parent to death, abandonment, or divorce	21%
Mentally ill, depressed or suicidal person in the home	16%
Witnessing domestic violence against the mother	10%
Incarceration of any family member for a crime	6%
Child physical abuse	17%
Child sexual abuse	11%
Child emotional abuse	29%
Emotional neglect	15% (U.S.)
Physical neglect	10% (U.S.)

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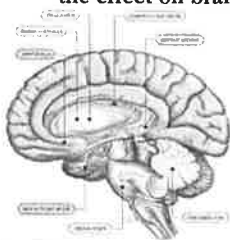
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**The longer the traumatic stress occurs, the larger the effect on brain development.**



Frontal Executive areas disengage

Subcortical 'fight or flight' areas engage

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**Trauma changes our physiology**  
fight, flight or freeze response

**Noticeable Effects**

- Pupils dilate
- Mouth goes dry
- Muscles tense
- Heart pumps faster
- Breathing rate increases
- Chest pains
- Palpitations
- Perspiration
- Hyperventilation



**Hidden Effects**

- Brain prepares body for action
- Adrenaline released
- Blood pressure rises
- Liver releases glucose to provide energy for muscles
- Digestion slows or ceases
- Cortisol released (depresses immune system)

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**Other Effects of Trauma in Children**

- Cognitive Functions – reduced attention, memory, curiosity
- Attachment Functions – distrust, isolation, control
- Biological/Physical – medical problems, sensory problems
- Affect Regulation – difficulty controlling and describing emotions
- Behavioral Control – impulsivity, aggression, high risk behavior

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**More Traumatic Event Types are Related to More Behavioral Health Problems**

- Age 0-6:
- greater behavior problems at home
- Age 0-17
- more school absence
- Age 11-17:
- more likely to use alcohol, tobacco, or marijuana
  - more likely to have attempted suicide

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### Trauma & School Outcomes

Students who have experienced trauma:

- Are two-and-one-half times more likely to fail a grade
- Score lower on standardized achievement test scores
- Have more receptive or expressive language difficulties
- Are suspended or expelled more often
- Are designated to special education more frequently

Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009

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Help traumatized children learn by making a paradigm shift from:

“What’s wrong with you?”  
to  
“What happened to you?”



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### Essential Components of Responsive Systems

- Culturally Sensitive
- Understand Trauma
- Promote of Safety
- Healing happens within relationships
- Strengths-based
- Compassionate Communication
- Empowering Students



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### Protective Factors That Build Resilience

- Caring relationship with an adult
- Good peer relationships
- Hobbies and interests
- Active coping style
- Positive self-esteem
- Good social skills
- Internal locus of control
- Balance between seeking help & seeking autonomy

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### STEPS TO CREATE A RESPONSIVE (TRAUMA- SENSITIVE) SCHOOL

1. Engage leadership
2. Perform needs assessment
3. Review literature (see reference and resources on last slide)
4. Provide training so ALL staff are aware of the impact of trauma on behavior and learning and can help to develop strategies to support these children
5. Implement classroom strategies to establish safety, trust, collaboration, empowerment and choice.

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### What about your school/district?

- What is working at your school? What is helping students at your school be successful?
- What are barriers to student success at your school? What you are worried about?
- What school programs or interventions address the identified issues?
- What school goal results from this reflection and analysis?

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### What is your goal?

- What is the gap, need or student issue you are addressing?
- How does addressing the issue affect student achievement, attendance, behavior and school safety?
- Is your goal based on existing data?
- Is your goal specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented and time-bound (SMART)?
- Does your goal align with the school mission or improvement plan?

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### How will you achieve it?

- What data do you need to examine to develop your SMART goal plan?
- Is the information or data available?
- What process, perception and outcome data will you collect and analyze?
- What procedures will you follow?
- Do data collection tools/instruments need to be created?
- How will you analyze the data?
- How will you use your results?

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### Key Components of Responsive Schools Training for School Personnel

- Foundational knowledge about brain & neuroscience, trauma's impact on the brain, attachment & learning
- Responsive (trauma-sensitive) school framework
- Compassionate discipline
- Teacher support (e.g., coaching), self-care, professional development
- Parent & Student education
- Responsive whole-school (universal strategies); strategies in class delivered by teachers; interventions delivered by counselors
- DATA, DATA, DATA & ongoing evaluation

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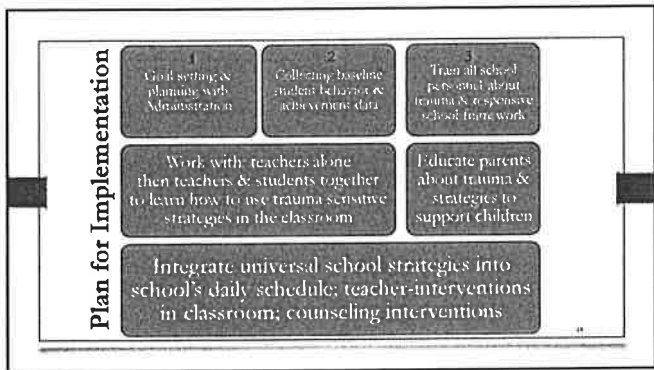
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### Addressing Student Needs

Student Support Team – generally includes administrator, the classroom teacher, a special education (or resource) teacher and/or a remedial education specialist, a school counselor and/or the parent.

- Functions to provide structure to the decision-making process
- Offers formalization of a process which allows for consistency and accuracy in communication, decision making and documentation
- Offers a team approach with an emphasis on collaboration and consultation.
  - Develop student support plan
  - implement this plan for a reasonable designated probationary period.
  - apparent that the school is unable to reasonably meet the needs of the child, it is the obligation of the school's administrator to share this information with the parent

<http://doep.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/Special-Learning-Needs.pdf>

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### References & Resources

- Child Safety Commissioner, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia (2007). *Calm classrooms: A guide to working with traumatized children*. Retrieved from [www.kids.vic.gov.au/downloads/calmclassrooms.pdf](http://www.kids.vic.gov.au/downloads/calmclassrooms.pdf)
- HHS Publication No. SMA-11-4642 (2011). *Helping children and youth who have experienced traumatic events*. Retrieved from [www.samhsa.gov/children/SAMHSA\\_Short\\_Report\\_2011.pdf](http://www.samhsa.gov/children/SAMHSA_Short_Report_2011.pdf)
- Massachusetts Advocates for Children (2007). *Helping traumatized children learn*. Retrieved from [www.massadvocates.org/documents/HITCL\\_9-07.pdf](http://www.massadvocates.org/documents/HITCL_9-07.pdf)
- Wolpov, R., Johnson, M., Hertel, R., & Kincaid, S. (2009). *The heart of learning and teaching: Compassion, resilience, academic success*. Olympia, WA: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Comprehensive Schools. <http://www.k12.wa.us/comprehensive/schools/publicdocs/TheHeartofLearningandTeaching.pdf>
- Video: The Heart of Learning Model. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HJN2G1H37g&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HJN2G1H37g&feature=player_embedded)
- Adverse Childhood Experiences in Wisconsin: Findings from the 2010 Behavior Risk Factor Survey. [https://emils.wisc.edu/pubs/ace/adh/prevention/Adverse\\_Childhood\\_Experiences\\_in\\_Wisconsin\\_2011.pdf](https://emils.wisc.edu/pubs/ace/adh/prevention/Adverse_Childhood_Experiences_in_Wisconsin_2011.pdf)
- Special Learning Needs: <http://doep.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/Special-Learning-Needs.pdf>
- Relationship Mapping Activity: [http://mtr.pse.harvard.edu/files/mtr-mce/files/Relationship\\_mapping\\_pitch\\_and\\_guide\\_0\\_0.pdf](http://mtr.pse.harvard.edu/files/mtr-mce/files/Relationship_mapping_pitch_and_guide_0_0.pdf)

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## NEEDS ASSESSMENT

**A team composed of school administration and members from multiple disciplines from all areas of the school is created to answer these questions:**

- 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?
- 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?

School Culture – The beliefs and attitudes that are rooted in the history of the school. This determines the rituals and traditions of a school. Current school rules and policies reflect the school culture. A trauma-sensitive school has policies and procedures that are consistent with maintaining a safe environment for all students. A committee reviews policy and procedures through a trauma-sensitive lens.

School Climate is related to school culture. However, school climate refers to the feel, atmosphere, tone, and personality of a school. This is characterized by how people treat and feel about each other, and the extent to which people feel included and appreciated.

**Questions to ask to assess school culture and climate:**

- Is our school environment welcoming to students and families?
- What is the stigma around needing help?
- Do we focus on student strengths?
- Are we able to access needed resources, so that our students arrive at school ready to learn?
- Are staff able to recognize signs of trauma?
- Do staff know what to do when they suspect abuse/neglect?
- Do we have a shared vision for creating a trauma-sensitive school?