



TRAUMA-SENSITIVE SCHOOLS TRAINING PACKAGE

# Building Trauma-Sensitive Schools Handout Packet

**National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments**



Safe Supportive Learning  
Engagement | Safety | Environment

# 1. HANDOUTS

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Audience	#	Handout Title
All staff	1	APPLYING THE CORE PRINCIPLES WORKSHEET
School leaders	2	STAFF DEVELOPMENT PLANNING GUIDE
All staff	3	SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS AND SELF-CARE PACKET
All staff	4	MAPPING TRIGGERS AND OPPORTUNITIES ACTIVITY
All staff	5	NAVIGATING CRISES WORKSHEET
Student services	6	TRAUMA-SENSITIVE ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING CHECKLIST
Student services	7	GUIDELINES FOR ADOPTING A MULTITIERED APPROACH TO ADDRESSING TRAUMA
All staff	8	SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES CHECKLIST
All staff	9	STRATEGIES FOR COLLABORATION
School leaders	10	GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

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# INTRODUCTION

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This Handout Packet includes all of the downloadable resources found throughout the Building Trauma-Sensitive Schools online module. Each of these handouts is available for individual download as staff work through the module. Some handouts are relevant to all school staff and other handouts are designed for staff in particular roles, such as school administrators and trauma-sensitive work groups supporting staff development and student services staff conducting student assessments or evaluations and providing services to students.

## Uses for Handouts

School staff may download and complete each handout individually during or after viewing the Building Trauma-Sensitive Schools Module to further your learning about trauma sensitivity and about how to apply a trauma-sensitive approach in your role.

School administrators and trauma-sensitive work groups can review the handouts together as you begin to create your action plans for adopting a trauma-sensitive approach. Where applicable, handouts include suggestions for how work groups can use the material to support action plans for implementing a trauma-sensitive approach located in the Action Guide.

School administrators and trauma-sensitive work groups can use the handouts as part of ongoing professional development activities related to trauma sensitivity. Even if staff download the handouts on their own, it can be helpful to revisit the concepts at a later date. For example, school leaders may use certain handouts as part of a training day or staff meeting to explore and reinforce particular concepts.

# 1. APPLYING THE CORE PRINCIPLES WORKSHEET

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Trauma-sensitive schools are grounded in a set of core principles that inform everyday school operations. For some schools and districts, these core principles align with existing culture and practice, and for other schools and districts, the core principles represent a significant shift.

Consider how you currently integrate the core principles into daily practice and what more can be done to support a trauma-sensitive learning environment.

## 1. Understand trauma and its impact.

*In a trauma-sensitive school, all staff share a common understanding of trauma and its impact on students, families, and staff and a joint mission to create learning environments that acknowledge and address trauma's impact on school success.*

Here's how **my school** currently integrates an awareness and understanding of trauma and its impact into daily practice:

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Here's how **I** currently integrate an awareness and understanding of trauma and its impact into my daily work:

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Here's what I think we can do more of:

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## 2. Believe that healing happens in relationships.

*Trauma-sensitive schools believe that establishing safe, authentic, and positive relationships can be corrective and restorative to survivors of trauma and can be resilience building for all. This principle encompasses relationships among and between school staff, students, and families.*

Here's how **my school** demonstrates a commitment to fostering healthy relationships:

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Here's how **I** demonstrate my commitment to fostering healthy relationships:

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Here's what I think we can do more of:

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### 3. Ensure emotional and physical safety.

*Trauma-sensitive schools are committed to establishing a safe physical and emotional learning environment where basic needs are met; safety measures are in place; and staff responses are consistent, predictable, and respectful.*

Here's how **my school** upholds a commitment to ensuring emotional and physical safety:

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Here's how **I** uphold a commitment to ensuring emotional and physical safety:

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Here's what I think we can do more of:

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#### 4. View students holistically.

*Schools invested in taking a trauma-sensitive approach understand the interrelated nature of emotional and physical health and academic success and the need to view students holistically and build skills in all areas.*

Here's how **my school** demonstrates a commitment to viewing students holistically:

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Here's how **I** demonstrate my commitment to viewing students holistically:

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Here's what I think we can do more of:

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#### 5. Support choice, control, and empowerment for students, staff, and families.

*Trauma-sensitive schools operate in a way that supports choice, control, and empowerment for students, families, and staff and empowers all by building skills that enhance sense of mastery.*

Here's how **my school** demonstrates a commitment to supporting choice, control, and empowerment for students, staff, and families:

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Here's how **I** demonstrate my commitment to supporting choice, control, and empowerment for students, staff, and families:

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Here's what I think we can do more of:

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## 6. Strive for cultural competence.

*Trauma-sensitive schools strive for cultural competence by acknowledging and respecting diversity within the school; considering the relationship between culture, traumatic experiences, safety, healing, and resilience; and using approaches that align with the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students, families, and the broader community.*

Here's how **my school** demonstrates a commitment to striving for cultural competence:

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Here's how **I** demonstrate my commitment to striving for cultural competence:

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Here's what I think we can do more of:

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## 7. Use a collaborative approach.

*Trauma-sensitive schools use a collaborative approach with students, families, and staff. This approach includes sharing power and decision making across all levels of the school and seeing students and families as partners.*

Here's how **my school** demonstrates a commitment to using a collaborative approach with students, families, and staff:

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Here's how I demonstrate my commitment to using a collaborative approach when working with students, families, and staff:

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Here's what I think we can do more of:

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## 2. STAFF DEVELOPMENT PLANNING GUIDE

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Adopting a trauma-sensitive approach schoolwide requires significant and ongoing investment in professional development to ensure that the entire staff has the knowledge and skills to support students who are affected by trauma. This handout is designed to help school-based administrators and trauma-sensitive work groups create the plan needed for such an investment. A comprehensive professional development plan will cover multiple training topics and will provide the following information for each topic:

- **Topic title** and brief **description**
- **Audience**
- **Training delivery method** and **rationale** for use
- Intended **learning outcomes** that indicate participant mastery and/or application of new professional knowledge and skills
- At least one measurable **benchmark** or indicator for each outcome
- **Evaluation strategy** to assess intended outcomes and indicators, including data-collection instruments, data-analysis techniques, and reporting method
- **Follow-up** as needed to support learning
- **Resources to support** professional development activities

Use the form titled Staff Development Plan at the end of this handout to develop your plan. For each topic you address, make a copy of the blank form and then enter the information as you develop the activity.

### 1. Topic title and description

Providing all members of the school staff with a basic education in trauma and its impact is an important first step in the process of becoming a trauma-sensitive school. The *Understanding Trauma and Its Impact* e-resource and the *Building Trauma-Sensitive Schools* training module support initial training efforts for all staff. Ongoing professional development builds on these initial training tools and provides additional information on trauma-related topics and helps staff develop skills associated with trauma sensitivity.

In some cases, professional development activities associated with trauma sensitivity align with activities supporting another approach, such as restorative practices or positive behavioral supports. Describing the topics will help you anticipate such alignments.

### Trauma-Related Topics for All Staff

- Child development and attachment and the effects of early adversity
- The neurobiology of trauma
- Particular types of trauma (e.g., historical trauma, racial trauma, complex trauma)
- Experiences of particular groups of students (e.g., LGBTQ youth, youth of color, refugees)
- Relationship between culture and trauma (e.g., culture-specific experiences and responses)
- Secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma
- Child and adolescent mental health
- Resilience across development
- Core principles of trauma sensitivity

### Skill Building for All Staff

- General trauma-sensitive practices
- Trauma-informed crisis intervention and de-escalation strategies
- Culturally responsive practices
- Strategies for engaging youth and families
- Strengths-based approaches to working with youth
- Self-care strategies
- Restorative practices
- Positive behavioral supports
- Mental health first aid

### Specialized Topics

- Classroom strategies for promoting safety (teachers)
- Social and emotional competencies and curricula (teachers)
- Trauma-sensitive assessment and evaluation practices (student services staff)
- Evidence-based, trauma-specific mental health interventions for addressing trauma (student services staff)

## 2. Audience

Most topics will be useful for all staff, although some specialized topics specifically address the information needs of particular staff participants. Specifying the audience for each topic provides information for determining delivery method selection, choice of venue, and mechanism for announcing the activity. Even more important, knowing the audience helps the organizer or trainer focus and prepare each activity to meet any particular audience needs.

## 3. Training delivery method and rationale

Adults learn most effectively when they are actively engaged in the learning process, causing growth to occur at the individual level and helping change occur in the broader school environment. Real change calls for ongoing and varied training, incorporating opportunities for staff to practice applying concepts and to give feedback. Potential training delivery methods include any of the following, each of which provides advantages and limitations that will contribute to your rationale for using it:

**Large-group training** can be useful when providing initial staff and leader education about trauma and trauma sensitivity. Schoolwide trainings allow for all staff to receive the same information at the same time, to ensure a common understanding across roles and departments. Training may be done in person or by having all staff review the same web-based materials and offering times for follow-up discussion. Although helpful when starting out, one-time, large-group trainings are only a place to begin and should not be used exclusively. Staff retention of information is limited if concepts are not reinforced continuously.

**Small-group training** allows for in-depth conversation and offers opportunities to apply knowledge to practice. Small-group sessions may be conducted for all staff in a particular role (e.g., teachers, student service staff, paraprofessionals) so that examples and discussions can be tailored. Small groups also may be multidisciplinary, to encourage cross-agency communication and opportunities to learn what staff face in different roles, as well as flexibility in applying trauma-related concepts. As with large-group trainings, training content must be reinforced day to day to have long-term impact.

**Team or staff meetings** already in place offer smaller settings in which to convey, clarify, and apply information on a regular basis. Small-group meetings are a forum for open communication, peer support, and additional training and education. These meetings may include regular staff meetings, in which particular trauma-related topics can be addressed or reinforced each time, and department or shift meetings, in which learning can be tailored to the specific needs of these staff.

**Real-world application** provides opportunities to practice applying trauma-related concepts in everyday situations. To further large- or small-group trainings, school leaders may identify skills or strategies of focus for a particular time period, such as a *skill of the month* for all staff to practice—for example, using strengths-based language, identifying potential trauma triggers, and incorporating self-regulation strategies in the classroom. All staff members are charged with practicing a particular skill or considering a particular concept in their work. Staff or team meetings may be used for staff to report out on their experiences.

#### 4. Learning outcomes and benchmarks

Staff development plans for supporting trauma sensitivity should include anticipated outcomes and measurable indicators of success. The components need to indicate who demonstrates each outcome and benchmark. Each benchmark also needs to be measurable and time limited. Data for deriving this information may come from the evaluation strategies you choose and may help determine your follow-up activities.

Sample Learning Outcomes	Benchmarks
Training participants will demonstrate an understanding of the neurobiological effects of trauma.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pre- and post-training surveys administered at the time of the session assess for knowledge change related to brain and body responses to stress and trauma.</li> <li>Upon receiving the information, participants will be able to identify potential trauma-related responses by their students.</li> </ul>
Training participants will be able to apply trauma-related concepts to their classroom practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>During the session, teachers will identify specific strategies that they can use to reduce trauma-related triggers in the classroom environment.</li> </ul>
Training participants will be able to identify the warning signs of secondary traumatic stress or vicarious trauma.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Within a week of the session, school staff will develop individualized self-care plans that incorporate helpful strategies for supporting health and wellness.</li> </ul>

## 5. Evaluation strategy

Evaluating professional development activities involves collecting data about the activity that took place and about the participation. Information gathered may include staff perceptions about the activity and benchmark measurements that indicate whether the activity achieved the desired outcomes. Data gathered from professional development activities can be used as part of a school's larger efforts to evaluate the impact of trauma sensitivity on students, staff, and schools.

Evaluation Question	Data Collection
Did the professional development take place as planned?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Track individual staff participation via sign-in sheets.</li> <li>Track whether the activity or activities occurred at the intended frequency or duration as planned using tools such as activity logs for tracking any follow-up.</li> <li>Note any factors that altered original plans related to the professional development.</li> </ul>
What were teachers' perceptions of the professional development?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Survey training participants on topics such as their understanding of the purpose of the professional development, the usefulness of the activity, and the support they received to engage in and apply learning.</li> </ul>
Did the professional development achieve the intended outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data collection is tailored to benchmarks indicating whether the professional development activity achieved your desired outcomes. For example, pre- and post-training surveys can assess knowledge change related to trauma and trauma sensitivity.</li> </ul>

## 6. Follow-up

Depending on the topic, mastery may benefit from staff feedback, trainer assessment, or repetition or refresher activities. The needs of your staff will dictate the type of follow-up to offer. The following ideas are provided to stimulate your own ideas:

- Provide opportunities for teachers to try out a new approach in the classroom and report back on results during team meetings.
- Trainers can respectfully and unobtrusively observe or coach the staff on the job.
- Designate a particular time period for staff to practice the same skill. For example, in a general meeting announce a strategy of the month related to trauma sensitivity, such as developing routines related to transition times.

## 7. Resources to support

Effective staff development requires adequate resources, including time, staffing, facilities and equipment, and funding. School administrators and trauma-sensitive work groups identify needed resources for each trauma-related professional development activity. With limited funding and time for professional development, as well as competing demands related to staff training, consider how trauma-related topics align with other topics that may be of interest in your school, such as restorative practices, school climate improvement, and positive behavioral supports. Combining professional development efforts maximizes resources and helps staff understand the integration between various approaches.

# Staff Development Plan

Copy this form, and complete it for each topic.

Topic title:	Date:
Description:	Lead: Team:
Audience:	Training delivery method: Rationale for use:
Learning outcomes:	Benchmarks:
Evaluation strategy:	Follow-up:
Resources for support:	

Action Steps	Person Responsible	Date for Completion

## References

- Maryland State Department of Education. (2008). *Maryland teacher professional development planning guide*. Baltimore, MD: Author. Retrieved from <http://mdk12.msde.maryland.gov/share/pdf/MarylandTeacherProfessionalDevelopmentPlanningGuide.pdf>
- Haslam, M. B. (2008). *Maryland teacher professional development evaluation guide*. Retrieved from <http://mdk12.msde.maryland.gov/share/pdf/MarylandTeacherProfessionalDevelopmentEvaluationGuide.pdf>

## 3. SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS AND SELF-CARE PACKET

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Educators, counselors, and other support staff who work with students exposed to trauma are at risk of being indirectly traumatized as a result of hearing about their students' experiences and witnessing the negative effects. In the first section of this packet, learn about secondary traumatic stress and related conditions; in the second section, use the tools and strategies provided to help you create individual and schoolwide plans to promote staff self-care and resilience.

### Secondary Traumatic Stress and Related Conditions

**Secondary traumatic stress (STS)** is the emotional distress that results when an individual hears about the traumatic experiences of another individual. Distress may result from hearing someone's trauma stories, seeing high levels of distress in the aftermath of a traumatic event, needing to retell a student's story, and/or seeing photos or images related to the trauma. Individuals with symptoms severe enough could be diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Common symptoms of STS include the following:

- Increased anxiety and concern about safety
- Intrusive, negative thoughts and images related to their students' traumatic stories
- Fatigue and physical complaints
- Feeling numb or detached from students
- Feeling powerless or hopeless about students and the work
- Diminished concentration and difficulty with decision making
- Desire to physically or emotionally withdraw from people or situations that trigger difficult thoughts and emotions

Several other terms capture elements of STS, often describing some terms slightly differently from STS.

**Burnout** is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a sense of reduced personal accomplishment. Although burnout also is work related, burnout develops as a result of general occupational stress; the term is not used specifically to describe the effects of indirect trauma exposure.

**Compassion fatigue** is a less stigmatizing way to describe STS and can be used interchangeably with the term *STS*.



**Vicarious trauma** refers to internal changes in teachers and staff members who engage empathetically with a student affected by trauma. It is a theoretical term that focuses less on trauma symptoms and more on the cumulative effects of exposure to details about another person's trauma.

**Compassion satisfaction** describes the positive feelings derived from competent performance as a trauma supporter. It is characterized by positive relationships with colleagues and the conviction that one's efforts contribute in a meaningful way to students, their families, and the community.

## Risk Factors for STS and Related Conditions

Any professional who works directly with children exposed to trauma and hears them recount their traumatic experiences is at risk of STS. Additional risk factors associated with STS and related conditions for professionals include:

- Prior trauma exposure
- Female gender
- Inexperience in the field
- Dose of exposure
- Type of work
- Young age

## Warning Signs of Vicarious Trauma

Persons who experience vicarious trauma undergo negative changes in their views of themselves, others, and the world. These negative changes eventually affect all aspects of daily life.

Warning Signs of Vicarious Trauma	
<b>Hypervigilance</b>	Excessive alertness for potential threats or dangers at and outside of work. Always being “on” and “on the lookout”
<b>Poor Boundaries</b>	Lacking a balanced sense of your role so that you take on too much, step in and try to control events, have difficulty leaving work at work, or take the work too personally
<b>Avoidance</b>	Coping with stress by shutting down and disconnecting
<b>Inability to Empathize/Numbing</b>	Unable to remain emotionally connected to the work
<b>Addictions</b>	Attaching to distractions to check out from work, personal life, or both
<b>Chronic Exhaustion/ Physical Ailments</b>	Experiencing physical, emotional, and spiritual fatigue or inexplicable aches and pains exceeding what you expect for an ordinary busy day or week
<b>Minimizing</b>	Trivializing a current experience by comparing it with another situation that we regard as more severe
<b>Anger and Cynicism</b>	Using cynicism or anger to cope other intense feelings that we may not understand or know how to manage
<b>Feelings of Professional Inadequacy</b>	Becoming increasingly unsure of yourself professionally, second-guessing yourself, feeling insecure about tasks that you once felt confident to perform

# Tools for Staff Self-Care and Resilience

A number of individual and system-level strategies effectively promote staff self-care and resilience. This section includes the following tools for supporting individual and schoolwide strategies for addressing and minimizing the effects of STS and related conditions:

- **3.1 Shared Strategies for Staff Self-Care and Resilience** suggests individual and schoolwide strategies to support a culture of staff wellness.
- **3.2 Staff Self-Care Plan** begins with a personal inventory of warning signs, proceeds to an assessment of self-care practices, and concludes with making a commitment to specific practices.
- **3.3 School Self-Care Plan** offers a process similar to developing an individual self-care plan but for the entire school.

## 3.1 Shared Strategies for Staff Self-Care and Resilience

Creating a healthy work environment is a shared process that includes individual and school-based strategies. Explore these ideas for what you can do and what your school can do to foster wellness for all.

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

## 3.2 Staff Self-Care Plan

Use this worksheet to create your own self-care plan. You do not need to share your answers with anyone—this is simply for self-reflection. Check back regularly to see how things are going and assess whether you need to make any adjustments to your plan.

### 1. Recognize the warning signs.

*Becoming aware of the effects your work has on you is essential to helping you take care of yourself. Think about the warning signs of STS and related conditions and consider how they may be present in your daily life. Even if you are not regularly exposed to student trauma, you may be struggling with issues of burnout or remnants of your own personal trauma experience. Feel free to add other signs that you are feeling overworked, overextended, or overwhelmed.*

Warning Sign	Yes or No	If Yes, Describe the Effect on You
Increased anxiety or concern about safety	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Intrusive, negative thoughts and images related to your student's traumatic experiences	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Difficulty maintaining work–life boundaries	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Avoiding people, places, and activities that you used to find enjoyable	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Feeling emotionally numb, disconnected, or unable to empathize	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	

Warning Sign	Yes or No	If Yes, Describe the Effect on You
Experiencing feelings of chronic exhaustion and related physical ailments	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Regularly feeling angry and/or cynical about students, staff, and your work	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Feeling inadequate in your work and questioning whether what you do matters	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Other:		

## 2. Assess your self-care practice.

Many strategies are available to support self-care and reduce the signs and symptoms of STS and related conditions. Take some time to complete the self-care self-assessment below. This tool provides ideas about how to practice self-care across many areas of your life. Remember that no one strategy works for everyone.

**How often do you do the following? (Rate, using the following scale):**

**5–Frequently 4–Sometimes 3–Rarely 2–Never 1–It never even occurred to me**

### Physical self-care

Eat regularly (e.g., breakfast and lunch)
Eat healthfully
Exercise or go to the gym
Lift weights
Practice martial arts
Get regular medical care for prevention
Get medical care when needed
Take time off when you are sick
Get massages or other body work

Do physical activity that is fun for you
Take time to be sexual
Get enough sleep
Wear clothes you like
Take vacations
Take day trips or mini-vacations
Get away from stressful technology, such as pagers, faxes, telephones, and e-mail
Other:

### Psychological self-care

Make time for self-reflection
Go to see a psychotherapist or counselor for yourself
Write in a journal
Read literature unrelated to work
Do something at which you are a beginner
Take a step to decrease stress in your life
Notice your inner experience—your dreams, thoughts, imagery, and feelings
Let others know different aspects of you
Engage your intelligence in a new area—go to an art museum, performance, sports event, exhibit, or other cultural event
Practice receiving from others
Be curious
Say no sometimes to extra responsibilities
Spend time outdoors
Other:

### Emotional self-care

Spend time with others whose company you enjoy
Stay in contact with important people in your life
Treat yourself kindly (supportive inner dialogue or self-talk)
Feel proud of yourself
Reread favorite books, review favorite movies
Identify and seek out comforting activities, objects, people, relationships, places
Allow yourself to cry
Find things that make you laugh

Express your outrage in a constructive way
Play with children
Other:

### Spiritual self-care

Make time for prayer, meditation, and reflection
Spend time in nature
Participate in a spiritual gathering, community, or group
Be open to inspiration
Cherish your optimism and hope
Be aware of nontangible (nonmaterial) aspects of life
Be open to mystery, to not knowing
Identify what is meaningful to you and notice its place in your life
Sing
Express gratitude
Celebrate milestones with rituals that are meaningful to you
Remember and memorialize loved ones who have died
Nurture others
Have awe-filled experiences
Contribute to or participate in causes you believe in
Read inspirational literature
Listen to inspiring music
Other:

### Workplace or professional self-care

Take time to eat lunch
Take time to chat with coworkers
Make time to complete tasks
Identify projects or tasks that are exciting, growth promoting, and rewarding for you

	Pursue regular learning and professional development
	Get support from colleagues

	Negotiate for your needs
	Have a peer support group
	Other:

**Follow-up questions to consider**

1. What was this process of filling out the checklist like for you?

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2. Were you surprised by any of your responses? If so, which ones?

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3. In what areas are you strongest? Weakest?

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### 3. Adopt specific strategies.

Based on your responses to the self-care self-assessment, list 1–2 things in each area that you already do and 1–2 things that you would like to do to take care of yourself. Then choose 3–5 things from your list that you can make a commitment to doing in the next month.

Area	Already Do	Would Like to Do
Physical		
Relational		
Emotional		
Spiritual		
Professional		

**Committed to doing:**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_



### 3.3 School Self-Care Plan

These checklists will help you recognize warning signs of STS at a school level and to choose schoolwide strategies to support self-care.

#### 1. Recognize the warning signs.

*A range of warning signs can indicate that your school as a whole may be affected by trauma. Check any signs you detect in your school.*

	School environment is often chaotic, disorganized, and unpredictable.
	Staff members are often fearful of their own safety.
	Staff members often use harsh and punitive discipline practices to regain control.
	The school has a high rate of staff turnover.
	The school has a high rate of staff absenteeism.
	There is a lack of communication and/or frequent miscommunication among staff members.
	Interpersonal conflicts are increasing among staff members in different roles or departments.
	Work is often incomplete.
	Work quality is often poor.
	The school has a negative atmosphere.
	People at the school feel a lack of emotional and/or physical safety.
	Staff members have less energy or motivation to go the extra mile.
	Staff members collectively tend to be cynical and negative about students.
	Student and family complaints about the school have increased.

#### 2. Assess your schoolwide self-care practices.

Check everything that your school currently does to support staff members in each domain.

##### Training and education

	The school provides education to all employees on the signs of STS and related conditions such as vicarious trauma.
	The school provides all employees with professional development related to stress management, self-care, and resilience-focused strategies.

	The school provides all employees with training related to their job tasks.
	Staff members are given opportunities to attend refresher trainings and trainings on new topics related to their roles.
	Staff coverage is in place to support training.
	The school provides education on steps necessary to advance employees in their roles.

### Support and supervision

	The school offers an employee assistance program.
	Employee job descriptions and responsibilities are clearly defined.
	All staff members have access to regular supervision or support by administrators or peers.
	Staff members have access to ongoing support for managing workload and time needed to complete tasks.
	Staff members are encouraged to understand their own stress reactions and take appropriate steps to develop their own self-care plans.
	Staff members are regularly supported in practicing self-care strategies.
	Staff members are welcome to discuss concerns about the school or their jobs with administrators without negative consequences (e.g., being treated differently, feeling like their jobs are in jeopardy, or having their concerns affect their positions on the team).
	Staff members are encouraged to take breaks, including lunch and vacation time.
	The school fosters team-based support and mentoring for staff.

### Employee control and input

	The school provides opportunities for staff members to give input into practices and policies.
	The school reviews its policies on a regular basis to identify whether the policies are helpful or harmful to the health and well-being of its employees.
	The school provides opportunities for staff members to identify their professional goals.
	Staff members have formal channels for addressing problems and grievances.
	Workplace issues, including grievance issues and interpersonal difficulties, are managed by individuals in the appropriate roles and are confidential.

## Communication

	Staff members attend regularly scheduled team meetings.
	Topics related to self-care and stress management are addressed in team meetings.
	Regular discussions of how people and departments are communicating and relaying information occur in team meetings.
	The school has a way of assessing staff level of STS and related conditions.
	The school has a way of evaluating staff satisfaction on a regular basis.

## Work environment

	The school environment is well lit.
	The school environment is physically well maintained (e.g., clean, secure).
	Information about self-care is posted in places that are visible.
	Employee rights are posted in places that are visible.
	The school provides opportunities for community building among employees.
	The school has policies concerning acts of discrimination, harassment, disrespect, and bullying for staff.
	The school responds promptly to any acts of discrimination, harassment, disrespect, and bullying among staff.

### 3. Adopt specific strategies that promote staff self-care and resilience.

Based on your responses on the school self-care assessment, list 1–2 things in each area that your school already does to support staff and 1–2 things that you would like to see more of to promote staff wellness.

*If you are in a leadership position, you may consider gathering staff opinions related to the school's current support for self-care and use the feedback to identify gaps and related action steps. If you are not in a position to implement some of these strategies, take this school self-care plan to your supervisors or directors for their consideration.*

Area	Already Do	Would Like to Do
<b>Training and Education</b>		
<b>Support and Supervision</b>		
<b>Employee Control and Input</b>		
<b>Communication</b>		
<b>Work Environment</b>		

## References

- National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Secondary Traumatic Stress Committee. (2011). *Secondary traumatic stress: A fact sheet for child-serving professionals*. Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.
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- Volk, K. T., Guarino, K., Edson Grandin, M., & Clervil, R. (2008). *What about You? A Workbook for those who work with others*. Washington, DC: National Center on Family Homelessness at American Institutes for Research.

## 4. MAPPING TRIGGERS AND OPPORTUNITIES ACTIVITY

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Trauma-sensitive schools work to identify and reduce potential triggers (i.e., trauma reminders) in the school environment. Although no school can identify and eliminate all possible trauma-related triggers for students or parents, trauma-sensitive schools focus on aspects of the environment that they can control and then work to reduce potentially triggering situations. This activity will help you to identify potential trauma triggers in your school environment as well as opportunities for reducing and eliminating potentially triggering practices.

### Overview of Triggers

Triggers are reminders of past traumatic experiences that cause the body to react automatically as if the traumatic event were happening again. Specific to the individual, trauma reminders can be as subtle as odors or as obvious as a repeat incident. Some potentially triggering experiences for trauma survivors include situations or experiences that could be difficult for any student to manage (e.g., chaotic environments, threatening gestures). But a person who is triggered feels overwhelmed and appears to overreact to the situation from the standpoint of a person unaffected by trauma. Potential triggers for persons with histories of trauma include the following:

- Loud, chaotic environments
- Odors
- Physical touch
- Confinement
- Uncertainty about expectations
- Change in routine
- Situations involving authority figures and limit setting, even appropriate limits
- Hand or body gestures that appear threatening
- Witnessing violence between other individuals, such as peers fighting
- Areas of the school experienced as unsafe, such as bathrooms or less well-monitored areas
- Emergency vehicles and police or fire personnel
- Feelings such as anger, sadness, or fear in response to common school conflicts—getting in trouble, doing poorly on a test, having an argument with another student (Such feelings may trigger an intense reaction related to past trauma.)

Triggers set off intense reactions that can be confusing and easily misunderstood or mislabeled, particularly if the school staff does not understand the connection between current behavior and previous trauma. Triggered students can display a variety of fight, flight, or freeze responses.

Survival Response	Related Behaviors
<b>Fight</b>	Verbal attacks, aggression, assaultive behavior, defiance, aggressive stance, clenched fists and teeth
<b>Flight</b>	Running away, refusing to talk, avoidance, hiding, substance use
<b>Freeze</b>	Appearing nonresponsive, numbed out, unable to interact, or disconnected

## Triggers for Parents

Parents who are affected by trauma may have their own triggers related to their experiences. Some types of interactions between parents and the school staff present an elevated potential for triggering, particularly interactions that leave parents feeling helpless, vulnerable, or out of control or that mimic other aspects of past traumatic experiences. Potential trauma triggers for parents arise from situations involving conflict:

- Feeling disrespected by the school staff
- Being called into a meeting to address their child's behaviors
- Uncertainty about what is happening
- Lack of control over decisions being made about their child
- History of negative experiences with the education system

Responses to trauma triggers that you may encounter from parents include extreme anger, defensiveness, avoidance, or shutting down. These behaviors are challenging and can be easily misunderstood by staff, leading to negative interactions that interfere with parent engagement and relationship building.

# Mapping Triggers and Opportunities Activity

Recognizing potentially triggering experiences for students helps school staff in identifying opportunities for reducing trauma triggers and trauma-related responses.

## 1. Mark it on the map.

Review the coded list of potential trauma triggers for students and parents. Determine where in your school building these triggers are likely to occur, and insert the associated code on the school map (following page). For example, writing P3 on the administrator’s office indicates that participating in large meetings has a potential for triggering a vulnerable parent. Some triggers are likely to occur in multiple places, so you might write S1 on hallways, gym, and cafeteria for the trigger potential of loud, chaotic environments.

Student Triggers	Parent Triggers
S1. Loud, chaotic environments	P1. Being called into school to discuss a problem
S2. Physical touch	P2. Being treated disrespectfully when you arrive at the school
S3. Uncertainty about expectations	P3. Participating in large meetings with a lot of school staff
S4. Changes in routine	P4. Not being part of decision making for your child
S5. Witnessing violence between peers, such as fighting	P5. Lack of privacy in where school staff members are talking to you about a private matter
S6. Meeting with an adult to address behavior	P6. Participating in an assessment process related to your child
S7. Emergency vehicles, police or fire personnel	P7. Confusion and lack of clarity about your child’s education
S8. Being called out on your behaviors in front of others	
S9. Being harassed or intimidated by others	
S10. Being asked to discuss difficult topics	
S11. Feeling embarrassed or ashamed	





## 2. Provide alternatives.

In the following two tables, list alternatives for eliminating or reducing potential trauma-related triggers for students and then do the same for parents.

**Student examples**—*You may reduce the trigger potential of S8 by making a practice of confronting student behavior out of the public eye. Strategically placing adult support during drills can reduce the trigger potential of S7.*

Student Triggers	Alternatives
S1. Loud, chaotic environments	
S2. Physical touch	
S3. Uncertainty about expectations	
S4. Changes in routine	
S5. Witnessing violence between peers, such as fighting	
S6. Meeting with an adult to address behavior	
S7. Emergency vehicles, police or fire personnel	
S8. Being called out on your behaviors in front of others	
S9. Being harassed or intimidated by others	
S10. Being asked to discuss difficult topics	
S11. Feeling embarrassed or ashamed	

**Parent examples**—A way to reduce the trigger potential of P1 is to give parents as much control as possible over the agenda for a meeting. Also, you can eliminate the trigger potential of P5 by ensuring that you always talk about confidential issues in a private space.

Parent Triggers	Alternatives
P1. Being called into school to discuss a problem	
P2. Being treated disrespectfully when you arrive at the school	
P3. Participating in large meetings with a lot of school staff	
P4. Not being part of decision making for your child	
P5. Lack of privacy in where school staff members are talking to you about a private matter	
P6. Participating in an assessment process related to your child	
P7. Confusion and lack of clarity about your child's education	

## 5. NAVIGATING CRISES WORKSHEET

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A trauma-sensitive approach to crisis prevention and intervention is grounded in an understanding of the human stress response and its amplification in students exposed to trauma. This worksheet describes five phases of a crisis and, for each phase, particular considerations for youth affected by trauma. As you familiarize yourself with each phase, consider supportive strategies that you currently use or want to use.

### Phase 1: Baseline

How a student usually behaves and responds defines the baseline phase. Students affected by trauma often function in survival mode, which makes them more anxious, fearful, and on the alert for danger at all times compared to youth who are not affected by trauma. Students affected by trauma tend to be overly reactive to cues or triggers in the environment—sights, sounds, smells, feelings, or situations—that cause them to relive their experience and react suddenly. To prevent students from quickly escalating to a crisis, particular strategies may be required.

#### Questions to consider

How do you foster a general sense of safety and calm as you work with students?

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What additional strategies do you need to help students affected by trauma feel safe and calm?

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#### Trauma-sensitive strategies

Check the strategies you currently use to prevent crises and help students remain calm. Circle the practices you would like to add or use more often.

	Establish clear routines.
	Ensure adequate staffing during times when students are more likely to have difficulties.
	Arrange your space to minimize potential trauma triggers (e.g., where students sit, amount of physical space, areas to take space when needed).
	Anticipate potential trauma triggers for students and plan ahead.
	Provide trigger warnings for content that may be upsetting.
	Plan for times of uncertainty and transition, and offer additional support to students who need it during these times.
	Make all your responses to students calm and respectful.
	Use positive behavioral interventions.
	Incorporate self-control practices, such as breathing exercises and mindfulness activities, into daily routines.

## Phase 2: Triggering Phase

The stress response system is activated in the triggering phase. The brain's emotional control center begins to take over. You see changes in behavior and mood (e.g., shorter responses, tearfulness, moving or pacing, raised voice, becoming quieter, withdrawing, or unresponsiveness).

Students affected by trauma may be triggered by a range of stimuli that prompt them to relive a traumatic experience. At this point, the students cannot easily access the thinking part of their brains that would help them maintain perspective and emotional control. The behavior of triggered students may be confusing to other individuals and may look like an overreaction to what adults may see as a relatively minor or neutral situation. At this point, though, adults may have only a short amount of time to recognize what is happening and to help a student calm down before the situation escalates.

### Questions to consider

What types of situations or experiences might trigger a student affected by trauma?

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What types of behaviors do you notice that tell you a student has been triggered?

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What are some preventative responses you might use at this point?

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What responses would not be helpful at this point?

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### Trauma-sensitive strategies

Check the strategies you currently use to intervene once a student is triggered. Circle the practices you would like to add or use more often.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Validate feelings (even if the feelings do not appear rational).	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide a space for the student to calm down.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Listen to what the student is saying.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Avoid arguing with the student.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide choices in the moment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Minimize public confrontation.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Use encouraging statements and positive reinforcement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Avoid threatening punishment in the moment.

### Phase 3: Escalation Phase

Increased agitation and intense, emotionally driven, survival-based responses typify the escalation phase. Fight, flight, or freeze responses of students affected by trauma include yelling, swearing, posturing, running away, refusing to talk, spacing out, or appearing disconnected. At this point, the emotional center of the brain has taken over and filters out unessential information, making nonverbal strategies increasingly important. Adults must stay aware of their own emotional state and avoid using punitive, threatening, or aggressive approaches that could be re-traumatizing for the student.

### Questions to consider

What does the escalation phase commonly look like for students?

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At this point, what types of responses tend to escalate the situation further? What responses might be re-traumatizing?

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What types of responses help to de-escalate the person and situation?

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What are the signs that the staff member is escalating?

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### Trauma-sensitive strategies

Check the strategies you currently use to intervene as a student is escalating. Circle the practices you would like to add or use more often.

	Use a calm and respectful tone of voice.
	Pay attention to your body language, gestures, and physical proximity to the student.
	Maintain boundaries and allow for a reasonable “comfort zone” to offer space.
	Use grounding techniques to help students access their thinking brain (e.g., breathing, providing something to hold or squeeze).
	Provide choices in the moment.
	Be clear about your intention and purpose in the situation.
	Refrain from giving a lot of directions.
	Identify, acknowledge, and label feelings.
	Offer support and reassurance.
	Avoid confrontation and punishment.
	Avoid arguing with the student.
	Check your own level of stress.
	Get support as needed.

## Phase 4: Outburst Phase

Full-blown escalation characterizes the outburst phase and increases the potential for dangerous behavior. The focus goes to the safety of all individuals involved and to the effort to set limits and help the triggered student to calm down and feel physically safe. As a person affected by trauma starts to feel increasingly unsafe and out of control, the fight, flight, or freeze response intensifies. During this phase, those individuals trying to help could cause additional harm by inadvertently recreating a situation that mimics the triggered person's traumatic experiences. Adults must balance the need to keep themselves, the student, and other students safe as they try to avoid creating another traumatic situation.

### Questions to consider

What does the outburst phase commonly look like?

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What types of responses might you use at this point?

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### Trauma-sensitive strategies

Check the strategies you currently use to intervene during periods of full-blown crisis. Circle the practices you would like to add or use more often.

	Use a calm and respectful tone of voice.
	Pay attention to body language, gestures, and physical proximity to the student.
	Be clear about your intention and purpose in the situation (why you are there, what you plan to do).
	Refrain from giving a lot of directions.
	Provide choices for getting support on the student's own terms.
	Set clear limits.
	Be directive while maintaining a respectful tone.
	Set the tone that you expect the student will regain control.
	Check your own level of stress.
	Get support as needed.



## Phase 5: Recovery Phase

The student returns to baseline, and adults help the student repair relationships and learn from the crisis. Students affected by trauma may feel disconnected and isolated after a crisis. Students also may feel ashamed and embarrassed, which can fuel additional trauma-related reactions and promote an ongoing cycle of distress and crisis. Post-crisis restorative practices include reassuring the student that he or she is a valued member of the school community, explaining the brain and body responses to stress, and planning to avoid future crises. Debriefing with colleagues can help you reduce your stress.

### Questions to consider

How do you debrief with students after a crisis?

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How do you repair relationships and rebuild connections?

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How do you debrief with fellow teachers and staff after a crisis?

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### Trauma-sensitive strategies

Check the strategies you currently use to help students recover from a crisis. Circle the practices you would like to add or use more often.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Re-establish a connection with the student.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clarify the chain of events.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify triggers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop a plan (identify possible triggers, early warning signs, and helpful strategies).
<input type="checkbox"/>	Teach new coping skills.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Help the student practice new behaviors.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Debrief with colleagues.

## References

Knowledge Network by and for Educators. (2015). *Therapeutic crisis intervention strategies*. Retrieved from [http://tccl.rit.albany.edu/knilt/index.php/Therapeutic\\_Crisis\\_Intervention\\_Strategies](http://tccl.rit.albany.edu/knilt/index.php/Therapeutic_Crisis_Intervention_Strategies)

## 6. TRAUMA-SENSITIVE ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING CHECKLIST

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This handout for student services staff and other staff who conduct student assessments is designed to help you adopt trauma-sensitive assessment, evaluation, and planning practices. By incorporating an awareness of trauma and its effects, those individuals performing student assessments are more likely to correctly identify trauma-related behaviors and provide appropriate interventions.

Even so, staff members in trauma-sensitive schools refrain from assuming that trauma is at the root of all student difficulties. Also, trauma-sensitive assessments are not trauma evaluations that identify the details of the trauma and provide clinical recommendations. Instead, the assessments take into account the potential effects of trauma on student behavior and learning. A formal trauma evaluation may be warranted based on results.

### Components of Trauma-Sensitive Assessments and Evaluations

#### Functional behavioral assessments

Use this checklist as a guide for conducting trauma-sensitive functional behavioral assessments.

	Assessments consider school routines that could trigger a student affected by trauma.
	Assessments include examples of trauma-related cues or triggers in the school environment that may lead to fight, flight, or freeze responses.
	Assessments consider trauma-related physiological responses as possible drivers of behavior (versus more purposeful or obvious motivations such as seeking attention or avoiding difficult tasks).
	Assessments consider a wide range of potentially traumatic experiences that may increase the likelihood of problem behavior.
	Assessments consider student strengths.

#### Psychological evaluations

The term *complex trauma* refers to exposure to multiple traumatic events as well as to the long-term impact of such exposure. Children and youth affected by ongoing trauma from an early age exhibit a wide range of difficulties that can mimic other conditions, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, bipolar disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, and reactive-attachment disorder. When youth are diagnosed solely on the basis of presenting symptoms, mental health

and other providers are likely to miss an underlying trauma that may be the source of the emotions and behaviors and the necessary focus of treatment.

Student services staff with expertise in conducting comprehensive psychological evaluations (e.g., school psychologists and other school-based mental health professionals) should be aware of and assess for the effects of trauma, particularly complex trauma on all key areas of student functioning.

To guide your assessment process, consider the following graphic, which outlines the core developmental domains of complex trauma that should be assessed.

### Developmental domains affected by complex trauma

<b>Attachment and Relationships:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship problems with family members, adults, and peers</li> <li>• Problems with attachment and separation from caregivers</li> <li>• Problems with boundaries</li> <li>• Distrust and suspiciousness</li> <li>• Social isolation</li> <li>• Difficulty attuning to others and relating to other people's perspectives</li> </ul>	<b>Thinking &amp; Learning:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulties with executive functioning and attention</li> <li>• Lack of sustained curiosity</li> <li>• Problems with information processing</li> <li>• Problems focusing on and completing tasks</li> <li>• Difficulties with planning and problem-solving</li> <li>• Learning difficulties</li> <li>• Problems with language development</li> </ul>
<b>Physical Health: Body &amp; Brain:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensorimotor developmental problems</li> <li>• Analgesia</li> <li>• Problems with coordination, balance, body tone</li> <li>• Somatization</li> <li>• Increased medical problems across a wide span</li> <li>• Developmental delays/regressive behaviors</li> </ul>	<b>Behavior:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulties with impulse control</li> <li>• Risk-taking behaviors (self-destructive behavior, aggression toward others, etc.)</li> <li>• Problems with externalizing behaviors</li> <li>• Sleep disturbances</li> <li>• Eating disturbances</li> <li>• Substance abuse</li> <li>• Oppositional behavior/difficulties complying with rules or respecting authority</li> <li>• Reenactment of trauma in behavior or play (e.g., sexual, aggressive)</li> </ul>
<b>Emotional Responses:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty with emotional self-regulation</li> <li>• Difficulty labeling and expressing feelings</li> <li>• Problems knowing and describing internal states</li> <li>• Difficulty communicating wishes and needs</li> <li>• Internalizing symptoms such as anxiety, depression, etc.</li> </ul>	<b>Dissociation:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disconnection between thoughts, emotions and/or perceptions</li> <li>• Amnesia/loss of memory for traumatic experiences Memory lapses/loss of orientation to place or time</li> <li>• Depersonalization (sense of being detached from or "not in" one's body) and derealization (sense of world or experiences not being real)</li> <li>• Experiencing alterations or shifts in consciousness</li> </ul>
<b>Self-Concept &amp; Future Orientation:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of a continuous, predictable sense of self</li> <li>• Poor sense of separateness</li> <li>• Disturbances of body image</li> <li>• Low self-esteem</li> <li>• Shame and guilt</li> <li>• Negative expectations for the future or foreshortened sense of future</li> </ul>	

\*The information above is adapted from Cook et al., 2005.

### Information gathered in trauma-sensitive evaluations

Use this checklist as a guide for conducting trauma-sensitive psychological evaluations. Based on results, student services staff may refer students for a more detailed trauma evaluation.

	Assessments include questions about student exposure to potentially traumatic events.
	Assessments gather information about possible trauma-related challenges across developmental domains related to self-regulation, physical functioning, relationships, and academics, including:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Developmental delays</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Difficulty regulating or controlling behavior, emotions, and bodily states, and regulating or identifying and expressing feelings</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Risky behaviors (e.g., self-harm, substance abuse, risky sexual behaviors, illegal activities)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Difficulty sustaining attention and concentration</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Learning difficulties</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Difficulties in relationships with others</li> </ul>
	Assessments include questions about reactions to common trauma triggers.
	Assessments include questions about family functioning and potential exposure to trauma.
	Assessments include questions about student and family strengths.
	Assessments include questions about student and family cultural background, values, and norms.
	Information is gathered using a variety of techniques—clinical interviews, standardized measures, and behavioral observations.
	Information is gathered from a variety of perspectives—the child, caregivers, teachers, and other individuals who have direct contact with the student.
	Staff members conducting assessments try to determine connections between exposure to various traumatic events and current difficulties.
	Staff members conducting assessments try to determine potential trauma-related reminders or triggers based on the types of traumatic events the student has experienced.

### Conducting trauma-sensitive assessments and evaluations

The manner and situation for conducting assessments is as important as the questions asked. Assessments require students and parents to meet with people they don't know and share sensitive information that can be emotionally painful or unsettling. The very concept may reside outside the family's cultural norms. School professionals need to stay aware of these challenges throughout the encounter and create a safe, secure, comfortable, and respectful environment.

Use this checklist to consider how you incorporate trauma-sensitive strategies into your assessment process.

	Assessments are conducted in a private space.
	Students and families are well informed about what to expect.
	Students and families are given choices about the conduct of the assessment (e.g., form of expression or consideration for reading or writing limitations).

	Staff members consider potential safety issues and triggers (e.g., asking personal questions, shame about behaviors, fear about what could come up).
	Staff members consider cultural norms and expectations when greeting, engaging, and questioning students and families.
	Students and families are given options for stopping assessments and continuing at a later time if they begin to feel uncomfortable or overwhelmed.
	Assessments are relationship oriented (e.g., empathic, respectful, engaged, student and family-centered).
	Assessments maintain a strengths-based focus.

## Trauma-Sensitive Student Plans

In a trauma-sensitive school, individual student plans, such as behavioral support plans and individualized education programs (IEPs) address trauma when appropriate.

Use this checklist as a guide for creating trauma-sensitive student plans.

	Behavior support plans include a place to identify student-specific trauma-related triggers.
	Behavior support plans include a place for necessary accommodations and helpful adult responses for students who have been exposed to trauma.
	Individualized strategies for supporting students include a focus on physiological regulation.
	Plans include strategies or routines for supporting students during difficult times and in potentially triggering situations.
	Social and emotional IEP goals include ways to build skills that support resilience and skill building for students exposed to trauma.
	Plans include opportunities for teaching students exposed to trauma about the stress response and strategies for managing physiological responses.

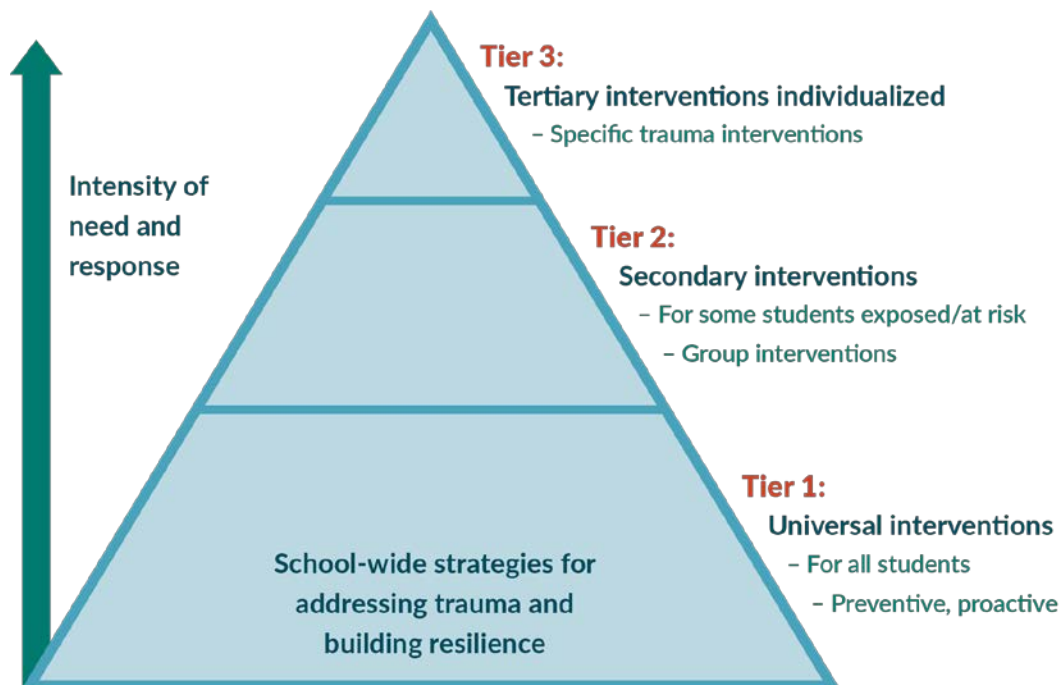
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## 7. GUIDELINES FOR ADOPTING A MULTITIERED APPROACH TO ADDRESSING TRAUMA

Student services staff members play a critical role in supporting universal trauma-sensitive practices and ensuring that students have access to more intensive, trauma-specific supports and that these intensive supports are provided in a trauma-sensitive manner. You can use this guide to learn strategies for supporting a multitiered, trauma-sensitive approach.

Student services staff refers to school counselors, social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, or other mental health providers who coordinate and/or provide support for students exposed to trauma.



### Additional Resources

Student services staff can visit the following websites for additional resources related to supporting trauma-sensitive practices and interventions in schools:

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network at [www.nctsn.org/](http://www.nctsn.org/)

National Center for PTSD at <http://www.ptsd.va.gov>

International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies at <https://www.istss.org>



# Strategies for Supporting Trauma-Sensitive Schools

Consider how you currently support the interventions outlined below. Identify those practices that you would like to more fully integrate into daily practice at your school. Determine what the next steps would be for you to adopt new practices as an individual and across the student services department.

## Tier 1: Universal Interventions

For each practice, rate your effort as to whether you:

1–Do this well    2–Could do better    3–Want to do it

	Educate school staff about trauma and its impact on students, staff, and schools (trainings, informal consultation, team meetings, student review and pre-referral meetings).
	Educate school staff about mental health and trauma-related mental health challenges.
	Educate school staff about cultural variations in responses to trauma.
	Support whole-school strategies for integrating trauma knowledge and trauma-informed principles in classrooms and throughout the school.
	Provide strategies for trauma sensitivity tailored to staff according to role (e.g., teacher, administrator, support staff).
	Support whole-school approaches to crisis, discipline, and behavior management that are aligned with trauma-sensitive principles.
	Support school staff in identifying and reducing potential triggers or re-traumatizing practices.
	Support universal programs for social and emotional learning in key areas of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and decision making.
	Support universal practices related to cultural awareness and responsiveness.
	Work with school teams to integrate a trauma-informed approach with other initiatives or frameworks, such as PBIS (positive behavioral interventions and supports).
	Support school staff and administrators in identifying and implementing individual and schoolwide strategies to support staff self-care.

## Tier 2 and Tier 3: Targeted and Selective Interventions

For each practice, rate your effort as to whether you:

1–Do this well    2–Could do better    3–Want to do it

	Consider trauma in all school-based evaluations or assessments and related impact on learning, behavior, testing results, diagnoses.
	Consider historical and racial trauma in assessments.
	Assess for trauma in country of origin and resettlement and acculturation stress for students who are refugees.
	Include a place for trauma-related considerations in all individualized plans (e.g., triggers, trauma responses, trauma-related supports).
	Offer evidence-based group and individualized interventions for addressing the effects of trauma.
	Be aware of cultural variations in trauma-related responses and experiences with the mental health and educational systems.
	Provide and/or refer students to therapeutic services that are culturally specific.
	Adapt interventions to meet the needs of student groups as needed (e.g., students of color, refugees, LGBTQ youth).
	Incorporate opportunities for skill building to support resilience (self-regulation, coping, attachment) into your work with students.
	Educate children and families about trauma and its impact.
	Be aware of your own cultural attitudes, values, and beliefs and how they influence your work.
	Recognize symptoms of secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma.
	Practice self-care strategies.
	Support a safe physical environment in your space.
	Ensure all interactions with students and families are conducted in a trauma-informed manner.
	Maintain a family-driven focus that encourages parent involvement.
	Minimize re-traumatizing practices (e.g., consider how you uphold confidentiality and how you address issues of safety or reporting in a trauma-informed manner).

### Next Steps

Choose 3–5 actions from the two checklists that you can make a commitment to doing to support a multitiered approach to trauma sensitivity at your school:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
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## 8. SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES CHECKLIST

Supporting social and emotional development is a core component of trauma-sensitive schools. Social and emotional competencies, such as self-regulation, strong coping and problem-solving skills, and positive social connections, buffer the effects of trauma and strengthen resilience.

### Intersection of Trauma Sensitivity and Social and Emotional Learning

Trauma Sensitivity	Social and Emotional Learning
Enhances awareness of trauma and its impact on student and staff social and emotional health	Builds student and staff competencies that support resilience in the face of adversity
Identifies building social and emotional skills as a key component of trauma sensitivity	Can be incorporated at all tiers to build skills for supporting resilience and healing for students exposed to trauma
Fosters environments that promote social and emotional learning	Fosters environments that promote trauma sensitivity

### Five Sets of Competencies

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has identified five interrelated sets of cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies.

**Self-awareness:** The ability to accurately recognize one’s emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior. This includes accurately assessing one’s strengths and limitations and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.

**Self-management:** The ability to regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals.



**Social awareness:** The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures; to understand social and ethical norms for behavior; and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

**Relationship skills:** The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed.

**Responsible decision making:** The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others.

## Social and Emotional Competencies Checklist

Whether or not your school has formally adopted a social and emotional learning program, everyone at the school can help students build social and emotional skills in the course of their daily work and interactions with students. Use this checklist to consider how you support social and emotional learning for students.

### Self-awareness

	I provide varied opportunities for students to practice identifying and expressing their feelings (e.g., through dialogue, visual and performing arts, journaling).
	I help to expand students' emotional vocabulary and their abilities to identify physical sensations related to particular feelings.
	I give students opportunities to explore how they learn.
	I provide opportunities for students to practice identifying potential situations or experiences that lead to feeling overwhelmed and struggling to manage emotions.
	I help students accurately assess their own capabilities and qualities.
	I regularly acknowledge students' strengths.
	I work to build students' self-confidence.
	I ask my students for feedback on lessons and activities to empower and engage them.
	I provide opportunities for students to feel successful.
	I am aware of my own emotions and internal states.
	I am able to recognize internal biases that may skew how I view my students.

### Self-management

	I provide opportunities for students to practice managing their thoughts and behaviors.
	I offer positive support when students are having difficulties with self-regulation.

	I teach students about stress and help them practice ways of coping with stressful experiences.
	I incorporate emotional and behavioral regulation techniques that include breathing exercises; muscle relaxation; journaling; mindfulness exercises; and use of nonverbal means of expression such as music, art, dance, and yoga.
	I offer students opportunities to set goals and work to achieve them.
	I offer students with a range of strategies to help them manage their work (e.g., checklists, reminders, prompts).
	I am able to manage my emotional reactions and behaviors using techniques such as mindfulness strategies, breathing, and self-talk.
	I actively practice self-care strategies.

### Social awareness

	I provide opportunities for students to practice identifying how others may be feeling and using active listening skills such as body positioning and reflective responses.
	I provide opportunities for students to listen to their peers' opinions and express disagreements in constructive ways.
	I recognize commonalities and differences (e.g., racial, cultural) that exist among students.
	I demonstrate respect for diversity among students and find ways for students to share their cultural backgrounds and experiences.
	I provide and enforce clear expectations regarding students' behaviors toward others (e.g., anti-bullying, harassment, and violence policies).
	I model respect for others in my daily interactions with students and staff.
	I provide opportunities for students to practice skills related to respecting others.
	I work to foster students' awareness of real-world problems and issues to apply what they are learning.

### Relationship skills

	I provide opportunities for students to practice communication skills (e.g., verbalizing your message, listening to others).
	I provide opportunities for students to work together in groups or with partners.
	I support students in resolving interpersonal conflicts with each other.
	I provide opportunities for students to reflect on positive and negative choices in relationships and consequences of each choice.
	I work to foster an environment that supports relationship building among students and between students and staff.
	I model positive and respectful relationships with students, families, and colleagues.
	I offer students multiple options for communicating with me.

### Responsible decision making

	I allow students to have a decision-making role related to classroom activities and rules.
	I provide students with a range of options for completing their work.

	I offer students choices about ways they can present their ideas
	I encourage students to develop their own strategies for how to complete a task or learn a new concept.
	I work to create an environment in which students believe that their thoughts and opinions are valued.
	I provide opportunities for students to evaluate their own work.
	I work with students to solve problems.
	I help students make connections between classroom activities and their personal goals.
	I provide opportunities for students to evaluate various real-world scenarios and make decisions based on the information at hand.
	I help students understand cause and effect.

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## 9. STRATEGIES FOR COLLABORATION

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Trauma-sensitive schools foster collaboration with students and families by using strategies that support their control and empowerment, such as speaking respectfully, ensuring that families and students understand what is happening and can give their opinions, and involving families as partners in decision making related to student needs and plans. At a broader level, school leaders develop formal mechanisms for monitoring the level of engagement and partnership with students and their families.

Use this handout to learn strategies for collaborating with students and families that align with core principles of a trauma-sensitive approach.

<b>Understand Trauma and Its Impact</b>
Consider types of potentially traumatic events that students, families, and the broader community may have experienced.
Identify the unique experiences and risk for trauma among particular groups of students and families (e.g., LGBTQ youth and their families, youth and families of color, American Indian and Alaskan Native students and families).
Recognize the potentially traumatic experiences that students and families may have had within the education system.
Educate all staff on trauma and its effects on students and families.
Be aware of how experiences of trauma may affect student and family engagement.
Provide education to students and families about trauma and its effects.
Be aware of potential trauma-related triggers and responses for students and families.
Minimize potential trauma-related triggers in the school environment and in interactions with students and families.
Include students and families in schoolwide efforts related to trauma sensitivity (e.g., work groups, feedback surveys).
<b>Believe Healing Happens in Relationships</b>
Build trusting relationships with students and families.
Maintain clear and respectful boundaries with students and families.
Demonstrate a commitment to maintaining positive relationships with students and families, even during difficult interactions or times of crisis.
Model healthy interactions with and for students and their families.
Facilitate positive connections between students and staff.
Provide skill building that fosters healthy relationships.
Promote student and family connection to the larger school community.



<b>Support Choice, Control, and Empowerment</b>
Be flexible and offer choice when scheduling meetings with families.
Ensure families understand why they are being contacted and what to expect when scheduling meetings.
Ensure students and families have the opportunity to offer their perspective and opinions during meetings.
Consider how to conduct meetings in trauma-sensitive ways (who leads, how the room is arranged, what signals are given regarding whether student and family voice is valued).
Support student and family control and choice during all interactions.
Focus on student and family skills and strengths.
Empower families to be advocates for their children.
Include students and families as partners in all decision making related to student plans and services (e.g., use family group or team decision-making approaches).
Set mutually satisfactory goals.
Make data on student progress easily accessible and understandable to families.
Involve students and families in creating policies, practices, and programs.
<b>Ensure Emotional and Physical Safety</b>
Welcome all families into the school.
Ensure the physical environment is safe for students and families.
Make sure the physical environment reflects the students and families in the school community.
Conduct family meetings in ways that support a sense of physical and emotional safety.
Make students and families feel valued and connected.
Be consistent, reliable, open, and honest with students and families.
<b>Strive for Cultural Competence</b>
Learn about families' backgrounds, cultures, and goals for their children.
Provide staff with resources and training to integrate culturally aware family engagement practices.
Use a cultural insider to help bridge cultural gaps in communication.
Create opportunities for students and families to share their stories.
Educate staff members about the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students and families.
Consider cultural factors when meeting with families (e.g., how to greet, what topics may be difficult to address, cultural norms, values, practices, and experiences with the education system).
Ensure an assessment process that engages students and families through varied lenses, including family strengths, capacities, cultural heritage, and extended family resources.
Information about student performance is shared and discussed with families in their preferred language.
Provide information in clear language.
Provide information in a family's home language.

<b>View Students Holistically</b>
Understand the relationship between school, family, and community factors and student health and well-being.
Incorporate strategies for understanding and coping with trauma into activities with students and families.
Incorporate social and emotional skill building into daily routines and curricula.
Educate families about social and emotional skills development and how they can support their children in developing these skills.
Ensure students and families have access to mental health education and services.
Identify and cultivate student strengths and interests in academic and nonacademic areas.
<b>Use a Collaborative Approach</b>
Create regular opportunities to mutually share information about a child's learning and development.
Ensure constant two-way communication and collaboration between families and school staff.
Work with families in constructing goals, monitoring progress, and supporting learning.
Encourage family involvement in the school.
Offer opportunities for families to receive leadership training, coaching, or mentoring to enhance their leadership and advocacy skills.
Include families as partners in school organizations, advisory panels, and committees.
Offer families opportunities to visit their children's schools and find ways to recruit and train family members to work in the schools.
Collect ongoing feedback from students and families about their experiences of collaboration with the school.
Link students and families to trauma-related resources in the school and community when needed.
Provide or connect families to community supports (e.g., connections to parenting programs; education and services on relevant topics, such as child development, violence, and mental health).
Support family connections (e.g., provide parent partner, peer, parent support programs or opportunities).
Identify and work to remove potential barriers to parent participation.
Provide student and family engagement training for staff (e.g., helping parents understand child data; informing parents of their rights; giving parent feedback on child needs; helping families support learning at home; promoting child development, learning, and wellness).
Integrate core competencies related to student and family engagement into existing competency frameworks.
Develop formal processes for continuous improvement related to student and family engagement (e.g., family satisfaction, assessments of quality of relationships, discussion of screenings and assessments, number of professional development activities with family engagement focus, changes in family engagement practices).

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## 10. GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

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Trauma-sensitive schools establish policies and procedures that align with trauma sensitivity, which include policies related to discipline practices, communication with students and families, and safety procedures. Policies and practices are reviewed regularly to ensure alignment with the mission and goals of a trauma-sensitive school. Schools look to eliminate practices, such as the following, that could re-traumatize students and families:

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

### Discipline

For students affected by trauma, traditional school discipline practices that include harsh language, negative interactions, and removal from the community may mimic traumatic experiences, trigger trauma-related responses, and reinforce the belief that adults are not predictably safe and trustworthy.

### Guiding questions

1. What is our primary approach to discipline?
2. How effective is this approach for students exposed to trauma?
3. How does our approach to discipline align with the core principles of trauma sensitivity (i.e., trauma awareness; safety; choice, control, and empowerment; relationship driven; culturally competent; collaborative; holistic)?
4. How do our discipline policies and practices facilitate or hinder student, family, and staff well-being? For example, are there practices that could be re-traumatizing to students and families?
5. Who is involved in developing discipline policies and procedures?
6. What do we need to do differently to ensure a trauma-sensitive approach?

## Trauma-sensitive discipline practices

- Engage in proactive planning.
- Identify the reasons behind behaviors.
- Hold students accountable but in clear, understandable, and respectful ways.
- Implement positive behavioral supports.
- Minimize isolation and disconnection from the community.
- Use restorative approaches.
- Model respectful, nonviolent relationships and restorative practices.

## Communication

Trauma-sensitive schools establish communication policies that consider the potential impact of trauma on students and families. In all cases, *how* information is communicated is as important as *what* information is communicated and can make a critical difference in whether a situation escalates or becomes a learning opportunity.

### Guiding questions

1. How do we currently consider trauma as it relates to our communication policies and procedures?
2. How does our approach to communication with students and families align with the core principles of trauma sensitivity (i.e., trauma awareness; safety; choice, control, and empowerment; relationship driven; culturally competent; collaborative; holistic)?
3. How do our communication policies and procedures facilitate or hinder student, family, and staff well-being? For example, are there practices that could be re-traumatizing to students and families?
4. Who is involved in developing communication policies and procedures?
5. What do we need to do differently to ensure a trauma-sensitive approach?

### Trauma-sensitive communication practices

- Maintain privacy and confidentiality in all communication with students, parents, and community partners.
- Communicate information in clear language.
- Communicate information in the family's home language.
- Ensure all communication processes are respectful of students and families.
- Consider potential trauma triggers for families in all communication (e.g., letters home, calls, meetings and conferences).
- Create formal structures for family feedback.
- Develop trauma-sensitive processes for communicating with families regarding difficult issues, such as filing abuse and neglect reports or discussing their child's trauma-related difficulties.

## Safety

In a trauma-sensitive school, policies and procedures are in place to ensure safety for students and families. Trauma-sensitive schools also ensure that staff members feel safe at their jobs and that emergency procedures take trauma into account.

### Guiding questions

1. How do we currently consider trauma in our policies and procedures related to school safety?
2. How do we currently consider trauma in our policies and practices related to emergency planning?
3. How does our approach to safety and emergency planning with students and families align with the core principles of trauma sensitivity (i.e., trauma awareness; safety; choice, control, and empowerment; relationship driven; culturally competent; collaborative; holistic)?
4. How do our safety procedures facilitate or hinder student, family, and staff well-being? For example, are there practices that could be re-traumatizing to students and families?
5. Who is involved in developing safety procedures?
6. What do we need to do differently to ensure a trauma-sensitive approach?

### Trauma-sensitive safety practices

- Create procedures for ensuring physical and emotional safety for all students.
- Create procedures for ensuring physical and emotional safety for all staff.
- Develop policies related to maintaining confidentiality and privacy as it relates to student, family, and staff safety issues (e.g., custody issues, experiences of domestic violence, restraining orders).
- Develop and uphold policies related to bullying, harassment, and other forms of violence in the school.
- Incorporate trauma-sensitive practices into emergency procedures to address and mitigate the impact of acute traumatic events on students and staff.

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