Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Toolkit
The National Center for School Safety (NCSS) is a Bureau of Justice Assistance-funded training and technical assistance center at the University of Michigan School of Public Health. As a multidisciplinary, multi-institutional center focused on improving school safety and preventing school violence, the NCSS team is composed of national leaders in criminal justice, education, social work, and public health with expertise in school safety research and practice. NCSS provides comprehensive and accessible support to Students, Teachers, and Officers Preventing (STOP) School Violence grantees and the school safety community nationwide to address today’s school safety challenges. NCSS serves as the national training and technical assistance provider for the STOP School Violence Program.

The National Council for Mental Wellbeing drives policy and social change on behalf of nearly 3,500 mental health and substance use treatment organizations and the more than 10 million children, adults and families they serve. They advocate for policies to ensure equitable access to high-quality services and build the capacity of mental health and substance use treatment organizations. They also promote greater understanding of mental wellbeing as a core component of comprehensive health and health care.

Suggested Citation
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Using this Toolkit

The Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Toolkit outlines a framework for implementing these approaches in any school or school district. It utilizes tools, videos, professional development slide decks, and concise instruction to explain the concepts of trauma and toxic stress, offers individual and school-wide strategies for addressing trauma and fostering resilience for students, staff, and families, and to assess the impact of these adaptations throughout the school community.

The sections’ topics are presented in the order your school or district will likely start to address them. However, this is a continual process of implementation, assessment, and improvement. As such, it is likely that you will not fully complete activities in one section before moving to the next, and action steps of one section may influence action and understanding of another.

| Section 1 | Introducing Trauma and Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools | Creates shared understanding of core concepts and offers tools to encourage new mindsets about students, staff, and families |
| Section 2 | Universal Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Practices and Processes | Outlines school- and district-wide strategies to establish safe and secure environments and relationships |
| Section 3 | Building a Culture of Faculty and Staff Compassion Resilience | Explains the importance of promoting staff wellness through improved resources and policies as universal strategies of trauma-informed, resilience-oriented schools |
| Section 4 | Tier II and Tier III Interventions and Supports | Details specific approaches for multi-tiered systems of support |
| Section 5 | Engaging Parents, Families, and Communities | Outlines strategies for including and supporting parents, families, and communities in student-centered planning |
| Section 6 | Implementing and Evaluating Your Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Innovations | Explains how to build a system to continually evaluate the strengths and needs of your school |
| Section 7 | Educating During Crisis: The COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond—Recommendations for All Phases | Details the use of trauma-informed, resilience-oriented approaches in response to crises |
Action Steps structure each section and offer different approaches for understanding and utilizing the information. Implementation Tools, Alternate Learning Strategies, and Inclusion and Engagement Action Steps are designed to provide tangible activities to apply your learnings in your school or district.

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**Who Should Use this Toolkit?**

The primary audience for this toolkit includes: school administrators, school board members, teachers and student support staff, parents and families, and community partners. This toolkit recognizes the diversity of schools, districts, and communities and is designed to be applicable regardless of size, geography, and resources. Most resources included and citations referenced are free to use and in the public domain to prioritize accessibility. The authors understand that financial resources vary widely district-to-district, so each Action Step can be implemented with no or minimal additional funding needed.

It is recommended that each school or district form a core team to lead their trauma-informed, resilience-oriented schools initiative. This team should consist of members who represent the diversity of the school community and are motivated and empowered to implement the Action Steps.

This toolkit is designed for adult learners, who:

- **Are autonomous and self-directed**: Implementation Tools for discussion, learning, and input from all adults involved in the school are offered.
- **Have a foundation of life experiences and knowledge**: This toolkit acknowledges the strengths each learner brings and encourages them to utilize them in the implementation of the material.
- **Are goal-oriented**: Action Steps provide clearly defined elements to learn, understand, and integrate into daily practice.
- **Are relevancy-oriented**: This toolkit offers guidance for elementary, middle, and high school settings; for teachers, staff, parents, families, and communities; and for programs with existing initiatives, such as PBIS, social and emotional learning, and multi-tiered systems of support.
- **Are practical**: Implementation Tools and Inclusion and Engagement Action Steps ensure learners can act on the information immediately.
- **Want to be shown respect**: This toolkit acknowledges that schools are experts on their own context and offers guidance to integrate into existing structures. It is strengths-based and acknowledges the incredible expertise and dedication educators, students, parents, and communities bring to their schools.
Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Action Steps Checklist

Section 1: Introducing Trauma and Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools
  » Establish understandings of trauma, its impact, and prevalence in school communities
  » Encourage new mindsets about students and their experiences of trauma and toxic stress
  » Embed trauma-informed, resilience-oriented principles into all decision-making

Section 2: Universal Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Practices and Processes
  » Adapt the physical school environment to foster safety and learning
  » Utilize a trauma-informed, resilience-oriented lens to build relationships
  » Implement resilience-building classroom strategies

Section 3: Building a Culture of Faculty and Staff Compassion Resilience
  » Increase awareness and understanding of compassion fatigue, burnout, and compassion resilience
  » Encourage wellness assessment and seek feedback from staff on resilient culture
  » Implement individual and district-wide adaptations to promote resilience

Section 4: Tier II and Tier III Interventions and Supports
  » Create student plans responsive to trauma and rooted in resilience-building approaches
  » Adapt schoolwide discipline processes
  » Implement targeted practices for Tier III supports

Section 5: Engaging Parents, Families, and Communities
  » Apply a trauma-informed, resilience-oriented lens to parent and family engagement
  » Identify and respond to needs of parents and families
  » Build partnerships with families and community partners

Section 6: Implementing and Evaluating Your Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Innovations
  » Establish a collaborative team to lead your trauma-informed, resilience-oriented schools initiative
  » Engage in the implementation process
  » Utilize a continuous quality improvement approach

Section 7: Educating During Crisis: The COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond—Recommendations for All Phases
  » Use a trauma-informed, resilience-oriented lens to plan and decide
  » Undertake activities to put safety first
  » Create support infrastructure for teachers and staff
  » Implement classroom strategies to promote safety and connection
Introducing Trauma and Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools

Students, staff, administrators, and families experience multiple stressors each day. For many, stressors are rising to the level of distress and trauma, and negatively impact their ability to live healthy lives and learn to their full potential. Before educators can make decisions about effective ways to address trauma in their classroom and throughout the school, they need to understand what it is, its impact generally, and its disproportionate effects on individuals of color and other underserved groups. This section of the toolkit establishes a common vocabulary related to trauma and resilience, their impact on life, learning, and other important concepts, and offers strategies to begin to embed a trauma-informed, resilience-oriented approach throughout the school community before a crisis happens.

Establish Understandings of Trauma, Its Impact, and Prevalence in School Communities

Trauma and its impact are individual experiences. Multiple kinds of events such as child maltreatment, violence in the home, substance misuse, loneliness, serious illness, car accidents, natural disasters like flooding and forest fires, terrorism, and war, can all be experiences of trauma. Additionally, groups of people defined by culture, race, religion, ability, gender, sexuality, territory, socioeconomic status, or language can have collective experiences that impact themselves and multiple generations of their offspring. Often experiences of oppression related to the multiple pieces of a person’s identity layer on each other, and intensify and increase the frequency of trauma.

ACTION STEPS
» Establish understandings of trauma, its impact, and prevalence in school communities
» Encourage new mindsets about students and their experiences of trauma and toxic stress
» Embed trauma-informed, resilience-oriented principles into all decision-making

IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS
» Six Principles of Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Reference Sheet
» Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Principles Assessment Questions
» Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Review Tool for School Policies, Protocols, Procedures & Documents
» Practicing Responding to Trauma Scenarios
» Personal Identity and Loss Activity
» Brain Rules Practice Template Tool
» Introduction to Trauma and Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Slide Deck
Defining Trauma

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances experienced or witnessed by an individual that amount to an overwhelming or life-changing effect on the individual’s well-being. Trauma affects people in numerous and individualized ways, such as health complications, distrust of people, institutions, and systems, and an altered view of the world, beliefs, and spirituality.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are a sociological measure of childhood experiences that can cause trauma. They include events occurring during childhood such as experiencing or witnessing violence and parental separation. Research has linked ACEs to chronic health issues, including mental illness and addiction. Since 1997, almost every state has completed the ACEs survey at least once with a cross-sample of their population. Consistent through all the surveys is the conclusion that ACEs are common. They exist across states, communities, cultures, races, geographical areas, socio-economic categories, and languages. Additional studies have been done in schools. A study in Washington State concluded that, on average, 13 out of every 30 students in a classroom will have toxic stress from 3 or more ACEs.

The original list of ten ACEs in the seminal 1997 study has since been expanded as the field’s definitions of trauma have solidified and gaps in the list have been highlighted. Trauma is now understood to result from experiences like food insecurity, poverty, and discrimination.

Historical trauma is the cumulative and psychological wounding, over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences. This form of trauma stems from an event affecting a group of people, and the consequences of the event impact generations to come, particularly as systems

KEY TERMS

Sometimes conflated, there is a difference in definitions for trauma, ACEs, and toxic stress.

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<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Trauma</td>
<td>An umbrella term used to describe the impacts of ACEs and toxic stress.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACEs</td>
<td>Specific experiences occurring during childhood, such as abuse or neglect.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Toxic Stress</td>
<td>Occurs when an individual “experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity” without adequate support. This term refers to the physiological stress response to ACEs. Without intervention, this response can disrupt brain and organ development and increase risk for serious health consequences later in life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Trauma</td>
<td>The cumulative and psychological wounding, over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences.</td>
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Section 1: Introducing Trauma and Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools
and institutions continue to inflict pain related to this event. Some examples include genocide and forced assimilation of indigenous peoples in the United States, slavery, Jim Crow era discrimination, and procedures and policies that make it difficult for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color to achieve their goals. This form of trauma has long-lasting impacts and has been tied to disparities in health and educational outcomes for these populations.

**Effects on Learning**

Toxic stress, resulting from ACEs and trauma, can disrupt a learning brain. Much of our understanding of the effects of toxic stress on the brain comes from the work of Dr. Bruce Perry. The stress response is not inherently bad; the brain reacts to challenging situations to protect the body through what is often called a fight, flight, or freeze response. However, when experienced frequently and intensely, this stress response becomes toxic. The physiological response can negatively impact the development of the brain and other organs, potentially resulting in cognitive impairment and chronic physical disease.

An escalated stress response system activates the lower and midbrain (indicated by purple, green, and yellow on the diagram) causing individuals to be hypervigilant to threats and fears. When the stress response system remains escalated over an extended period of time, the brain can be structurally, chemically, and neurologically changed. Thus, learning is often impacted as memory function, attention, and cognitive abilities can be compromised.

In addition to the physiological disruption of learning, trauma can negatively impact a child’s sense of self-worth and self-esteem. Trauma is known to impact an individual’s sense of identity and how they perceive themselves. Confidence and self-esteem are tied to learning. Students with low self-esteem frequently are hesitant to engage in learning and may respond to challenges in the classroom with frustration, anger, and disinterest. This change in worldview, identity, and learning ability often manifests itself in negative behaviors. Educators’ responses to these attitudes and behaviors, such as focusing on poor performance, publicly addressing the issue, and ignoring students who are struggling can exacerbate the reaction, which further isolates and discourages the student.

**Resilience—the Antidote**

The prevalence and impact of trauma can be overwhelming and intimidating. Fortunately, it is possible to heal and prevent trauma and improve responses to stressors. Resilience is “the capability of individuals to cope successfully in the face of significant change, adversity, or risk.” This capability is not fixed; through targeted strategies and interventions, it is possible for an individual’s resilience to improve. Changes to the environment, the development of protective factors, and practicing skills to manage stress response all can promote resilience.
Encourage New Mindsets about Students and Their Experiences of Trauma and Toxic Stress

Where does that leave schools? With stress, toxic stress, and trauma on the rise, how can they respond? To begin, educators, administrators, and any individuals who interact with students must be introduced to the most basic information about trauma, its prevalence, and impact. Consider sharing with teachers the article, 10 Things About Childhood Trauma Every Teacher Needs to Know, and creating one-page fact sheets about trauma and why your school and/or district is paying special attention to this issue, such as those provided by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) for preschool, elementary, middle school, and high school children. Integrate NEAR Science (Neurobiology, Epigenetics, ACEs and Resilience) into science curricula at the high school level. Host information sessions at school board meetings, parent-teacher conferences, professional development meetings, and other established meetings to share definitions and begin community conversations about trauma and resilience, and how both show up in your school. Included in this toolkit is an introductory presentation that you can adapt for these types of sessions.

One goal of learning about trauma and resilience is to start to shift mindsets about students and their experiences of trauma and toxic stress. Support teachers, staff, families, and even the students themselves to adapt their perspective to understand that student disengagement, frustration, emotional dysregulation, and lack of academic success can all be related to experiences of distress, toxic stress, and trauma. Often, it’s not a question of their motivation to learn, but rather a question of what is getting in the way of learning. Even shifting language from describing a student as “acting out” or “uncontrollable” to “emotionally dysregulated” and “lacking skills” helps to focus an educator’s actions on teaching lagging skills and repairing relationships rather than on punishment.

Students experiencing trauma and toxic stress may be in a state of alarm while in the classroom, whether in person or virtually. They may be teetering on the edge of calm and upset, and seemingly small actions may make the difference of which side they fall on. Even nonverbal cues from educators and staff may have a heightened effect on a student sitting in this state.

Terms to Avoid | Replacements
---|---
Acting out | Emotionally dysregulated
Aggressive | Fight
Runner | Flight
Disengaged | Freeze
Uncontrollable | Lacking skills
is why it is important to shift mindsets from a behavioral deficit model to an understanding of students’ behavior.

Because this mindset may be new, it is important to practice how to respond when trauma and toxic stress show up in the classroom. **When teachers and staff adopt and utilize regulating practices with students, they can help to keep a situation from escalating and even move a student from a state of alarm to calm, which allows their brain to utilize their cortex and learn more effectively.**

Use the Practice Responding to Trauma Scenarios tool during professional development and parent-teacher conferences to consider how to respond to situations differently. Scenarios for early childhood, elementary, and secondary age groups are provided. Each practice scenario includes a description of a traditional response to challenging behaviors. Then, it offers an alternative rooted in trauma-informed, resilience-oriented principles and practices.

The more educators can practice responding, the more effective they will become. Frequently, our brains run automatically, making decisions about how we feel about interactions and situations without our conscience recognition. Fortunately, these automatic responses can be confronted. Consider these six brain rules to practice changing learned habits and behaviors for responding to challenges in the classroom:

1. “The brain seeks to minimize social threats and maximize opportunities to connection with others in the community.” Seek to prioritize relationships and connection-building activities throughout the school community.

2. “Positive relationships keep our safety-threat detection system in check.” Build community norms around supporting academic safety. Foster a psychologically safe environment that encourages the growth and risk-taking needed for learning.

3. “Culture guides how we process information.” Consider taking time to reflect on your own culture and view of the world. Our differences can be our strength, but only when we understand how they are playing out in our relationships and interactions.


5. “All new information must be coupled with existing funds of knowledge in order to be learned.” Encourage each other to reflect on how new information is similar to or different from previous experiences and current expectations. This curiosity can spur growth and foster relationships.

6. “The brain physically grows through challenge and stretch, expanding its ability to do more complex thinking and learning.” Lean into learning. Support each other to engage in growth rather than step away when things are different or difficult.

A template found in this toolkit of the six brain rules includes the six rules, an explanation of each, implementation examples for work with students and staff, and a place for teachers to insert their own method of implementation.
Educators can also refer to three tips for making any lesson more culturally responsive. These tips take into account how students who come from a communal and oral tradition can be engaged in learning new knowledge and concepts. The tips are not based on language or race, but a broader, cross-cultural oral tradition.

1. Gamify it: Games “get the brain’s attention and require active processing,” which makes them a powerful strategy in the classroom.  

2. Make it social: Organize learning activities to encourage students to rely on each other. This will “build on students’ communal orientation…attention and engagement.”

3. Storify it: The use of stories is universal. Students “learn content more effectively if they can create a coherent narrative about the topic or process presented. That’s the brain’s way of weaving it all together.”

Videos can be a helpful way to understand and see a visual depiction of what is meant by changing mindsets. In the Alternate Learning Strategy box, you will find videos to encourage staff, students, families, and communities to think about trauma and resilience in the classroom and school community.

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**Alternate Learning Strategy**

Videos for understanding trauma, ACEs, and toxic stress and resilience:

» [How childhood trauma affects health across a lifetime](https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine_burke_harris_how_childhood_trauma_affects_health_across_a_lifetime) by Dr. Nadine Burke Harris at TEDMED 2015

» [Experiences Build Brain Architecture](https://www.centeronthe发育者child.harvard.edu) from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University

» [Serve & Return: Interaction Shapes Brain Circuitry](https://www.centeronthe发育者child.harvard.edu) from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University

» [Toxic Stress Derails Healthy Development](https://www.centeronthe发育者child.harvard.edu) from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University

» [InBrief: The Science of Neglect](https://www.centeronthe发育者child.harvard.edu) from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University

» [Intergenerational Trauma Animation](https://healingfoundation.org) from the Healing Foundation

» [How Do People Experience Historical Trauma?](https://extension.umn.edu) from the Children, Youth & Family Consortium at the University of Minnesota Extension

» [Brains: Journey to Resilience](https://www.albertafamilywellness.ca) from Alberta Family Wellness

» [ReMoved](https://www.mat-su.org) by Nathanael Matanick

» [Purple Glasses](https://www.mat-su.org) from Teeland Middle School at the Mat-Su Borough School District community.
Embed Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Principles into all Decision-making

Throughout this toolkit we will use the trauma-informed, resilience-oriented principles as applied to the field of education as a lens for choosing trauma-informed, resilience-oriented practices, processes, and procedures. When these principles are embedded in the school culture, policies, and daily practices, it can be identified as a trauma-informed, resilience-oriented school: “an innovation in which schools infuse the core values safety, trust, choice, collaboration, and empowerment into their Multi-Tiered System of Support’s practices, assessments, and program adjustments. [The school] acknowledges the high prevalence of traumatic exposure for students, the importance of staff wellness, and strives to meet the unique needs of all learners.”

Six Principles of Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools

The central feature of a trauma-informed, resilience-oriented school is the infusion of the Six Principles of Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools throughout the school community, its processes, procedures, and environments. The Six Principles of Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Reference Sheet serves as a quick reference sheet to help readers remember, understand, and communicate the principles.

To begin to embed these principles into decision-making, a good activity is to use the Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Principles Assessment Questions tool to drive discussions with leadership, staff, students, and the broader school community. The guiding questions in this tool are broader and more theoretical, and may be used to open a discussion. The specific questions highlight more concrete considerations to take action on, and could easily be turned into a survey that is disseminated to school community members or used in a focus group. Consider using existing channels of communication, such as parent-teacher conferences and professional development days, to make it easier to gather this information. When making decisions that affect the school community, it is recommended that decision-makers come back to these principles and assessment questions. As you make plans and decisions, ask:

» How will this decision further embed the principles in our school community?
» How have we utilized these principles to make this decision?
» Is there an additional step we may need to take to ensure these principles are utilized in our decision-making process?

6 PRINCIPLES OF TRAUMA-INFORMED, RESILIENCE-ORIENTED SCHOOLS

» Safety
   Ensuring physical, academic, social, behavioral, and emotional safety in the school community

» Trustworthiness
   Maximizing trustworthiness through task clarity, consistency, and interpersonal boundaries between all members of the school community

» Student Voice and Empowerment
   Maximizing student and family input, choice and control

» Collaboration
   Facilitating collaboration and sharing power

» Peer Support
   Providing help and support for each other, for both students and staff

» Inclusion and Engagement
   Practicing inclusion, seeking to prevent discrimination, and celebrating the unique aspects of our school community
Universal Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Practices and Processes

 Everyone benefits from a trauma-informed, resilience-oriented school community culture, regardless of their histories and experiences. It is not always obvious which students, staff, or community members have been impacted by toxic stress and trauma. Implementing trauma-informed, resilience-oriented adaptations at the universal level ensures that everyone in the school can experience a basic level of support. Section 3 – Tier II and III Supports describes how to build systems of supports for those with a higher level of need. The Universal or Tier I level along with Tier II and III assessments, instruction, and supports make up a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). In the Federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) MTSS is defined as “a comprehensive continuum of evidence-based, systemic practices to support a rapid response to students' needs, with regular observation to facilitate data-based instructional decision making.”

 Universal approaches help schools foster safe environments, focus on building relationships throughout the school community, integrate resilience-building classroom strategies, and provide meaningful support for teachers and staff. These resilience-building efforts may improve the school community’s response to a crisis because of the trust and relationship built in advance. This is a big topic, and so, for ease of reading, we have separated teacher and staff compassion resilience into its own section.

ACTION STEPS

» Adapt the physical school environment to foster safety and learning
» Utilize a trauma-informed, resilience-oriented lens to build relationships
» Implement resilience-building classroom strategies

IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

» Regulation Strategies Reference Sheet
» Sensory Strategies Reference Sheet
» Addressing the Use of Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Principles
» Trauma Sensitive Classroom Environment Assessment
» Universal Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Practices and Processes Professional Development Training Slide Decks

» Physical Environment
» Building Relationships
» Classroom Strategies
Adapt the Physical School Environment to Foster Safety and Learning

Regardless of the setting, safety is the first and foremost consideration. When students feel safe, they are able to focus on building relationships and learning. When they do not feel safe, they spend time in their lower brain, endeavoring to ensure their personal security. Students in this state may withdraw or respond aggressively as they attempt to control what is perceived as threatening. As discussed in Section 1 – Introducing Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools, as a concept, this has several components: physical, emotional, social, behavioral, academic, and moral. First, we will focus on physical safety.

What should be addressed when focusing on physical safety? Any part of the school community, including:

- School building and administrative buildings
- Classrooms
- Hallways and bathrooms
- Playgrounds
- School bus, transportation
- Field trip locations
- Athletic and arts facilities

The goal is to create predictable environments that are attentive to transitions and sensory needs. This toolkit narrows in on the classroom, but recommendations shared are applicable to all parts of the school community. Beginning in the classroom focuses our attention on those factors that immediately impact learning.

Assess Classrooms for Environmental Safety and Optimal Learning

Small changes will make a big difference. Consider how each of the components listed in this diagram may affect an individual student’s ability to focus and learn. Recommendations for creating inclusive, safe classrooms are listed below. This list is not exhaustive, and one activity you can lead with students is to ask them what would make the classroom a better place for them to learn. Consider asking them to complete the Classroom Environment Assessment to anonymously provide feedback. If a student complains or seems irritated by something in the room, talk with them more about this issue and seek to collaborate to resolve it.
Calming tools, kits, and spaces: Normalize the need to regulate emotions in the classroom with a designated space or calming tools such as stress balls, small slinkies, thinking putty, an expanding ball, and glitter jars to name a few. When students are sent out of the classroom to regulate, it sends the message that regulating emotions is not a normal classroom experience.  

Adjust lighting: Fluorescent lighting and its noise can be harsh for children. Use full-spectrum light bulbs and cover fluorescent lights with curtains.  

Signage and visuals: Use clear and positive signage that is not cluttered. Students should easily understand images and text.  

Sound: Eliminate excess noise in the classroom as much as possible.  

Temperature: Research suggests comfortable classroom temperatures, around 72°F, lead to optimal performance. If you cannot change the temperature, allow students to wear layers to manage their comfort.  

Integrate Movement into the Classroom  
Students at all grade levels benefit from movement throughout the day. This does not necessarily have to be large-scale exercises or a long activity. But, short movement breaks can help students to regulate and reset, giving them more efficient access to the cortex of their brains. Build brain breaks into each day. Brain breaks reduce stress and increase attention. Some activities include stretching as a class, cross-lateral exercises, and moving in patterns. These are great strategies students can take home with them to practice when working on homework as well.  

Utilize a Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Lens to Build Relationships  
At the foundation of a trauma-informed, resilience-oriented school is relationships. It is not necessarily an easy task to form supportive relationships with all students. Some students may be resistant to efforts to connect. This is where a trauma-informed, resilience-oriented lens and our understanding of brain development comes in. As babies, we learn to self-soothe and build self-regulation skills through our connections with caregivers. Through the cyclical pattern of expressing a need and having it met, also called attunement, a child learns that people will take care of them. Regulation and relationships are intertwined at this stage of development, and if trauma interrupts this development, the effects may be lifelong. As children grow, this need for attunement does not disappear. In fact, it becomes a critical component of relationship building. Youth are very sensitive to the attention they receive when sharing information or seeking assistance from others.

Alternate Learning Strategy
Videos for understanding changes to the physical environment:

- De-escalation Spaces at Pearl-Cohn High School by Edutopia
- Peace Corners at Fall-Hamilton Elementary School by Edutopia
- A School’s Journey Toward Trauma Sensitivity by Trauma Sensitive Schools
- Fall-Hamilton Elementary: Transitioning to Trauma-Informed Practices to Support Learning by Edutopia
- What Does a Trauma-Sensitive Middle/High School Look Like? by Trauma Sensitive Schools
When children have been impacted by trauma, the ability to connect and trust with any adult can be significantly compromised. Many times, students who have not had trusted, safe adults in their life withdraw from relationships altogether or participate in bullying, aggressive, or oppositional relationships, making it that much more difficult to connect and build positive relationships.

Fortunately, it is possible to reach even the most distant students through trauma-informed, resilience-oriented strategies. The Developmental Relationships Framework offers an overview of how to develop positive relationships through the eyes of a student:

- **Express care**: Show me that I matter to you by being trustworthy, paying attention when I speak and valuing what I say, showing you enjoy the time with me, and praising me for my effort even if it does not lead to achievement.

- **Challenge growth**: By expecting me to do my best and pushing me to keep getting better. Helping me to take responsibility for errors and learn from them.

- **Provide support**: Guide me through difficult situations and assignments, stand up for me when I need that, and put limits in place that keep me from moving off track.

- **Share power**: Treat me with respect by treating me seriously and fairly, including me in decisions about my education, working with me to solve problems, and providing new opportunities for me to grow.

- **Expand possibilities**: Connect me with people and places that broaden my world and open my eyes to new opportunities.
**Seek to Build Safety and Trust with Students**

For those who have experienced trauma, a sense of safety and trust is compromised. It will take time to build trust with students, and teachers and staff may have to prove to students that they are worthy of that fragile trust when adults in the past have broken it. Dr. Brene Brown offers a definition of trust using the acronym, BRAVING, that can help educators understand the components that must exist before a student is willing to build a relationship.

» **B** – Boundaries: I trust you if you are clear about your boundaries and you respect mine.

» **R** – Reliability: I trust you if you do what you say you are going to do over and over again.

» **A** – Accountability: When I make a mistake, I am willing to own it, apologize, and make amends.

» **V** – Vault: What is shared will be held in confidence.

» **I** – Integrity: Courage over comfort, right over easy, and practicing values, not just professing them.

» **N** – Nonjudgment: I can fall apart, be in struggle and not be judged. Must be able to ask for help.

» **G** – Generosity: I assume the most generous thing about the other person and do not assume the worst about what they are doing.

Educators can show reliability and integrity through how they make and keep a promise. Student-adult relationships and connections will grow stronger when the adult only makes promises they can keep. The table below shows common promises educators try to make and better ways to show support that they can actually deliver.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Promises Teachers Can’t Keep</th>
<th>Promises Teachers Can Keep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This won’t ever happen to you again.</td>
<td>There are a lot of people who want to help you. I will always care about you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can fix this.</td>
<td>I am here to help you. It is my job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You don’t have to worry anymore.</td>
<td>This is not your fault. What has happened to you is not fair and I am sorry you have to deal with this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I won’t let you down.</td>
<td>You don’t have to cope with this alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It will be okay.</td>
<td>It sounds like there are some really hard things going on that you wish would stop.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, adults and teachers reinforce trust when they have clear boundaries. A boundary is saying what is okay and what is not okay for you, and the other person in the relationship needs to honor those lines. Teachers and staff can help students to understand their own boundaries through modeling. Brittany Williamson, a mental health counselor at Florida Children’s Institute in Jacksonville, provides several methods of using modeling to teach boundaries.

» **Empathy checks** can happen throughout the day when one student offends another verbally or by taking something away. The teacher intervenes to ask the student, “How do you think you would feel if Aaron took your calculator when you needed it? What could you do differently next time?” These questions help a student gain perspective and start to think about boundaries with other students.

» **Role play/discussions** during social and emotional learning or morning meetings helps students to see another’s perspective and get outside of their immediate need.
» **Demonstrating clear boundaries** is modeled by showing respect for every student, making only promises that can be kept, and showing consistency in actions.

» **Reflecting on incidents and how they felt** helps students understand what they will say yes to and what they will say no to. In this way students begin to develop their own boundaries based on their experiences and feelings.

Come up with common agreements about how they will interact with each other in the school. This shared expectation feeds into the A of “BRAVING”: Accountability. When expectations are clear, it is possible to know when a boundary has been crossed and begin a process of making amends.

Finally, educators must endeavor to hone their empathy skills. A key step is listening to understand, not to reply. When someone is sharing their concerns, create the space for them to talk without fear of judgment, and reserve your response until you have heard them. Showing empathy in this way helps students to feel they have been heard and acknowledged, and then can look for ways to improve their situation with your support. Adults should not seek to solve students’ problems for them, but rather, they should provide the tools, skills, and strategies to move forward. Remember that actions speak louder than words, as the adage goes. Be sure to monitor your body language, gestures, and tone of voice when providing support to not undercut your supportive messages.

Seek to empower students, even when they do not reach expectations. Students experiencing trauma and toxic stress expect to hear that they are not good enough and have once again failed. A teacher in a trauma-informed, resilience-oriented classroom will identify the specific behavior or skill needing some work and offer clear guidance on how it can be strengthened through practice.

**Focus on Regulation when Things Get Difficult**

So, what do you do when you feel a student is difficult or distant? How do you prioritize a relationship when things are frustrating? It all comes back to regulation. No matter how strong relationships are, some students impacted by trauma and toxic stress will struggle to stay regulated. It is important to remember that a dysregulated adult cannot regulate a child. When a student acts in a way that shows dysregulation, the adult must take the lead and first mind their own thoughts and action. All it takes is one moment of breath to make the difference. When a student has done something disrespectful or harmful, adults should pause before responding. In that moment, the adult’s brain can take time to process what is happening and respond productively. When the adult is regulated, they are ready to respond. They should use a calm voice with a clear directive that makes sense to the student. Once the incident is over and the student has become regulated again, only then can the adult have a conversation with the student to help them identify other ways to express their concerns and needs.

In this way, adults can serve as a “relationship coach” for the students. Many students come to school lacking skills to initiate and sustain a conversation, let alone a relationship. When the teacher is present with students as they are learning, they can model behaviors and prompt conversations to coach the development of positive connections.
Implement Resilience-Building Classroom Strategies

To build on the burgeoning trust within a physically safe environment, teachers can implement specific strategies within the classroom, whether in-person or virtual, to support students to stay regulated, build resilience, and, ultimately, effectively participate in learning. A key component is to understand and promote social and emotional learning (SEL): “the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.”

Research has shown that SEL is appropriate to teach in schools and will effectively lead to improved student outcomes, academically, socially, and emotionally. Many school districts have already begun implementing an SEL curriculum, and this integrates well into the trauma-informed, resilience-oriented schools framework. These models are complementary; implementation of one supports implementation of the other. However, SEL implementation cannot replace school-wide trauma-informed, resilience-oriented schools approaches.

Foster a Positive Classroom Culture

A positive classroom culture provides a safe space for all students to learn. It builds on the expanded definition of safety discussion in Section 1 – Introducing Trauma and Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools. In this environment, students are all given access to learning and know that their efforts are valued. A central feature of a positive classroom culture is predictability and routines. Students who have experienced trauma are on the lookout for threats to their safety. When a teacher builds predictability and routine into the classroom environment, that student can better regulate, know what to expect, and feel emotionally and psychologically safer. It is not always possible to set routines or prevent change. Whenever possible, notify students in advance of any changes to the status quo. All activities should be structured in a predictable and emotionally safe way.

» Avoid calling on students when they have not been given an opportunity to prepare to present.

» Seek to keep difficult situations private.

» Reduce shaming and blaming by eliminating public methods of noting performance, such as clip charts.

» Use multiple modalities of instruction to meet students' different learning styles: visual, auditory, kinesthetic.

KEY TERM
Social and emotional learning (SEL)

“the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.”

Alternate Learning Strategy

Videos for understanding more about SEL from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL):

» What is Social and Emotional Learning?

» The Impact of Social and Emotional Learning
Inclusion and Engagement Action Steps

Culturally responsive instruction is an important approach to promote positive classroom culture and reach students who may seem distant or disengaged. Aligned with trauma-informed, resilience-oriented schools principles, culturally responsive instruction is all about building relationships, but it takes a specific focus on building relationship with students’ families and communities. Use the VABB method to promote culturally responsive instruction:

» V – Validate the student and their culture.
» A – Affirm them in a positive way.
» B – Build connections between school and home, including language and culture, through instructional strategies and activities.
» B – Bridge any gaps by providing opportunities for students to learn, utilize, and share their cultural backgrounds.

At the start of the school year or term, set positive norms around learning for the whole class to practice. Consider these norms as a starting point:

» Everyone can learn to the highest level. Students can learn processes and tackle even the most difficult problems with support. Teachers acknowledge students’ work, effort, and learning rather than the results. This strategy applies to all areas of learning from math problems to discerning meaning in a difficult task to transferring social science information into a pro or con debate argument. Praise is given for the actual effort and not the end result by saying things like, “Look how much you have completed,” or, “You have really made clear the author’s purpose in writing.”

» Mistakes are valuable. Mistakes are opportunities for learning and growth. Present mistakes for everyone to learn from each other such as a math problem with an error for the group to find. While working on the problem the students are acknowledged for finding new ideas and good strategies.

» Questions are really important. Asking questions is linked to high achievement. If the teacher does not have the answer to a question, they or the class seek to find the answer.

» Learning is about creativity and making sense, not memorizing. Visualize patterns, create solutions, discuss and critique your findings. Help students focus on understanding a problem and not finishing the work quickly. This is the skill that can always be applied to the next level of math they tackle.

» Learning is about connecting and communicating. Make connections between all subjects and topics demonstrating where the ideas and skills will show up in real life and in their other classes. Teaching integrated curriculum is helpful to ensure that reading and writing skills are embedded in every academic subject and do not stand alone for 40 minutes a day.

» Class is about learning, not performing. Focus on growth, effort, and taking time to learn. Grades and tests are secondary to growth.

» Depth is more important than speed. It is a common myth that being a good learner means students act quickly. We no longer need students to work fast, but rather, take time to think deeply, connect methods, reason, and justifications. Processing through the difficult math problem creates a learning mindset that no problem is beyond my grasp. A valuable skill for any career path.
Facilitate Calm Environments and Co-Regulation

One of the most challenging skills for a student to learn is how to regulate their own behavior, emotions, and physical being. This is especially true for students impacted by trauma and toxic stress. Fortunately, this is something teachers can model and support students to develop by facilitating calm environments and co-regulation. It begins by understanding how the brain functions. This image helps us understand the main three areas of the brain.

1. The lower part of the brain is sometimes called the “survival” brain. It functions primarily to help us survive and stay safe. This part of our brain asks, “Am I safe?”

2. The middle part of the brain is our “relational” brain. It is focused on our relationships and emotions. This part of our brain asks, “Am I loved?”

3. The upper part of the brain is the locus of cognition. Its functions are thinking, learning, planning, and remembering. This part of our brain asks, “Can I learn?”

Ideally, students would mostly be using the upper part of their brain while in class. However, due to current or past experiences of trauma and toxic stress, students’ relational and survival parts of their brain may take over and get in the way of cognition. When activated or dysregulated, a student’s brain will focus on survival first. This prompts the “fight, flight, or freeze response,” causing students to act out, run away, or withdraw altogether. If a student is exhibiting this behavior, teachers can identify that they are not in a place to learn and must return to a state of calm and regulation in order to allow the upper part of the student’s brain to dominate. Fortunately, there are strategies teachers can use to engage a student when they are in this state.

First, it is important to remember the power of calm. Remaining regulated in the classroom is the single most important strategy a teacher can implement. There is always a power
differential between people that is communicated through their interactions. Adults, especially the teacher in a classroom, are at the top of the power differential, meaning they dictate the level of anxiety and panic in the classroom through their interactions with students. Dr. Bruce Perry calls this relational contagion. When a teacher is dysregulated, it can cause a ripple effect through the classroom, changing the students’ emotional state and overall well being. The opposite is true as well; when teachers decrease the power differential through positive cues like smiling, using a calm tone, and managing their physical presence, students will feel less threatened and more able to access the cognitive part of their brain. Teachers and other adults are then able to co-regulate with the student with a calm voice, soothing touch, or steady presence. There is no fear, anger, or frustration to mirror.

Second, when a student moves into that fight, flight, or freeze response, seek to co-regulate with the student. Teachers can do this using Dr. Bruce Perry's memorable approach, “Regulate, Relate, Reason.” This approach is tied back to our understanding of the three main parts of the brain: survival, relational, cognition. Recall that when a student perceives a threat, their survival brain takes over. Learning is extremely difficult in this state. The more anxious or threatened a student feels, the less rational they become and the further into that survival state they move. A teacher’s role is to monitor both their personal brain state and those of their students. As students start to show signs of dysregulation, change your educational strategies from reason (when an individual reflects, learns, remembers, articulates, and self-regulates their emotions), down to relate (connecting with the child), and even down to regulate (helping an individual control and calm their flight/flight/freeze response). Start by listening more. Begin to use calming strategies, such as brain breaks, a mindful minute, or prompt the student to use the calming kits or spaces you developed in the classroom. A list of various sensory strategies to support in moments like this are provided in the Sensory Strategies Reference Sheet. These are only a few examples of actions teachers can take to practice co-regulation with students.
When the student is back to a state of calm, consider talking with them about what strategies work best for them for the next time this might happen. That is also a great opportunity to help them start to identify what caused them to be dysregulated in the first place and seek to minimize those experiences in the classroom. It is critical to note that you will not be able to have this conversation with the student until they have regulated. If they are operating from their survival brain, they are not in a place to reason, and, despite your intentions, teachers may even aggravate the situation if they do not seek to co-regulate first.

As mentioned before, predictability and clear expectations can help create calm classrooms. Take the brain states into account when making lessons plans to ensure the stress related to a given lesson is predictable, moderate, and controlled. Having small moments of manageable stress gives students an opportunity to build their resilience skills and grow to handling increasingly difficult work. Be sure to build breaks in throughout the class period and day.

**Support Students to Build Skills for Regulation**

In addition to supporting students through co-regulation, teachers and other adults can actually help students build lifelong skills for emotional and behavioral regulation. This toolkit will highlight a few approaches that many schools around the country have already started to integrate with great success.

One approach is to help students learn about regulation and how to identify it in themselves and others. There are several models that teach emotions with words to describe them. The emotions are linked to words such as happy, sad, discouraged, and angry, as well as the way those feelings present themselves physically in the body. This work is intimately tied to teaching social and emotional learning (SEL) discussed previously in this section.

**Mindfulness**

One extremely effective strategy to help students learn how to calm their brain is mindfulness. This is both a regulatory and cognitive strategy. It requires students to focus enough to relax their muscles before they begin to relax their brain. This can be used as a universal strategy built into the daily routine. Alternatively, it can be used with specific students when they are struggling to focus, stay on task, or remain calm. It is estimated that five minutes of mindfulness practice at a difficult time in the classroom will give the teacher back 20 minutes of calm learning time.
Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS)

The research on the impressive success of collaborative problem solving (CPS) means this approach cannot be ignored. This model understands brain states and recognizes that students benefit from understanding why they are struggling in the first place. As the creators say, “kids with challenging behavior are already trying hard. They don't lack the will to behave well. They lack the skills to behave well.” CPS focuses on building those skills in partnership with the student when a conflict or a challenge arises. Adults trained in CPS learn the three components of the approach:

1. Empathize: Clarify the child’s concern and perspective.
2. Share the adult’s concern.
3. Collaborate: Brainstorm, assess, and choose a solution that addresses both sets of concerns.

While it seems simple, this approach can teach communication, attention, emotion and self-regulation, cognitive flexibility, and social thinking skills. It also builds positive relationships between the adult and student in stark contrast to traditional discipline and punitive practices. Research shows schools that integrate CPS into their practices experience 73% reduction in oppositional behaviors during school, 25% reduction in school office referrals, and reduced stress among 60% of teachers.
SECTION 3

Building a Culture of Faculty and Staff Compassion Resilience

A trauma-informed, resilience-oriented school honors the need to prioritize the well-being of all staff. Compassion fatigue and burnout are increasingly prevalent when staff members work daily with students who are impacted by trauma and toxic stress. The reality of public school education is that it is both exhilarating and stressful, and staff do well if they are able to within that environment. Education is a realm full of organizational and professional changes, expectations, and uncertainties that are often continuous, fast-paced, sometimes contradictory, and usually in response to economic, social, and political demands. Over time, the effect of that demanding work takes its toll. Trauma-informed, resilience-oriented schools have parallel processes of supporting students and supporting staff to build resilience.

Increase Awareness and Understanding of Compassion Fatigue, Burnout, and Compassion Resilience

These are not concepts widely discussed among faculty and staff, but they need to be. All individuals need to have strong compassion resilience skills to balance out the stress, toxic stress, and trauma they experience in their lives. It is helpful to plan to address the needs of staff while addressing the needs of students. Staff, like students, need:

» A physically, emotionally, and psychologically safe environment to work in.

» Healthy relationships with peers, administrators, mentors, and supervisors, as well as students and families.

» Instruction on how to implement new strategies to take care of themselves.

» Support from building and district leadership to implement these self-care strategies.

» Building and district processes and procedures to follow when in need of more support.

ACTION STEPS

» Increase awareness and understanding of compassion fatigue, burnout, and compassion resilience

» Encourage wellness assessment and seek feedback from staff on resilient culture

» Implement individual and district-wide adaptations to promote resilience

IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

» ProQOL

» Safe and Secure Environment Staff Survey

» Questions for Leaders about Workplace Psychological Health and Safety

» Developing a Self-Care Plan

» Building a Culture of Educator Compassion Resilience Professional Development Slide Deck
An intentional focus on building faculty and staff resilience is both an individual and organizational responsibility and opportunity. Educating staff on these concepts is an important first step toward addressing them and building a culture of resilience within your building and school.

It is common for faculty and staff to experience stress; this is a demanding job. It is important to understand when stress becomes toxic. Look out for the following symptoms of burnout and compassion fatigue:

- Chronic fatigue, insomnia.
- Forgetfulness, impaired concentration.
- Physical symptoms, illness, loss of appetite.
- Mood changes, anxiety, anger, depression.
- Isolation, detachment, pessimism, apathy, hopelessness.

The development of compassion fatigue happens in a circular, logical path. Faculty and staff enter the field as Zealot/Idealist. They are committed, involved, ready to make a difference, and willingly put in extra hours. Once educators start to see the system and the people in it are not perfect, they enter the stage of Irritability. They start to distance themselves from students, coworkers, and friends. They may avoid student and parent contact and speak unfairly about their challenges. Sometimes, they feel anger, cynicism, sadness, and hopelessness.
As the complexity of need and unrealistic expectations placed on educators grows, they enter the stage of Withdrawal. Their enthusiasm turns sour, and they see students as irritants, not individuals. Colleagues make complaints about their work. They may have problems in their personal life, are tired all the time, and no longer wish to talk about work. This can lead to absenteeism. If these concerns are not addressed, the educator can enter the Zombie stage. Here, hopelessness turns to rage and hate. They have no patience and cannot experience fun or joy. They have a sense that they cannot ever do enough, but no one else can do what they do.

Fortunately, it is possible to interrupt this cycle by building a culture of compassion resilience for educators. Compassion resilience is “the ability to maintain physical, emotional, and mental well-being while responding compassionately.” It can be fostered on the individual, building, and district levels and serves to respond to and prevent burnout and compassion fatigue among all staff. Efforts to support educators will have positive effects on students and families as well; supported teachers support students. Compassion resilience is comprised of four components: the heart (relationships and emotions), the spirit (core values, rest, play), strength (care for the body), and mind (school, work). Before you can address these four components in your environment, you must assess the needs of your staff and seek their feedback on your organizational culture.

**Encourage Wellness Assessment and Seek Feedback from Staff on Resilient Culture**

**Staff Wellness Assessments**

Once faculty and staff have a better understanding of these concerns, it is appropriate to encourage staff to assess their wellness related to work. There are several faculty and staff well-being assessments available, including the Professional Quality of Life Measure (ProQOL). This tool is widely used across all helping fields and is available in several languages. Panorama Education also offers a free well-being survey designed specifically for teachers. It is a lengthy survey, but portions of it can be pulled out for different assessment purposes.

Staff may be sensitive regarding their responses, not wanting to be negatively assessed or criticized for issues pertaining to their emotional, mental, and work-related well-being. Consider how you will encourage these assessments without perpetuating stigma. One strategy to prevent feelings of targeting or judgment is to ask all staff to complete the assessments and normalize the idea that anyone may be feeling toxic stress at work.

Additionally, consider what response and resources are available to staff whose results indicate compassion fatigue and burnout. Do not ask staff to publicly report their scores on these assessments. There is a self-score version of the ProQOL available, which allows staff to interpret their results without sharing widely. Provide guidance to staff about resources available, such as Educator Assistance Programs, community-based services, policies for using sick days for mental health, and services provided by their union.

**Seek Feedback on Current Culture and Ideas for Improvements**

In addition to understanding individual-level well-being, it is important for school buildings and districts to assess their culture for compassion resilience. Individual efforts to build resilience can be amplified or hindered by the culture of the building and district. And so, it is important to understand what is going well and what can be improved. Staff members are the best resource available for the
administration to understand the underlying culture at the building, and seeking their input is deeply aligned with the Principles of Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools. Ask staff to complete the Safe and Secure Environment Staff Survey or other assessments, such as sections of Panorama Education’s well-being survey mentioned earlier. Be sure responses are anonymous and free of retaliation for negative assessments. If not, staff may not feel as comfortable being truly honest about what is going on at the building.

Consider assembling a team of administration, faculty, and staff to review the aggregated responses and develop a plan to build on your strengths and address needs and gaps. As a team, discuss the Questions for Leaders about Workplace Psychological Health and Safety. This tool is designed to prompt further discussion about common barriers to well-being at your building or district.

**Implement Individual and District-Wide Adaptations to Promote Resilience**

To effectively build a culture of compassion resilience, adaptations are needed on the individual, building, and district levels. Adaptations to one level only are insufficient to promote widespread and deep culture change. Efforts to foster one level should also support the others.

**Individual Strategies to Promote Compassion Resilience**

Faculty and staff can start to foster compassion resilience in themselves and among their peers by focusing on the four components: the heart (relationships and emotions), the spirit (core values, rest, play), strength (care for the body), and mind (school, work).

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**Components of Compassion Resilience**

- **Heart**
  - Foster self-compassion.
  - Be kind to yourself when you struggle as you would a student.

- **Spirit**
  - Reflect on why you decided to work in education in the first place.
  - Write your own mission statement

- **Mind**
  - Practice mindfulness.
  - Utilize organizational strategies to manage time, priorities, money, and belongings.

- **Strength**
  - Identify causes of stress.
  - Create strategies to manage stress and care for your physical body.
An additional, helpful strategy for individuals is to develop a self-care plan. This activity prompts faculty and staff to proactively take care of themselves when they are so accustomed to caring for others. This tool also includes a small card template for strategies to use in moments of crisis. Completed at a moment of calm, this can quickly be referred to when stress is at an all-time high to help manage in the moment.

**Building- and District-Wide Adaptations to Foster Resilience**

The building’s and the district’s roles are to encourage and facilitate individual efforts to build compassion resilience. Using the responses from surveys, seek to address the barriers to resilience in your building or district. As a team, create an action plan to take this on intentionally and continuously seek staff input on strategies and implementation. One strategy may be to weave relationship-building activities into existing professional development days. Another may be to celebrate weekly wins with each other via email. Reconsider your policies and benefits, and partner with the teachers’ union to improve your response when a staff member is having well-being challenges, including burnout. Explore opportunities in your community to support staff wellness; for example, ask a gym in town to offer an educator discount on memberships. Finally, be sure to facilitate ample opportunities for staff to grow in their role, including utilizing mentorship, encouraging additional certifications and endorsements, and promoting teacher leadership.

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**Inclusion and Engagement Action Steps**

It is important to acknowledge that strategies to support individual resilience may differ based on culture, gender, and abilities. Create space for individuals to pursue the strategies that resonate the most for them and never assume you know what will work best for someone.

Ensure activities are inclusive of staff with differing religious practices, cultures, and holidays. Encourage staff to share their culture and celebrate together.

Nurture involvement in their communities, support networks, and individual spiritual practices to promote well-being.

Be wary of stigmatizing language, like “crazy,” when discussing stress and burnout and set up recovery-friendly staff bonding events without alcohol.
Once universal trauma-informed, resilience-oriented practices are in place, a small percentage of the student population will continue to struggle academically and/or behaviorally. Traditionally, these students would be referred for special programs such as Title I or Special Education Programming. Less time is spent in the general education classroom and interventions were chosen based on a student's lowest skill in an academic area. Often the student has mastered many of the skills in the chosen curriculum; however, the programmatic choice is either full-time instruction in the specific academic area in the general education classroom or in the pull-out intervention program. The result is students falling farther and farther behind their grade-level peers. Educators would consider, “What is wrong with this student?” and, “Which program will best address their deficits?”

In a multi-tiered system of supports, at Tier II, students receive services and supports in small groups and individually at Tier III. Although they benefit from Tier I approaches, these more targeted interventions and supports fill in where universal strategies fall short for these specific students.

The key purpose of schools is to ensure that students learn academic skills and knowledge as well as social and emotional skills, executive functioning, and problem-solving skills. It is not the role of the school to assess, diagnose, and provide therapeutic treatment for students with mental illness. However, it is necessary to understand an individual student’s mental health needs and how to support them in the academic environment. Trauma-informed, resilience-oriented schools create partnerships with community agencies to provide students with the services that the school does not. More about school-community partnerships can be found in Section 5 - Parent and Community Partnerships.

In a trauma-informed, resilience-oriented approach implemented in a tiered framework, student needs, interventions, and how they were implemented is the focus of the discussion. Individual skills are remediated, with the student only leaving the general education classroom for short periods of time.
The goal of a multi-tiered system of supports (represented in the Key Terms box) is to maintain all students in their classrooms with their peers and the teacher who knows the content. When they need more support, the staff are curious about the root of the problem and choose an evidence-based intervention targeting the specific root or need. It might be implemented in a small group (Tier II) or in a one-on-one situation (Tier III) until the student has mastered the specific skill. For the remainder of the day, the student continues to learn in the classroom, leaving just for the targeted instruction. Finally, the educators consider what they need to do differently to assist the student in their learning. How can the environment be altered? Do I provide a safe environment and relationship that supports the student? How can I change my instruction based on what I have learned about the student?

Some examples of interventions for challenges related directly to toxic stress and trauma used at Tier II and III include alternative teaching of specific social and emotional skills such as identifying feelings and sharing that information with others, communicating frustration in a calm and helpful manner, working collaboratively with their peers, and other coping skills. Academic intervention may already be established in your school. Other sources for these interventions include the National Center on Intensive Intervention and the Wisconsin Response to Intervention Center. Most states have their own list of interventions that are recommended and vetted for their districts. In the area of behavior, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports suggests many evidence-based interventions. Interventions are best implemented within a system of assessment, implementation, and tracking to document success or identified needed changes.

Create Student Plans Responsive to Trauma and Rooted in Resilience-Building Approaches

Teams comprised of the student (when developmentally appropriate), their parents or guardians, teachers, administrators, student support staff, and community providers work collaboratively to determine the individual’s unique needs and then create an individualized plan. Teams can be a multi-
Student voice and choice must be involved in all stages of this process. Input from students may include: identification of safe adults and environmental factors, preferred learning style, effective regulation strategies, and their tolerance for length and style of interventions. To build resilience and to set clear expectations, the plan primarily focuses on what is behind the behavior, such as trauma and toxic stress, and what needs the student is attempting to meet, such as safety and emotional regulation. Disruptive behaviors are not condoned at any point in this plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Need</th>
<th>Plan to Address the Need</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>» Talking or yelling during instruction or quiet work time.</td>
<td>» Frustration</td>
<td>» Identify specificity of need,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» Shutting down and not doing work.</td>
<td>» Lack of regulation skills</td>
<td>source of pain, and fear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» Physical aggression toward others or self.</td>
<td>» Anger</td>
<td>» Determine level of readiness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» Using disrespectful language.</td>
<td>» Sadness</td>
<td>» Teach executive functioning,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» Hurting other students’ property, classroom materials, furniture, or the building.</td>
<td>» Fear</td>
<td>communication, academic, social, and emotional skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Jealousy</td>
<td>» Model and support development of skills.</td>
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<td>» Loneliness</td>
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<td></td>
<td>» Intrusive or distorted beliefs</td>
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Information about the challenge is gathered using a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) and/or academic assessment. All individuals on the team bring their knowledge of the student’s strengths and challenges to the table. Based on all the data the team creates a follow-up behavioral intervention plan (BIP). The assumption or belief behind a trauma-informed, resilience-oriented FBA and BIP is that all behavior serves a purpose. For students impacted by trauma, that purpose is generally an attempt to feel safe. Adults on the team must remember the neurobiology of trauma and toxic stress, and reflect the trauma-informed, resilience-oriented assumptions about student behavior:

1. All behavior serves a purpose.
2. Students do well if they can—when they do not, something is lacking.
3. Behavior continues because it is reinforced in some way.
4. It is necessary to understand the need behind behavior in order to understand its function or purpose. It is necessary to understand that information in order to choose interventions that will change a student’s behavior.
Choose Evidence-Based, Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Interventions in the Student Plan

Once the team has gathered the necessary data, they can choose specific interventions and supports to address the identified need. One key difference between universal approaches and interventions at Tier II and III is the increased intensity, frequency, and duration. In other words, they are utilized more often, are implemented in smaller groups, and are more focused in their scope. The interventions often continue for a longer duration and over a more extended period of time. These factors are part of a process to increase the student’s opportunity to learn new skills. Comprehensive lists of trauma-informed, resilience-oriented, evidence-based Tier II and III interventions can be found at Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development and the Institute of Education Sciences What Works Clearinghouse.

Social, Academic, Instructional Groups (SAIG) and Check-In, Check-Out (CICO) connections between an individual educator and student are commonly used and easily implemented strategies. SAIG is organized as a Tier II intervention to bring together students with similar social, emotional, regulation, or academic instructional needs. Adults leading the group may use specific curricula and should monitor students’ progress throughout the intervention. Students with significant academic needs in specific subjects may be placed in evidence-based interventions where progress is monitored weekly. Teams should consider this course of action if the student’s academic needs are so great that they are considering an evaluation for learning disabilities in the future. To ensure your SAIG is meeting the needs of students impacted by trauma and/or dealing with ongoing toxic stress, use the Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented SAIG Review Activity.

Students impacted by trauma benefit from CICO as both a Tier II and Tier III intervention. Through CICO, they can solidify a relationship with an individual educator. Every morning and afternoon, the student and educator touch base to monitor emotional, behavioral, and academic performance on that day. If a student is dysregulated during this meeting, the educator has time to help them return to a calm state before the school day or class period has even started. Educators do this through sensory regulation strategies, such as deep breathing, yoga moves, brain breaks, grounding exercises, or allowing the student to take time in a calming place. The educator can also refer to strategies the individual student has identified as helpful in their individualized plan. The educator can ask questions quietly and calmly, such as, “How are you feeling today?” “Do you feel safe this morning?” “What assignments do you need help with?” “Are you concerned about any class today?” “Will you have time to complete this work tonight?” These interventions and supports are helpful for students at all grade levels. To assess the efficacy of your CICO interventions, use the Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Check-In/Check-Out Checklist.

The student’s ability to stay regulated and benefit from instruction and support will determine the intervention dosage. The intervention itself should not push a student into a dysregulated state. For the intervention to be beneficial, the time of day and length of the intervention must align with a student’s tolerance level. This ensures they can experience stress as positive or tolerable as defined on the stress continuum.
Mild or moderate stress over short periods is considered to be healthy for development. All learning pushes students beyond their comfort level, enabling them to incorporate new concepts, skills, and processes. However, for students who have been impacted by trauma, learning new skills and ideas can be experienced as toxic. Unfortunately, learning stops when a student is experiencing toxic stress. During interventions, it is necessary to monitor the student’s state of mind to gauge their ability to regulate and/or reason.

Choosing the appropriate response based on a student’s brain state may look like taking a short break. Use the Individual Student Behavior Plan tool to see what responses are most beneficial at each stage of escalation and de-escalation.

Most students can learn the new skills needed to maintain regulated emotions and behavior when Tier II interventions are planned and implemented with fidelity based on student needs and input, and integrate the knowledge of the professional educators. Some students will need to be taught and supported in a more intensive setting than the Tier II small groups. These students require one-on-one work at Tier III. The instruction may be the same, but the student is receiving it more frequently in a one-on-one situation for a longer duration each time. As soon as a student is able to return to a Tier II group or the classroom, a shift in the schedule should be made. This would happen when they have mastery of the regulation skill needed to remain calm in an environment with other students.
Adapt Schoolwide Discipline Processes

Schoolwide discipline processes may not only unsuccessfully address problematic behaviors, but at their worst, they can cause further toxic stress and trauma for students. The traditional school discipline model is based on the increasing severity of consequences aimed at motivating a student to behave in “appropriate” ways. Often, these consequences include exclusion from peers, such as separate lunch or after-school detention. When a student’s behavior does not change or becomes more severe, schools traditionally continue along the continuum to suspension and, finally, expulsion.

Many schools have already started to adapt their discipline processes through programs such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Restorative Practices, and Conscious Discipline. These types of programs add instruction on appropriate behaviors and opportunities for discussing hurt and possible repair as responses to challenging and unsafe behavior. The decision-making process about consequences is considered a restorative approach when they move from “to” to “with” a student as seen on the Social Discipline Window.

A more flexible program that allows administrators, teachers, families, and students to create a plan responsive to the problematic behavior holds hope for helping students learn better behavior. These programs incorporate reflection, instruction, and restoration in their frameworks. This process involves guiding a student to think about the behavior, then creating a plan with the educator to learn new skills and address the harm that was done. A student is connected with the trusted adult identified in their plan. This educator facilitates the student’s reflection on their behavior by discussing what happened and why, who may have been hurt, what can be done to “repair” the harm, and what appropriate consequences or actions to take. Together, they create a contract that the educator monitors with the student. When the student, and in some cases their family, is involved in this process, the plan created can positively impact the student’s future.

For some students, this alternative discipline process is not easy or simple. It is difficult for them to reflect on their behavior and see why or how it must change. Truly restoring the harmed relationships is even more difficult. Collaborative Problem-Solving (CPS), discussed in Section 2 – Universal Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Practices and Processes, is an evidence-based approach to help students move beyond their current understandings of safety and needs to a place where they can effectively learn new behaviors and repair damage they have done. The techniques from CPS can be blended in conversations utilizing reflection, instruction, and restoration. The key is listening to the student first, then sharing the adult concerns, and then finally working collaboratively to find a solution.
**Implement Targeted Practices for Tier III Supports**

There are students so gravely impacted by their experiences that they do not have all their needs met by Tier I and Tier II strategies. They require even more targeted, intensive, and frequent interventions and supports categorized as Tier III. These strategies should be implemented one-on-one with a trusted adult who understands the impact of trauma and the specific interventions that work for that student. In many schools, these students will be receiving services in a special education program driven by an Individual Education Plan (IEP), but that is not required. Students do not need to qualify for special education programming to receive supports and interventions at this level. Tier III services should be available to all students regardless of their disability status.

**Always Return to Regulation**

Dysregulation is a significant problem for students in need of Tier III interventions and supports. It is likely that instruction and interventions have not been understandable, broken into small enough steps, reinforced, or supported enough to help the student change their behavior. In addition to slowing down instruction and chunking it into shorter time segments, utilize unique approaches to meet the student’s readiness level. A student may not be able to follow common plans to dysregulate because they are unaware of how it feels in their body or do not have the communication tools to express what is happening. In addition to using the curriculum and the strategies focused on regulation introduced in Section 2, the student might benefit from a better understanding of what they are able to tolerate.
The Window of Tolerance, graphically depicted below, helps us understand and describe brain and body reactions to adversity. This concept suggests there is a window of tolerance for stress and our nervous system can cope with an acceptable amount of up and down. Any reaction outside of this window may be the result of toxic stress, unmet needs, and trauma. It aligns with the fight, flight, and freeze response discussed in Section 1. The more adverse experiences a student has, the smaller their window of tolerance becomes. This is why it may be difficult for them to manage dysregulation. Simply put, they have less space in their window for the ups and downs of stress and, unfortunately, as a result, spend more time in the fight, flight, or freeze response.

**Window of Tolerance**

**Trauma/Anxiety Related Responses**

*Widening the Comfort Zone for Increased Flexibility*

- **HYPER-AROUSED**
  - Fight/Flight Response
  - ANXIETY
  - OVERWHELMED
  - CHAOTIC RESPONSES
  - OUTBURSTS (EMOTIONAL OR AGGRESSIVE)
  - ANGER/AGGRESSION/RAGE

- **HYPO-AROUSED**
  - Freeze Response
  - DISCONNECTED
  - AUTO PILOT
  - NO DISPLAY OF EMOTIONS/FLAT
  - SEPARATION FROM SELF, FEELINGS & EMOTIONS

**CAUSES TO GO OUT OF THE WINDOW OF TOLERANCE**
- Fear of...
  - Unconscious Thought & Bodily Feeling: Control, Unsafe, I do not exist, Abandonment, Rejection
- Trauma-Related Core Beliefs about self are triggered:
  - Emotional & Physiological Dysregulation occurs

**TO STAY IN THE WINDOW OF TOLERANCE**
- Mindfulness: Being Present, In Here-in-Now
- Grounding Exercises
- Techniques for Self-Soothing, Calming the Body & Emotional Regulation
- Deep, Slow Breathing
- Recognize Limiting Beliefs, Counter with Positive Statements About Self, New Choices

**COMFORT ZONE**
- EMOTIONALLY REGULATED
- Calm, Cool, Collected, Connected

**ABILITY TO SELF-SOOTHE**
- ABILITY TO REGULATE EMOTIONAL STATE

*Staying within the window allows for better relationship interactions*
Improving Academic Supports at Tier III

Academic activities can be activating for students who have experienced significant challenges and failure up to this point. If intensive evaluation of their academic difficulty has not happened, it is important to ensure that it is completed. This can be done outside of an evaluation for special education using the Response to Intervention approach and the ICEL Model (Instruction, Curriculum, Environment and Learner). 

The goal of this approach is to ensure that adult educators understand the power they have to implement changes that will make a difference for students and their ability to learn. Using the trauma-informed resilience-oriented lens, the student or learner is the primary factor at all times. So, even though the learner profile is listed last in this model, the learner’s viewpoint of all four domains is the most important information. Use the Trauma-informed, Resilience-oriented ICEL Questions to monitor academic interventions.

In addition to benefiting from small group or individual instruction in reading, math, and writing, students are likely to have other lagging skills in executive functioning, communication, attention and working memory, cognitive flexibility skills, and social thinking skills. Fortunately, students can learn these skills. But first, adults must identify the combination of triggers and lagging skills leading to a student’s struggles in class. By connecting these together, counselors, social workers, behavioral therapists, special education teachers, and Tier III specialists can identify a series of interventions to teach these skills.

Additionally, school counselors or others working with students impacted by trauma can be trained in Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS). This is an evidence-based program disseminated through SAMHSA’s National Child Traumatic Stress Network, which has demonstrated statistically significant improvement in student behavior. It includes ten group sessions, three individual sessions, two-parent psycho-educational sessions, and one teacher educational session.
The Road to Formal Assessment

After all three tiers of interventions and supports have been tried, some students continue to need even more support. For those students, mental health or trauma screenings and assessments are important. Screening processes and protocols need to be inclusive and engaging for all students in the school setting. First, each individual school should check their state guidance on securing consent to proceed with the screening or assessment. Student voice in this process is critical; answering all of their questions about how the information will be used, what information will be collected and why it is being done will make the process smoother, more effective, and truly trauma-informed and resilience-oriented. If your school does not have services on-site, partner with community agencies to provide mental health interventions after identifying needs led by student support staff.

Schools still have a responsibility to provide supports to their students even if they receive additional mental health therapy and supports from a community agency. Schools are primarily responsible for their academic instruction and, in the case of special education students, their Free Appropriate Public Education as required by law. Educators and student support staff must be strong in their commitment to continue to implement interventions and supports while that student is also supported outside the school. Strong communication between parents and guardians, the community agency, and the school is vital to making this structure beneficial for the student.

Alternate Learning Strategy

Videos for Understanding Challenging Behaviors and Supportive Responses:

» The Most Important Questions to ask about Children’s Behavioral Challenges by Dr. Mona Delahooke
» Check-In/Check-Out: Providing a Daily Support System for Students by Edutopia
» Restorative Practices in Education by Twin Cities PBS
Parents, families, and the community at large all play an important role in each student’s life. While most students spend a large portion of their week in school, whether it is in a building or on a virtual platform, when they leave that environment, they go into the community and back to their homes, both of which can impact their education. Thus, a collaborative approach to address the wellness and success of all students will be more effective if schools, families, and community organizations such as the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) and Mental Health American (MHA) along with unique organizations in each community work together. In this section of the toolkit, we will look at these three critical groups and their roles in student-centered planning. Please note, throughout this chapter, we will use “parents” and “families” interchangeably to include biological, adoptive, foster parents and families, legal guardians, and anyone else the student defines as playing a significant role in their upbringing and education.

The “why” of partnerships with parents, families, and the community has been identified and reinforced by research over the last thirty years. When parents and families are engaged in school, their students do better academically, behaviorally, emotionally, and socially. Parent-teacher organizations have long existed to nurture that involvement. As our understanding of the causes of student struggles and their shifting needs evolves, we are challenged to find new approaches to fully engage families as an active part of the school community.

**ACTION STEPS**

- Apply a trauma-informed, resilience-oriented lens to parent and family engagement
- Identify and respond to the needs of parents and families
- Build partnerships with families and community partners

**IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS**

- Adjusting Educator Mindsets Toward Parents and Families Reference Sheet
- Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Guiding Questions: Parents and Families
- School Policies, Protocols, Procedures, and Documents Review Tool: Examination of Parent and Family Engagement
- Shared Decision-Making with Parents and Families Activity
- Practicing Responding to Trauma: Parent and Family Scenarios and Directions
- Engaging Parents, Families, and Communities Professional Development Training Slide Decks
  - Partnering with Parents
  - Engaging Community Partners
Apply a Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Lens to Parent and Family Engagement

It is important to remember that trauma-informed, resilience-oriented schools involve everyone—students, staff, parents, families, and communities. Traditional approaches may limit family engagement, only involving them when a student is in academic or behavioral trouble or at parent-teacher conferences. However, families are important partners for educators and staff when engaged through a trauma-informed, resilience-oriented approach. Research suggests that students whose parents are involved in their school community are more likely to have higher grades, improved attendance, strong social skills, and improved behavior in the classroom. Prioritizing parent and family engagement can lead to improved student outcomes. For this reason, trauma-informed, resilience-oriented schools take this on with intention.

To start the conversation on improved engagement, building and district staff should review the Adjusting Educator Mindsets Toward Parents and Families Reference Sheet. Discuss what assumptions may permeate your school’s or district’s culture about parents and families. Then, consider the Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Guiding Questions: Parents and Families tool to more concretely identify areas of strength and growth for your building or district.

The National PTA offers six National Standards for Family-School Partnerships. These standards outline the critical building blocks for successful family engagement and district-wide assessments are available to further understand your district’s strengths and gaps in this area. The six Standards are:

1. Welcoming All Families into the School Community: Families are active participants in the life of the school and feel welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to school staff, and to what students are learning and doing in class.

2. Communicating Effectively: Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way, meaningful communication about student learning.

3. Supporting Student Success: Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students’ learning and healthy development both at home and at school and have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.

4. Speaking Up for Every Child: Families are empowered to be advocates for their own and other children, to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.

5. Sharing Power: Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families. Together they inform, influence, and create policies, practices, and programs.
6. Collaborating with Community: Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families, and staff to learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation.99

To engage meaningfully with parents and families, it is important to recognize and honor that they have their own histories of trauma and toxic stress, and may actively continue to experience challenges that school and district staff do not know about. Everything you learned in Section 1: Introducing Trauma and Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools about the impact of trauma and toxic stress on behavioral and emotional responses apply to students’ parents and families as well. To practice applying knowledge and skills, utilize the Practicing Responding to Trauma: Parent and Family Scenarios during professional development time.

Assumptions about parents’ ability or willingness to engage in school activities are not helpful. Schools must resist urges to label parents or families as “good” or “bad.” Research has found that parents and families of color, those living in poverty, and families that do not speak English at home all have lower rates of family engagement.100 A trauma-informed, resilience-oriented school understands that these families experience additional challenges, including bias in education, and seeks to reduce those challenges to increase and improve opportunities for engagement.

Everyone has a unique set of strengths and needs to consider when planning for engagement. Some parents will thrive in the classroom with students, planning and implementing school activities, or serving on school committees. Others will seem disinterested or will be unable to participate. Some families and parents could benefit from the school reaching out and supporting them with resources, learning events, mentors, or connections to community resources. Regardless of the level of family engagement, schools and districts should seek to make their systems clearer, easier to navigate, connected to community resources, and approachable for all parents and families. The remainder of this section illustrates how school personnel can provide a safe bridge to support parents and families.

Alternate Learning Strategy

Videos for understanding parent and family engagement:

» Teacher and Parent Relationships – A Crucial Ingredient by Cecile Carroll (TEDxWellsStreetED)
» Building Relationships Between Parents and Teachers by Megan Olivia Hall (TEDxBurnsvilleED)
» Parent-Teacher Home Visits by Flamboyan Foundation
» Initiating Contact by Learning for Justice
Seek to Improve Bi-Directional Communication Channels

Communication is the foundation for successful parent and family engagement. On a most basic level, all communications from the school should be timely, clear, concise, in the languages spoken by families at the school, and provided through multiple modalities (e.g., email, phone call, social media, take-home handouts). At its most complex, true engagement of families means parents are involved in school and district decision-making.

Communication must be bi-directional; families must have a consistent, easy-to-utilize mechanism to provide feedback to the school and district. Not only is it important to know about families and their approaches to life, but we need to know how they feel about the school that their student attends. Do they feel welcome and included or isolated and misunderstood? In a trauma-informed, resilience-oriented school, there are processes in place to ensure that families can provide this feedback at any time, whether it is positive or negative, without fear of retaliation against their students.

Once communication channels are established and regularly utilized in both directions, your building and district can begin to build processes for shared decision-making. Sharing power with parents and families is fundamental to a trauma-informed, resilience-oriented approach to engagement. But what does that mean? Shared decision-making means parents and families are involved on an ongoing basis in:

- Individualized education plans and other Tier II and III supports for their student
- Brainstorming, planning, and execution of school activities
- School committees, taking leadership roles in initiative and task-force work
- Code of conduct committees such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, discipline committees, and trauma-informed resilience-oriented workgroups
- District and building strategic planning and infrastructure changes, such as building a new school, contracting with a new food service, and initiating school-based health care services

### Inclusion and Engagement Action Steps

All school communications with parents and families must be responsive to their needs, schedules, and preferred forms of communication, utilizing more than a single method of interaction.

Diversity in work schedules, lifestyles, cultural and religious practices, and language among families require educators to use every form of communication available to them to connect.

Try using social media channels, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, to reach parents and families in real-time, share video messages in multiple languages, and increase opportunities for them to provide feedback.

Even with the growth of technology, in some communities, traditional methods are most helpful, including phone calls, text message reminders and notifications, and written notes sent home with students.

When scheduling parent-teacher conferences, remember the diversity of your school community. When setting the school calendar, ensure these do not conflict with religious and cultural celebrations and holidays. Set aside extra dates and times for parents who may not be available due to work schedules at the time of conferences. Consider how you can overcome barriers to attendance, such as transportation, timing, technology, and location.
By taking this step, schools move from informing parents to engaging them, then to centering them and their experiences in the school community.

**Identify and Respond to Needs of Parents and Families**

A trauma-informed, resilience-oriented school seeks to understand the needs of parents and families and work to meet them. It is important for schools not to make assumptions about those needs. This requires proactive outreach and authentic listening and curiosity about their concerns, experiences, and perspectives on what would make the school community more inclusive and supportive.

This is not easy. Educators at all levels are trained to provide solutions to problems. Listening to understand rather than to reply requires patience and time, especially when individuals come from a place of distrust and are reluctant to share to protect themselves. An educator can become easily frustrated by the amount of time it takes to engage in real communication. As difficult as this part of the process is, it is an essential part of planning to deliver the proper services and supports.

There are several ways to gather information from parents and families about their needs:

- **Surveys and assessments:** Using written tools like surveys and assessments can provide a glimpse of parents’ and families’ experiences and show through quantitative data where your school may want to focus its efforts. One tool to consider is the [U.S. Department of Education School Climate Survey](https://www2.ed.gov/programs/schoolclimate-survey) to understand family and student feelings of emotional and physical safety in the school. The [School Policies, Protocols, Procedures, and Documents Review Tool: Examination of Parent and Family Engagement](https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/ftegrd/parent-family-engagement.html) can also help you understand how well a specific policy or procedure aligns with the Six Principles of Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools.

- **Parent-teacher organizations and committees:** Bringing parents and families together in conversation with school leadership and educators can be a powerful way to build bridges and improve collaboration between the two. The [National PTA Local Leader Kit](https://www.pta.org/leadership/leader-kit) can help each parent-teacher organization form and flourish. Ensure parents and families are included in district committees. Utilize the resources on shared decision-making to create a meaningful role for them in these activities.

- **Home visits:** Home visits are a new trend but are becoming more common nationwide. Conferencing in a family’s home or at a local community center or library may reduce tangible barriers to engagement like transportation and can provide a more emotionally safe place for parents to meet. In these settings, parents may be more willing to share information about themselves, their concerns, hopes, and dreams for their children.

After gathering information about needs, trauma-informed, resilience-oriented schools work to meet them. Report back to those who participated in your information-gathering initiatives on what the data shows and how the school or district plans to act on this information. In meeting these identified needs, trauma-informed, resilience-oriented schools have an opportunity to increase engagement with families through the planning and execution of new projects, policies, and procedures. For example, if surveys found a desire among parents to be more involved in high school classrooms, the school can work with the local parent-teacher organization to create a plan for parents to share about their careers. Or, perhaps the assessments point to struggles accessing online materials to monitor grades. And so, your school counselor may offer training sessions for parents upon student enrollment to show them all the online tools available and how to access them.

Schools may not be able to meet all parent needs, but they can foster parent groups, such as PTA or parent mentorship programs. Primarily emerging to support families with students who receive special education services, parent mentorship programs are a new way to provide parent-to-parent
support in the school community. In some areas, these networks have expanded to include parents of any student in the district. A trauma-informed, resilience-oriented school is the perfect location for a parent mentorship network connecting parents to parents, parents to educators, and parents to resources, both in and out of the building. Given the proactive and universal nature of trauma-informed, resilience-oriented programs and schools, mentoring is extended to all families and parents in all grades and is primarily proactive in its approach. Emphasizing parent strengths and building on those from the very beginning has the potential of keeping many students out of special education programs and engaged 100% of the time with their general education peers.

In 2002, the Georgia Department of Education initiated the Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership to improve family engagement statewide. This diagram from their toolkit outlines the key components of the program. It weaves together a variety of resources into a structure to provide professional and peer support to parents, and the toolkit offers guidance for building this type of partnership in your district.

Finally, this is not a process that should be done once and assumed to be comprehensive. Trauma-informed, resilience-oriented schools are committed to continually gathering feedback about needs and initiatives put in place to meet them to ensure they continue to be relevant and responsive.

**Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership**

**Build Partnerships with Families and Community Partners**

Schools exist as part of communities—communities where individuals and organizations can be mobilized to support schools and have skills and expertise not available within the district. By connecting and creating partnerships with these individuals and organizations, it becomes possible for schools to provide rich experiences beyond the classroom and receive support or assistance from experts in their field. Some partnerships may benefit all students, and others may specifically target the students who have needs beyond the school’s expertise. As with parent partnerships, actively exploring community partnerships is a relatively new phenomenon in education. Community partnerships have emerged out of schools’ need to have more skilled professionals to support Tier II and III interventions and offer clinical mental health services.

At the foundation of any partnership should be the Six Principles of Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools. Schools should practice these principles with community partners and support them to understand and adopt the principles in their organization. Utilizing this approach can help reduce common barriers, such as insufficient involvement of leadership, misunderstandings of the different systems, questioning the ability of the partners to meet the current needs, funding, time, and other competing initiatives.

One strategy to beginning a new community partnership is to start with small, concrete tasks. Taking on smaller, visible projects helps the staff, students, families, and community members to understand what is happening and what to expect in the future. As the partnership grows, engage in
shared decision-making with the partner about their vision for new activities, supports, and events they would like to contribute to in the school community. For example, a local bank may begin its partnership by having its employees volunteer at graduation each year. Over time, they may develop a young professionals training program to allow students the opportunity to learn about working in the financial sector.

**Mental Health Services Partnerships**

A common partnership across districts is with community mental health providers to bring services inside the school building. Using the multi-tiered system of supports framework, these providers come into the schools to work with individuals and small groups of students at both the Tier II and Tier III levels. These groups can be co-facilitated by school and community professionals, but, in most cases, the providers work individually with students with the greatest needs while school counselors, social workers, and nurses handle small groups. Reasons for moving mental health services into the school buildings are numerous:

1. Schools are a natural setting because it is where students already are.
2. Onsite services give families convenient access with less system navigation.
3. It will support school-wide efforts to address toxic stress and trauma.
4. Staff knowledge of signs and symptoms of distress will improve.
5. Teachers will develop tools and techniques to promote emotional support and well-being.
6. Introducing mental health providers in school can help destigmatize mental health.
7. It increases access to mental health services for students regardless of socioeconomic status.
8. Services play a major role in early childhood intervention, mitigating impacts later in life.
9. Intensive, individualized support can be provided to small groups of students with high emotional and/or behavioral needs.
10. It can help families navigate the mental health system.

In the exploratory conversations regarding these services, complete a needs assessment within the school or district and a resource map or scan to narrow the scope of a potential partnership. Once a provider is identified and selected, it is recommended that schools and community mental health providers utilize a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to lay out the specific goals, funding, roles, and responsibilities of each player. Committees creating these agreements should include teachers, school counselors, and social workers, as well as the administrators responsible for the financial wellbeing of the school. This will help to counter any staff resistance stemming from a concern among student support staff that outside providers pose a threat to their job.
Wrap-Around Services for Tier III Services

Tier III services, whether they are in or out of the school building, are the most intensive trauma and mental health interventions provided through a school-community partnership, and are often implemented as a wrap-around service. In this partnership type, schools and providers create a process for making referrals from the school to the provider for individual students whose needs greatly exceed services provided on-site. Throughout that process, parents and families are engaged, and the student’s voice is centered. Schools that use the multi-tiered system of supports framework, especially those that use a trauma-informed, resilience-oriented lens, view wrap-around services as another part of the process of supporting students and families to gain the skills, confidence and support they need to manage their own futures and needs.

Wrap-around services support both the family and the individual student. Community mental health providers and others in a student’s support network, such as family, teachers, religious leaders, employers, peers, and mentors operate as one team, not separate school and community teams. Together, they help the family and student develop a plan to achieve their vision. That individualized plan is student-centered and relies on family involvement to ensure it reflects the strength, needs, and culture of the student and family.

Community Schools

One of the strongest partnerships between schools and communities is a community school. This encompasses both the physical location and the set of partnerships between the school and community organizations to help provide students with the full range of services and opportunities they need to thrive. The model and services should vary based on the needs of each school and community, but the general structure embeds community organizations in the school so that students can easily access them, and families can find everything they need for their student’s well-being in one place. In this form of partnership, the school becomes the hub of the community.
Implementing and Evaluating Your Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Innovations

Using the information and tools discussed in this toolkit to address targeted areas of need in a school does improve services. Areas such as special education and discipline processes immediately come to mind as ones that benefit from the implementation of trauma-informed, resilience-oriented approaches. Sustainable, lasting change that positively impacts the lives of the whole school community requires a larger vision and plan, the involvement of all collaborators, ongoing evaluation, and strong leadership at all stages of implementation. Implementation and forward progress rely on data collection. Leadership takes on both the roles of leading and managing the cultural changes. Their involvement is significant to success throughout the entire process.

The trauma-informed, resilience-oriented approach to schools is an innovation that requires a deep level of commitment and change management. It is an innovation or introduction of something new that often tweaks or changes an already existing program or process. It is not an initiative that ends on the last day of school in spring to make way for another initiative in the fall. The changes are a permanent shift in culture that do not replace previous processes. They increase the voice of the student and family, the emotional safety of the school, collaboration, inclusion, and engagement of all. Every area of school culture is assessed prior to the creation of plans. In this section, the discussion will focus on implementation action steps, ongoing evaluation, and the role of leadership in the process.

**ACTION STEPS**

- Establish a collaborative team to lead your trauma-informed, resilience-oriented schools initiative
- Engage in the implementation process
- Utilize a continuous quality improvement approach

**IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS**

- Implementing and Evaluation Your Program Professional Development Training Slide Deck
- Communicating about Your Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented School Initiative
- Activities for Continuous Quality Improvement
- Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Fidelity Assessment and Scoring Tool
Establish a Collaborative Team to Lead Your Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Initiative

No one can lead or execute this initiative alone. A strong team composed of diverse collaborators across the school community should be formed, and a team leader or co-leaders identified. While everyone in the school community will be involved in the implementation, this team will be the champions and coordinators of each activity. A recommended list of participants includes:

» School and district leadership
» Teachers from multiple departments
» Support personnel
» Classified staff
» Parents and families
» Community partners
» Students (no less than two)

It is recommended this team meet twice a month at the start of the initiative to set goals and action plans. As the initiative builds momentum, the number and frequency of meetings may change.

Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Leadership within the Implementation Process

Traditionally, school administrations have asked counselors and teacher leaders to take the helm of initiatives such as instituting trauma-informed, resilience-oriented principles, practices, and policies. However, administrative buy-in and commitment are critical to the successful implementation of an innovation that involves changes on all levels and in all areas of school practice. Administrators often help determine the make-up of the team leading the initiative. They can ensure the team is a diverse group of individuals representing different departments, grades, and groups in the school and that those chosen represent different cultures, races, genders, and viewpoints present in the district.

The administrator should participate on the team, not serving as the team lead, but rather providing guidance, motivation, and support when things are not going well and celebrating and communicating the successes along the way. Having school and district leaders there demonstrates the importance of this work and the school’s or district’s commitment to it.

One pivotal role for administrators is to ensure that resources are available, including funds and time for assessments, training, tools, and people to implement the interventions and strategies. They secure time for professional development for all staff and remain committed regardless of competing priorities. Only a person with the power of this position can provide these resources, which are vital to the forward movement of the innovation.

Another important role for administrators is communication and messaging about this initiative to all members of the school community. Participating in the development of the vision and making sure that it aligns with the building or district vision is critical. Collaborating with that same team to develop an elevator speech about the benefits of implementing trauma-informed, resilience-oriented practices and the strategies for securing buy-in from everyone with an interest in the school is key to strengthening the innovation.
Engage in the Implementation Process

Working to adapt trauma-informed, resilience-oriented practices in your school or district is a process. It is not achieved overnight; it is a lifelong process of implementation. As you begin this work, your school will move through phases outlined by the Missouri Model’s Developmental Framework pictured here. The framework has four phases: Trauma Aware, Trauma Sensitive, Trauma Responsive, and Trauma Informed. Understanding these phases can help your team have realistic expectations around progress and create a strong vision for the future.

### Trauma Aware

A team, leader, staff, and everyone who is involved in the school setting learns about trauma, its impact, and how to address it in the school setting. Everyone is made aware of how and where to find additional information and is supported in further learning. Following training, conversations among staff include key terms and concepts. Staff members demonstrate curiosity and a desire to know more so they can improve their practices. A school team is formed that explores what this new information might mean for them and what next steps may need to be taken.

### Trauma Sensitive

The school team explores the principles of safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness, and empowerment within their environment and daily work. There is widespread communication about what is learned to both families and staff through multiple communication channels. Through a self-assessment process, the organization identifies existing strengths, resources, and barriers to change as well as practices that are consistent or inconsistent with the principles. Leadership prepares the school or district for change and leads a process of reflection to determine readiness for change. The school and district begin to review tools and processes for implementation in the school. The school values and prioritizes the trauma lens; a shift in perspective happens. Trauma training expectations for all staff are established, including within new staff orientation. School and district leadership recognizes and responds to staff compassion fatigue and secondary trauma. Hearing stories of trauma and working tirelessly with students and colleagues impacted by trauma can lead to the development of compassion fatigue even when an individual has not personally experienced the trauma.

### Trauma Responsive

School or district culture has begun to change, highlighting the role of trauma and resilience. At all levels, staff members begin re-thinking the processes, practices, routines, and infrastructure of the school. There is an integration of principles into staff behaviors and practices and into staff support. Changes to environments are made in the classroom as well as school-wide settings. The school and district have developed a ready response for crisis management that reflects trauma-informed values.

### Trauma Informed

The school or district has made trauma-responsive practices the organizational norm. The model has become so accepted and so thoroughly embedded that it no longer depends on a few leaders. The school or district works with community partners to strengthen collaboration. Policies and procedures are revised and measured for fidelity to a trauma-informed model. Teachers and others involved with the school experience adequate support and say the culture is safe and supportive and that despite the
challenges, they enjoy working in the school. The organization uses data to inform decision-making at all levels. Training is promoted and made accessible to staff, including at new staff orientation. Ongoing coaching and consultation are available to staff on-site and in real-time. The business model including fiscal structures works to meet the need to address the needs of the school or district.

Understanding Phases of Implementation
The Missouri Model provides an overall picture of where schools are going to achieve a level of trauma-informed, resilience-oriented schools. However, it does not provide a step-by-step approach to start and continue the process. The National Implementation Research Network’s (NIRN) work in the field of education is focused on developing processes that support the selection, adoption, and sustained use of educational practices that are supported by evidence and have shown positive outcomes for students. They have broken down the change process into a series of four stages. Along with their implementation tools, their implementation stages provide an excellent guide to a school team wanting to smoothly implement their trauma-informed, resilience-oriented innovation with success.

NIRN estimates it will take a team anywhere from two to four years to complete all implementation phases.

Stages of the Implementation Process

1. Exploration
During this stage a team considers the possibility of implementing trauma-informed, resilience-oriented school principles and practices in their setting by answering the following questions:

» Where is the area of need?
» What is the urgency of that need?
» What resources will be needed?
» What is the capacity of our team/staff/district to provide those resources and implement them?

These questions highlight the key decisions that need to be made before a school or district can effectively begin the change process. When a team decides to quickly implement one strategy or a quick training with no follow-up activities, the efforts are likely to fail. Rushing to “fix” problems in schools without thoughtful planning and careful attention to alignment with existing initiatives will result in unsustainable outcomes for students. More than that, it may make staff reluctant to continue
to engage in the process at all. Teachers often experience initiative fatigue, stating “we’ve already tried that, it didn’t work for us” when asked to consider further innovation in strategies and practices.

To support this phase, consider using the Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Fidelity Assessment and Scoring Tool to gather baseline information.

2. **Installation**

This phase includes the steps of creating a vision, setting up communication channels, and planning for ongoing communication with all collaborators. This is when the team and leadership ensure that financial and human resources are in place to implement any plans they create, including professional development. Use the Communicating about Your Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented School Initiative tool to create your vision and communicate it broadly.

Awareness training continues as staff members enter the district while deeper strategic training is provided to classroom teachers and support staff on specific interventions that have been chosen for implementation. Choosing the interventions and supports can be a difficult step. There are a variety of resources and places to look; in fact, it can be overwhelming. Consider gleaning practices from other sections of this toolkit as well as a few other sources listed below:

1. [Trauma-Informed Programs and Practices for Schools (TIPPS) Program Guide](#) from the University of Michigan School of Social Work

2. [Resources from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)

3. [Trauma Sensitive Schools Initiative](#) from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

4. [Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI)](#) from the Massachusetts Advocates for Children and Harvard Law School

As new strategies and programs are chosen, professional development and resources are provided so that staff members have everything they need to implement. The team examines policies and procedures to ensure they are in alignment with the trauma-informed, resilience-oriented principles and are implemented equitably.
3. Initial Implementation
When a school or district reaches this phase, the majority of teachers and practitioners in the school are using the practice or program that was identified in the goal(s). Data and feedback are available from that practice or program to inform decision-making and improve the implementation of the practice or program. Teachers and other practitioners are beginning to achieve fidelity and improve the quality of implementation efforts. The evidence shows that the implementation of the practice or program is feasible.

It is important to note that some practices within the school may be at the initial implementation phase while the school team is just beginning to introduce another practice. For example, a school may have instituted calming places for all students and space spots for students with more significant needs. These may be an accepted part of the school’s process of addressing dysregulation. At the same time, they may be beginning the process of introducing restorative practices as a strategy that will replace their current punishment-oriented discipline program.

Many other activities can happen during this phase including the implementation of trauma-informed, resilience-oriented coaching in the school setting. Feedback drives the reassessment process on each specific goal.

4. Full Implementation
This is not achieved quickly. In this phase, a school has shifted its culture and thus its practices to be in alignment with the trauma-informed, resilience-oriented principles. Staff members describe their school as a calm and supportive place to work. Students and their families say that they feel like they belong and that the staff cares for them. This is a goal for a school team to push for, but not something that happens without resistance, regrouping, or reteaching.

Utilize a Continuous Quality Improvement Approach
Because trauma-informed, resilience-oriented implementation is a continuous process in which the team is striving to make decisions that will improve the work and outcomes for students and staff over time, it is important to use a continuous quality improvement approach. Often used in healthcare settings, continuous quality improvement is a process of incremental changes to processes and practices to improve the experience and efficiency of your program. This approach encourages teams to collect and analyze data throughout implementation to discern what needs to be kept, changed, added, or stopped.

When data and outcomes are not what is expected, the team might have to look at their process to identify what is missing. Have they been communicating the vision to generate support among collaborators? Are there those who do not understand the communication? Has staff development been effective? Are the resources necessary available to the staff and do they have the support they need to implement what they have been asked to do? If the answers to any of these questions lead a team to pause, then it is time to go back and address the missing link. This is a natural progression in an implementation process and will happen at some time to almost every team.

One strategy is to complete the Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Fidelity Assessment every year and compare your data over time. This will allow you to see what your school or district does well and where you may need to focus your implementation efforts next. Be sure to communicate the results of the assessment, share depictions of the data over time, and publicize your next steps based on the data with all parties.
The Activities for Continuous Quality Improvement tool includes a variety of activities to utilize with your team to practice this approach. Your team should meet consistently to review your implementation progress, review data, and assess what is working well and where your team should focus its efforts next. Continuous quality improvement does not consider unexpected outcomes as failures, but rather as an opportunity for learning and then moving forward. With the proper support, guidance, and resources a team of committed individuals can bring to life trauma-informed resilience-oriented practices in their school.

**Inclusion and Engagement Action Steps**

» When gathering and reviewing data from implementation, it is critical to obtain feedback from a representative sample. Without input from diverse collaborators’ perspectives, your team runs the risk of maintaining and reinforcing unhelpful practices.

» Encourage participation in implementation. Your team might be leading the innovation, but everyone interested in being involved should be. Consider how and when you are meeting, planning, and seeking input to ensure everyone has an opportunity to participate.

» Rotate team membership to gather new perspectives. Eliminate barriers to participation by providing transportation, food, child care, and interpretation services. And, ensure each member’s voice is respected and given equal weight. This will help reduce feelings of tokenism among participants as you seek to make your team more representative and inclusive.
Beginning the 2020-2021 school year in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic turned the excitement of back-to-school preparations into overwhelming anxiety for all involved. Teachers, administrators, students, and families had concerns about plans for the upcoming school year—whether they are virtual, hybrid, or physically in person. During times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, or experiences of community trauma, these concerns continue and may change throughout the school year. This section of the toolkit provides resources to help schools take steps forward during a crisis. The guidance and tools in this section are relevant at any point of the school year and duration of a crisis, and administrations should return to them as their areas move through phases of re-opening and community healing to continue positive conversations with all parties and increase positive connections with students and their families.

Using the trauma-informed, resilience-oriented lens, a school or district can ensure all communications, staff trainings, parent interactions, and learning activities are designed to create a safe and trustworthy environment for all involved.

All individuals involved in schools will need to be flexible and prepared to respond to changing conditions. A high level of flexibility is only possible when individuals have trust in each other developed through transparent communication and that everyone’s concerns have been heard and considered. Use the tools in this section to help build trust with everyone in the school community during times of crisis.

**ACTION STEPS**

» Use a trauma-informed, resilience-oriented lens to plan and decide appropriate policies and procedures

» Undertake activities to put safety first

» Create support infrastructure for teachers and staff

» Implement classroom strategies to promote safety and connection

**IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS**

» *Initial Activities for Staff and Students*

» *COVID-19 Surveys and Return to School Alignment Planning Tool*

» *Student Activity: Creating a Safe Virtual Learning Space*

» *Educating During Crisis: The COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond Professional Development Training Slide Deck*
Use a Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Lens to Plan and Decide

In response to a crisis, school administrators may need to create and revise plans about schooling and staffing throughout the school year. As areas look to move through phases of re-opening and/or adjusting schedules in response to the effects of the crisis, schools will respond to match the community’s needs. It is important to remember the principles of trauma-informed, resilience-oriented schools and infuse them into planning and decision-making processes.

It is recommended to begin by referring to the most current expert guidance to understand recommendations for schools affected by the crisis. For example, guidance has been ever-changing as researchers learn more about COVID-19, its prevention, treatment, and spread. This toolkit includes the Return to School Alignment Planning Tool to support efforts to organize the recommendations. You may revisit this tool to align this information with the concerns highlighted in surveys, described further below. This tool uses COVID-19 as an example, and starts with the following recommended resources:

» Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Toolkit for K-12 Schools

» Your local and state public health departments

» Your state departments of education

In alignment with the Principles of Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools, it is important to seek to understand the concerns, needs, and priorities of your three primary audiences: students, parents and families, and staff. When schooling is interrupted due to a crisis, districts will endeavor to return as many staff and students to the school building as possible, but both in-person and virtual settings cause stress for students, faculty, and staff. In a trauma-informed, resilience-oriented community, all parties are given a voice in decisions that affect them.

The five surveys in this toolkit help districts collect data regarding concerns about both in-person and virtual instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. These surveys were the collaborative effort of educators working in the field of trauma-informed, resilience-oriented practices and Social Emotional Learning. The surveys target different audiences: staff; parents, guardians, and families; high school students; middle school students; and elementary school students. Feedback from staff, parents and

KEY TERMS
Principles of Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools

Safety

Trustworthiness

Student Voice and Empowerment

Collaboration

Peer Support

Inclusion and Engagement
families, and all students helps a district or school understand stress related to the implementation of any scenario and prepare to meet everyone's needs. When you disseminate the surveys, spend time explaining what the survey is for, how the results will be used, and confidentiality protections. Additionally, follow your district's protocols around informed consent and collecting information from minors.

Districts and schools can create their own surveys, search online for surveys, or work with vendors that will assist them in creating surveys specific to their organizational needs.

Inclusion and Engagement Action Steps

» Each of the surveys provided begins with demographic questions. Use these questions to understand how each demographic group in the school or school boundary area is represented relative to their percentages within the community.

» Translate the survey into the languages spoken in your school community.

» Consider sending the survey electronically and on paper. If you use a digital survey, be sure it can be read by screen-readers used for visual impairment and that there is a mobile-compatible version. If you use paper surveys, provide a return envelope with paid postage to mail their response back.

» Create a survey dissemination plan that ensures every student and family learns of the survey and has adequate time to complete it. In some cases, this will mean districts may need to send a second round of surveys along with text, phone, and TV messages to ensure that all members of the school community receive and complete the form.

Factors to consider in creating a survey are to include student, staff, family, and community voice by gathering information from each group about their safety and learning concerns, academic and social needs in both virtual and in-person learning settings, and necessary health procedures. If a team is utilizing a vendor to develop a survey, look for ones that provide free surveys, will take input on design, and allow for easy access to results.

Once surveys are returned, the process of aligning needs and concerns with safety recommendations begins. This is when you can revisit the Return to School Alignment Planning Tool to add the information gathered from the surveys. Now you have one document with all inputs for decision-making. If there are discrepancies, consider hosting virtual town hall meetings, focus group sessions, or key informant interviews to better understand what will be best for your community. No matter what plan your district creates, it must be clearly communicated back to all school community members. Share how the plan was created and how future decisions will be made with the community and refer to the Inclusion and Engagement Action Steps above to inform your communication planning.
As much as possible social and emotional best practices should be at the center of the decision-making and planning process. An environment for mutual decision-making, considering everyone’s voice, can be created by following these steps:

1. Take time to cultivate and deepen relationships, build partnerships, and plan for social and emotional learning.

2. Design opportunities where adults can connect, heal, and build their capacity to support students.

3. Create safe, supportive, and equitable learning environments that promote all students’ social and emotional development.

4. Use data as an opportunity to share power, deepen relationships, and continuously improve support for students, families, and staff.

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**Case Example – Fulton County Schools COVID-19 Decision Matrix**

To guide decision-making, the Fulton County School District created a decision matrix. This tool is an example of communication tool successfully modeling transparent sharing of information behind decisions for quarantines, closings, and opening due to COVID-19. Parents and community agencies can plan how to support the fluid changes that will happen during the school year. As the COVID-19 pandemic ebbs throughout their community, they will close schools, zones, and even the entire district. This tool does not have the details for contact tracing, quarantine, or cleaning, but it helps the community to understand when the schools might close, causing them to shift their own schedules to address childcare and work concerns in their families.

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**Undertake Activities to Put Safety First**

When planning for the school year during a crisis, the toughest conversation may be “What do we do first?” With all the concerns, priorities, and guidelines swirling around, it can feel overwhelming. In that moment, it is important to come back to the first of the Principles of Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools—safety. When actions are rooted in prioritizing safety for all, it ensures the regular school activities can occur.

There are several dimensions of safety: physical, psychological, social, moral, and academic. These dimensions are defined in the Introduction section of this toolkit. The following recommendations will support schools and districts to prioritize all types of safety as they respond to a crisis in their community.

Begin by assessing safety in your environment. One tool to consider is the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction’s Trauma-Sensitive Environment Implementation Tool on Safety. This tool can be used to assess both in-person and virtual settings, and focuses on student needs specifically. It provides concrete strategies to implement immediately to promote safety in both settings. Teachers can select the most applicable strategies and incorporate them into lesson plans, as relevant.
One of the most important strategies to put safety first is establishing routines and maintaining clear communication. While it can be difficult to create predictable environments in a time of crisis, schools and districts can strive to be counted on for consistent and clear communication. Build trust between administration, teachers, staff, students, and families that, while you may not always have the answers, you will regularly and clearly update them, explaining changes in accessible language.

**Create Support Infrastructure for Teachers and Staff**

Teachers and staff will experience high levels of stress as they work to effectively teach and provide services during a crisis, whether in-person, virtual, or in a hybrid model. School and district leaders must be proactive to support a culture of safety and collegiality among staff. Asking teachers and staff to practice self-care without infrastructure to support them is not a sustainable approach. It is important to promote compassion resilience among all school and district staff during a difficult time. During professional development time, try this activity—bring staff together to create shared staff agreements, or a joint commitment to creating a positive culture.

1. In small groups, discuss helpful behaviors for the work environment.

2. Come together as a full group to share what the groups discussed and identify common themes.

3. Draft an agreement specifying the agreed upon helpful behaviors.

4. Post the agreement in common areas. During times of conflict, refer back to this agreement to guide conversations and actions.

Strategies for developing strong collaborative healthy teams within schools are available in multiple resources developed over the last several years. Teams can search for resources that focus on compassion resilience for staff, social-emotional learning (SEL) skills for school staff, and collaboration to find these resources. One such source is the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction’s [Trauma-Sensitive Module on Compassion Resilience](#). This resource provides an example of a cultural contract developed using the four steps listed above.
Next, it can be helpful to provide staff with skills to manage difficult conversations. Given the heightened levels of stress and anxiety, changing public health and other official recommendations, and pressures from multiple fronts, to say staff should anticipate difficult conversations coming up might be an understatement. They will be unavoidable, but how staff manage them as they come up will make all the difference. The **Self-Care Module of the Trauma-Sensitive Schools Online Professional Development** includes a 6-step process for responding in a compassionate resilient manner. The steps are as follows:

1. **Notice:** Be present in the moment and able to recognize signs of distress.
2. **Self-check:** Be aware of your initial thoughts and feelings.
3. **Seek understanding:** Suspend appraisals. Listen for feelings and strengths.
4. **Cultivate empathy:** Develop genuine concern based on your connection to what the person is feeling.
5. **Discern best action:** Co-plan with the person to figure out what would be helpful to them.
6. **Take action:** Be aware that intention alone is not compassionate action.

During professional development time, staff can discuss these workplace scenarios from the **Compassion Resilience Toolkit** in small groups. This will give them an opportunity to practice navigating difficult conversations before they arise. In the event a staff member appears to need additional and even professional support, [this guide](#) offered by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction suggests a helpful approach. This document can support staff to respond with empathy when one of their colleagues is really struggling and help connect them with resources.

### Inclusion and Engagement Action Steps

- Staff members’ responses to stress and preferred resilience-building activities can be rooted in their culture, religion, and community. Remember that each of us has our own sources for and strategies to build resilience.
- Allow staff to define what self-care means to them and create space for them to engage in the practices that are most healing for them, even if they are different from yours.
- When leading mindfulness or grounding activities, be mindful to use activities that do not actively exclude anyone. Consider giving everyone an opportunity to share and lead an activity that is special to them.
Implement Classroom Strategies to Promote Safety and Connection

The classroom, online or in-person, is one of the most important places to promote safety and connection. Students of all ages have experienced and may continue to experience varying levels of separation from friends and trusted adults. Uncertain times and changes at home will increase stress for them as well. While teachers and staff may be more familiar with strategies to promote safety and connection in the classroom, such as social-emotional learning (SEL), using these practices in virtual settings are new. But, it is more important than ever to integrate SEL and trauma-informed approaches.

» Make the paradigm shift to prioritize relationships and well-being over assignments and compliance. \textsuperscript{[119]}

» Seek to make students feel valued regardless of the grade they achieve.

» In virtual environments, it may be harder to engage students. One strategy is the Two-by-Ten approach – spending two minutes a day for ten consecutive days getting to know a student who is difficult to connect with.\textsuperscript{[120]}

» Make a personal connection with each student sometime during a session or day, either through specific feedback on skills or to note an achievement, targeted social and emotional instruction, or to hear their input into the class discussion. \textsuperscript{[121]}

Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance) lists several ideas to promote connection and help students to cope with stress during the pandemic. But connections with students will look different depending on the age of your students.

» Teachers and staff should engage in connection building activities with elementary school-age students daily. Try five-minute virtual chats one-on-one or with small groups.\textsuperscript{[122]}

» For middle and high school-age students, try using chat features or email exchanges through school email accounts consistently, such as every Wednesday, to talk about something other than academic work.

Other activities to try include:

» Virtual backgrounds show-and-tell: the day before, ask students to choose an image that shows their favorite food, activity, character in a book, somewhere they would like to travel, or something that gives them comfort when they are stressed. Take time to allow students to share what they chose and why to get to know each other better and build connection.

» Create a Bitmoji classroom. You can also use Google Slides or Microsoft PowerPoint to create this engagement tool as well.

» Movement breaks: for students who can, take time to move their bodies throughout the day. It can be very difficult to sit at the computer or tablet for a full day of classwork. Movement and exercise have been shown to improve focus and cognitive function. \textsuperscript{[123]} Implement strategies daily to get kids moving.

Some students may require additional supports beyond these Tier I/universal approaches. These Tier II and Tier III supports will look different virtually than in-person, but they are just as important. To support teachers and school psychologists to identify a student’s needs, use the COVID-19 School Adjustment Risk Matrix (C-SARM) developed by the National Association of School Psychologists.
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