

# THE BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO TRAUMA INFORMED SCHOOLS

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CEP 841

# PROBLEM STATEMENT

- In a world where a pandemic has changed family dynamics, socio-economic status, the loss of a social setting, and caused trauma in children's lives, it is important to consider a trauma-informed approach when interacting with children.
  - *Trauma: when we talk about trauma and the children we interact with, we can look at the child's Adverse Childhood Experiences or ACE*
- Providing schools with a trauma-informed approach can help bridge the gap between the traumatic experiences a child has faced with a supportive, caring and positive environment within the school setting.
- A trauma-informed approach leads to positive academic experiences, increase in self-esteem and a positive outlook for our children.

“A trauma-informed school promotes learning about and understanding the whole student, which can increase positive academic outcomes. It also provides a positive learning environment where students can—and are—willing to engage and educators can—and do—provide support for students' personal experiences. Developing a trauma-informed school, helps to develop socially and emotionally responsible citizens, creating safe spaces for the next generation. It’s a win-win for the whole community.”

--Dr. JaQuinda Jackson

# HOW MANY STUDENTS HAVE EXPERIENCED AN ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE (ACE)?

- According to a study completed in 2017, “national data show that at least 38 percent of children in every state have had at least one Adverse Childhood Experience or ACE, such as the death or incarceration of a parent, witnessing or being a victim of violence, or living with someone who has been suicidal or had a drug or alcohol problem.”
- Further, “Nationally, more than 46 percent of U.S. youth—34 million children under age 18—have had at least one ACE, and more than 20 percent have had at least two.”
- “Children ages 6 to 17 who have had two or more ACEs are twice as likely to be disengaged from school than are peers who have had no ACEs.”
- This research shows that nearly **half** of our children have experienced an ACE. We need to do something to help keep our students engaged and safe.

Source: <https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/articles-and-news/2017/10/traumatic-experiences-widespread-among-u-s-youth--new-data-show.html>

# Adverse Childhood Experiences

Traumatic events that can have negative, lasting effects on health and wellbeing



People with 6+ ACEs can die

**20 yrs**

earlier than those who have none

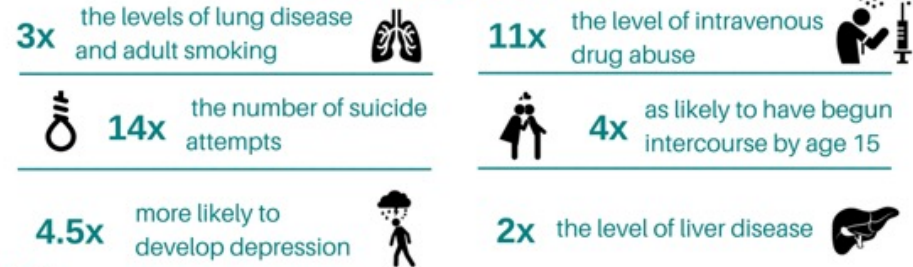


1/8 of the population have more than 4 ACEs



www.70-30.org.uk  
@7030Campaign

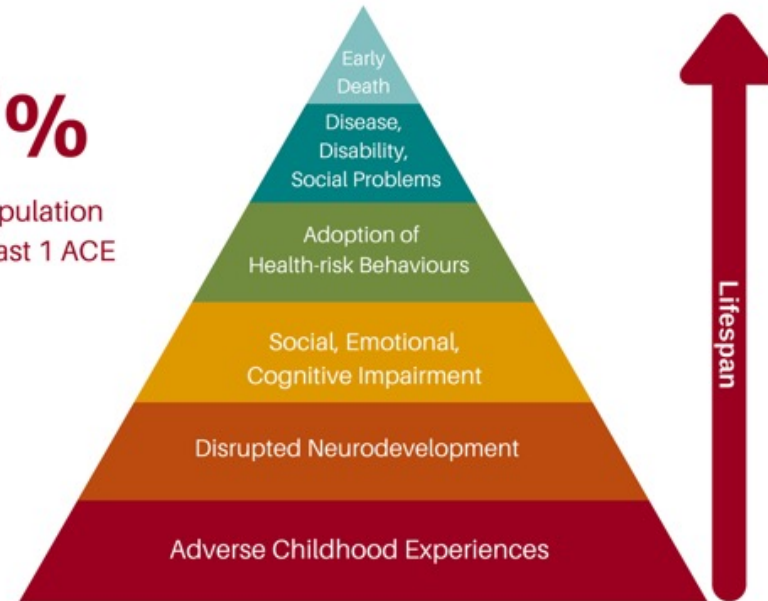
## 4 or more ACEs



“ Adverse childhood experiences are the single greatest unaddressed public health threat facing our nation today ”

Dr. Robert Block, the former President of the American Academy of Pediatrics

**67%**  
of the population have at least 1 ACE



# HOW HAS COVID-19 AFFECTED ACE IN OUR YOUTH?

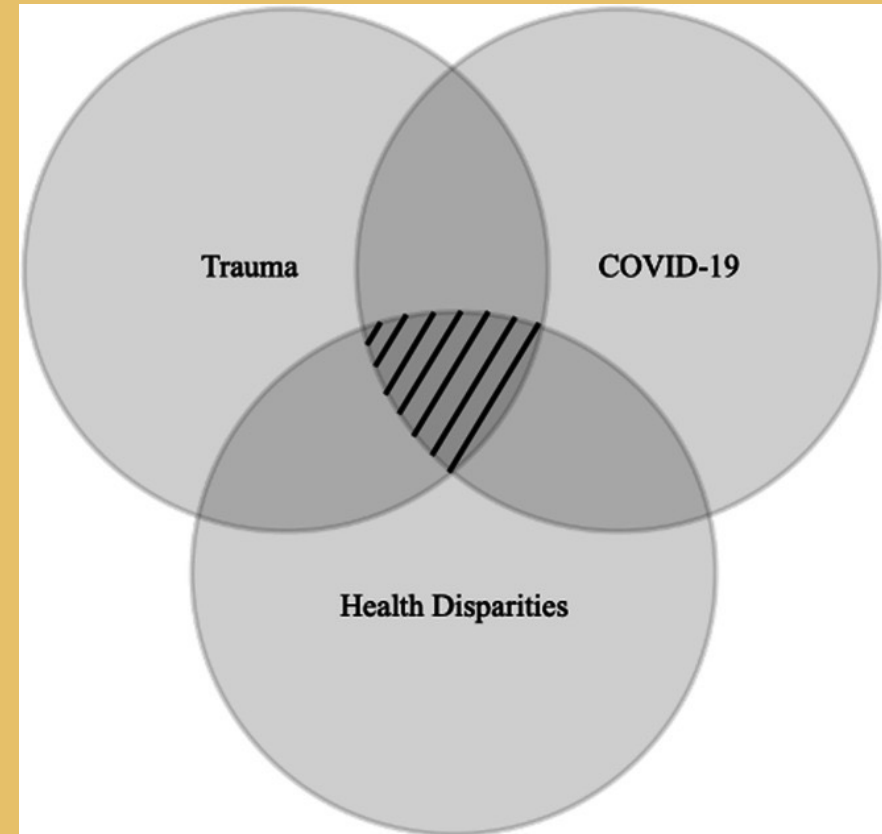
“There are growing concerns about the unintended consequences of COVID-19 on children's health and well-being as schools and afterschool activities remained closed, parents/caregivers navigate new stressors, and health care systems are stretched beyond capacity.”

“Restrictions posed by COVID-19, both identified risks for ACE exposure and mitigating protective factors are likely to be detrimentally impacted by the pandemic.”

“The field of ACEs and the emerging knowledge on COVID-19 speak to the importance of viewing and addressing the effects of this pandemic beyond virus exposure and treatment, but recognizing, in our pandemic response, the impact the virus is having on key social determinants of health that influence health and well-being across the lifespan.”

# HOW HAS COVID-19 AFFECTED ACE IN OUR YOUTH?

“We must acknowledge that **this pandemic is traumatic itself**. One of the reasons that long-term abuse in childhood is traumatic for children is because it’s often an unpredictable scenario for the child. The sense of uncertainty or not knowing what’s ahead can create distress, potentially exacerbating underlying anxiety and depression.



Sonu, S., Marvin, D., & Moore, C. (2021, May 15). *The intersection and dynamics between COVID-19, health disparities, and adverse childhood experiences: "Intersection/dynamics between COVID-19, Health Disparities, and aces"*. Journal of child & adolescent trauma. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8122187/>

We know that ACE and trauma touches the lives of an overwhelming amount of our students. The number of students that have experienced an ACE has risen since the beginning of the pandemic. The question isn't **IF** we should use a trauma-informed approach, the question is

**WHAT IS** a trauma-informed approach?



# WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR A SCHOOL TO BE TRAUMA INFORMED?

- A trauma-informed school:
  - Uses the knowledge of trauma to inform decisions regarding students
    - This helps to lessen the risk of re-traumatizing a student
  - Staff and community members work together to service the emotional, behavioral, academic and stress levels of the students
  - Is a safe, supportive and caring place for students
  - Can distinguish a trauma-induced response and appropriate behavior
  - Ultimately leads to the success of ALL students regardless of the number of ACEs they have experienced
  - Incorporates [restorative justice techniques](#)

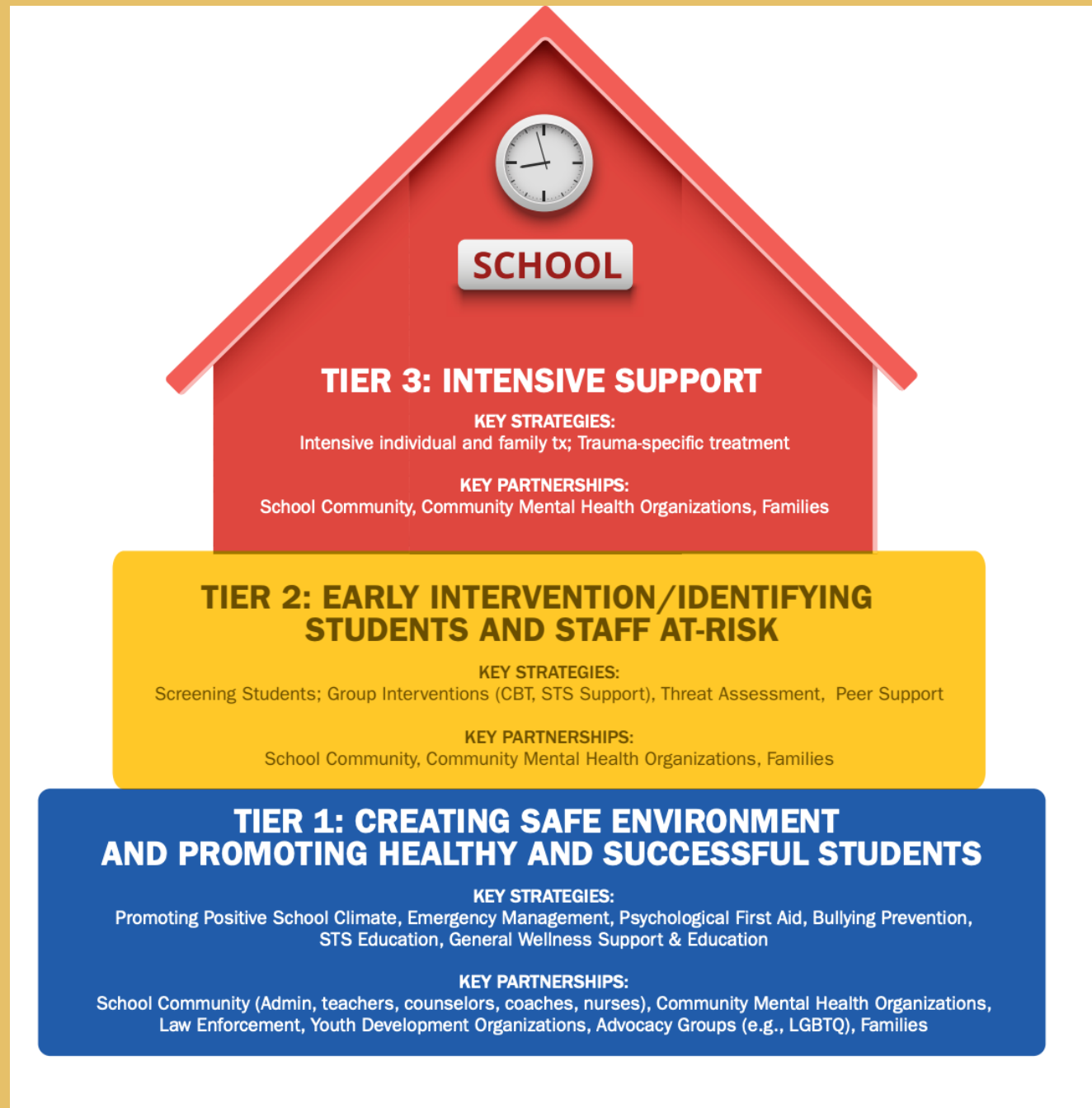
“Specifically, a trauma-informed school promotes a safe and welcoming climate; seeks to create a structured and predictable learning environment that minimizes unnecessary trauma and loss reminders; focuses on building positive and attuned relationships between teachers and students, and among school staff; has anti-bullying and suicide prevention programs; and uses a balanced restorative justice (a.k.a. restorative practices) approach to conflict and conflict mediation with appropriate disciplinary action.”

Source: <https://www.crisisprevention.com/Blog/Trauma-Informed-Schools>

# THE STEPS TO INTEGRATING A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

- **The Center for Resiliency, Hope and Wellness in Schools** recommends the 4 Rs approach:
  - *Realizing the widespread impact of trauma and pathways to recovery*
  - *Recognizing traumas signs and symptoms*
  - *Responding by integrating knowledge about trauma into all facets of the system*
  - *Resisting re-traumatization of trauma-impacted individuals by decreasing the occurrence of unnecessary triggers (i.e., trauma and loss reminders) and by implementing trauma-informed policies, procedures and practices*

Following the MTSS framework, the Center for Resiliency, Hope and Wellness in Schools shows that to be successful all students need to feel supported.

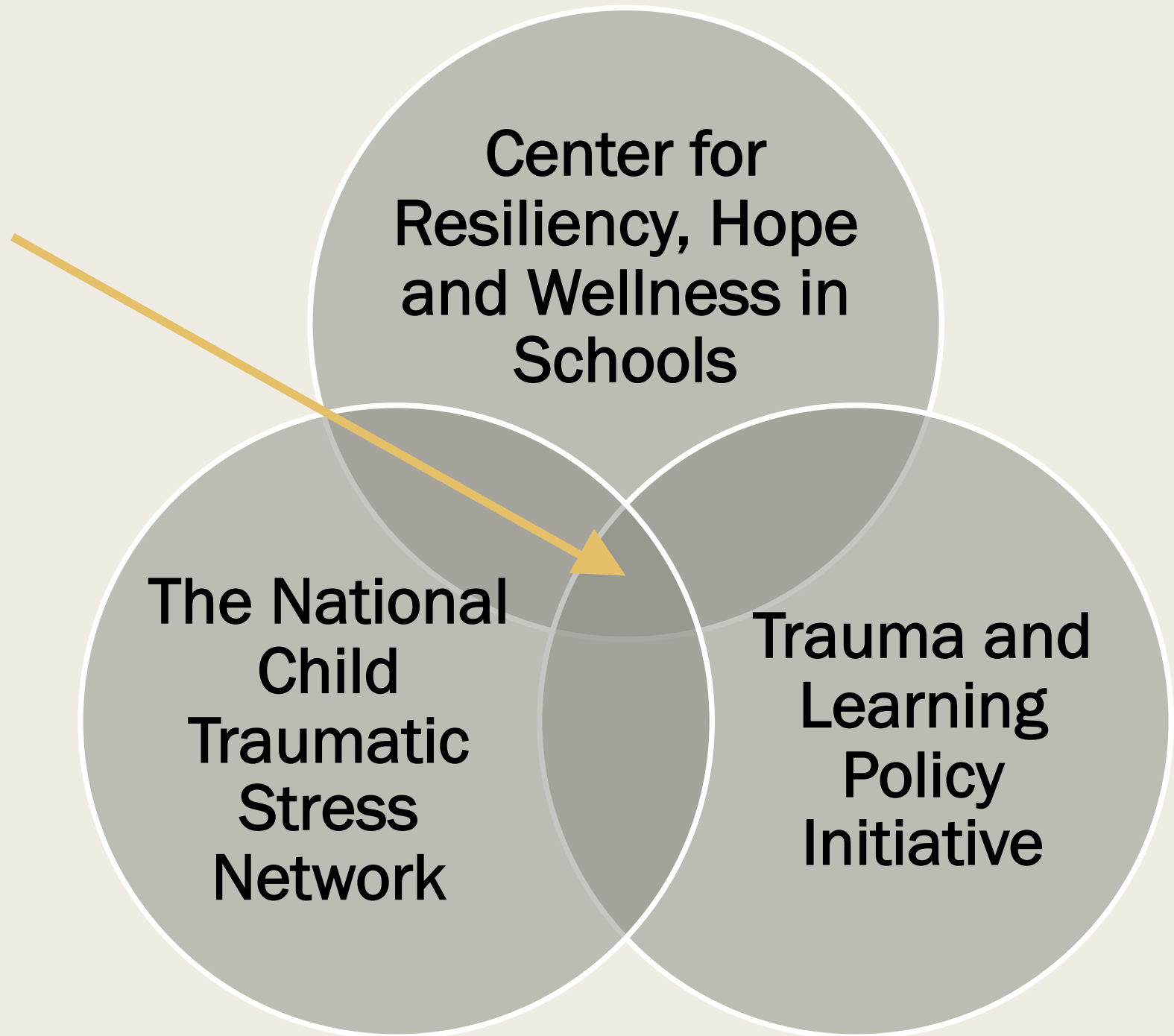


# THE STEPS TO INTEGRATING A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

- Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI) recommends an approach that focuses on:
  - *Leadership*
  - *Professional development*
  - *Access to resources and services*
  - *Academic and nonacademic strategies*
  - *Policies and protocols*
  - *Collaboration with families*

# THE STEPS TO INTEGRATING A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

- **The National Child Traumatic Stress Network** suggests a 10-level framework:
  - *Identification and assessment of traumatic stress*
  - *Prevention and intervention related to traumatic stress*
  - *Trauma education and awareness*
  - *Partnerships with students and families*
  - *Creation of a trauma-informed learning environment*
  - *Cultural responsiveness*
  - *Emergency management/crisis response*
  - *Staff self-care and secondary traumatic stress*
  - *School discipline policies and practices*
  - *Cross system collaboration and community partnerships*



**Center for  
Resiliency, Hope  
and Wellness in  
Schools**

**The National  
Child  
Traumatic  
Stress  
Network**

**Trauma and  
Learning  
Policy  
Initiative**

# ALL 3 FRAMEWORKS HAVE SOME IMPORTANCE SIMILARITIES:

- Fully understanding how trauma interacts with and affects our students
  - *Including recognizing signs of trauma and understanding how it may be presented*
- A partnership with families and communities
- Continuous learning and reflection
  - *Through professional development and critical practice*
- Resisting any kind of re-traumatization
  - *Re-learning how to discipline and react to situations*
- A policy that reaches academic and nonacademic needs
- Trauma-informed decision making



# IMPLICATIONS FOR CLASSROOMS, PARENTS, BUILDING

- There is no doubt that a trauma-informed approach is imperative to the success of our students and the children in our lives.
- While the process may seem overwhelming, start by first looking critically at your current practices and policies.
  - *Ask yourself how your policies react to behavioral problems. How many of the behavioral problems are a result of a traumatic experience?*
- Work as a team to define trauma and learn more about ACEs
- Practice empathy. Create a safe environment for all students.
- Find professional development from a reputable source (several sources linked towards end of presentation).
- Know that the work you are putting in is evolving and IMPORTANT.

# “What do I do?”

## Trauma-Informed Support for Children

**1 Create safety**  
If the child is overwhelmed, perhaps guide them to a quiet corner or allow them to decompress by visiting the restroom. If you are in a classroom, maybe you have a peace corner that you've outfitted with blankets or a screen so that it feels like a safe place.

**2 Regulate the nervous system**  
Stress brings a predictable pattern of physiological responses and anyone who has suffered toxic stress or trauma is going to be quickly stressed into hyperarousal (explosive, jittery, irritable) or hypoarousal (depressed, withdrawn, zombie-like). No matter how ingenious our regulation strategies, how artsy-crafty we get with tools, the child has to find what works for them.

**3 Build a connected relationship**  
This is the number one way to regulate the nervous system. When we are around people we care about, our bodies produce oxytocin, which is the hormone responsible for calming our nervous system after stress. If we stay connected, then eventually the calm discussion of each person's feelings and needs can take place.

**4 Support development of coherent narrative**  
Creating predictability through structure, routines and the presence of reliable adults helps reduce the chaos a child may feel and allows them to start creating the kind of logical sequential connections that not only help them understand their own narrative, but are also the fundamental requirement of many types of learning.

**5 Practice 'power-with' strategies**  
One of the hallmarks of trauma is a loss of power and control. When someone is wielding power over you with no regard to your thoughts or feelings, the toxic shame of the original trauma may come flooding back. As adults, we should use our power well. If we model a 'power-with' relationship with children it's our best chance of creating adults who will treat others with dignity and respect.

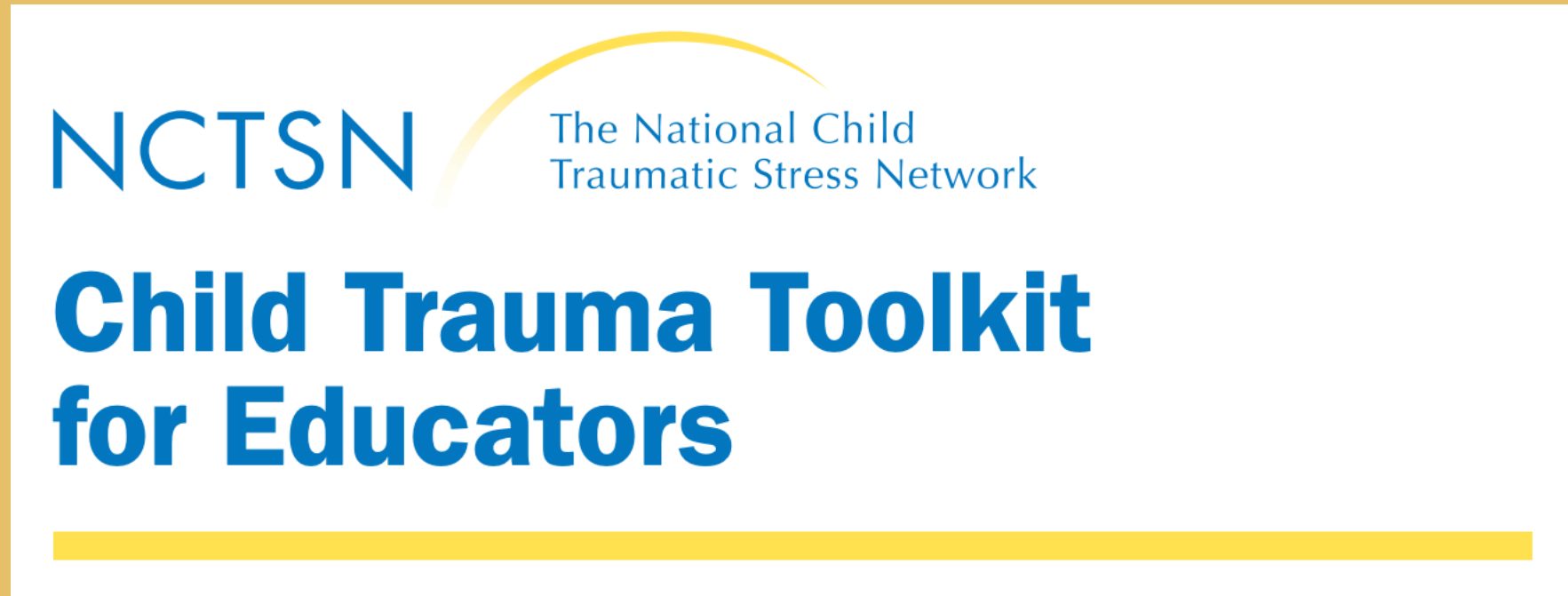
**6 Build social emotional and resiliency skills**  
Trauma robs us of time spent developing social and emotional skills. The brain is too occupied with survival to devote much of its energy to learning how to build relationships and it's a good chance we didn't see those skills modeled for us. Learning to care for one another is the most important job we have growing up.

**7 Foster post-traumatic growth**  
We know that there are qualities and skills that allow people to overcome the most devastating trauma and not just survive but find new purpose and meaning in their lives. Problem solving, planning, maintaining focus despite discomfort, self-control and seeking support are all known to lead to post-traumatic growth and are skills we can foster in children.

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# CONSIDER VIEWING THIS COMPREHENSIVE TOOLKIT



\*\*Picture above is linked to the full toolkit

# SUCCESS IN TRAUMA-INFORMED SCHOOLS

- Trauma informed schools cultivate lasting resilience, which leads to:
  - *Significant improvements in behavior*
  - *Fewer suspensions*
  - *Fewer expulsions*
  - *Significant improvements in academic achievement*
  - *Feelings of physical, social, and emotional safety in students*
  - *A shared understanding among staff about the impact of trauma and adversity on students*
  - *Positive and culturally responsive discipline policies and practices*
  - *Access to comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services*
  - *Effective community collaboration*
- ***“Promoting trauma-sensitive school approaches has the greatest potential to positively impact all students, regardless of trauma history.”***

**WATCH THIS VIDEO FOR A SCHOOL THAT HAS IMPLEMENTED A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH**  
[HTTPS://WWW.EDUTOPIA.ORG/ARTICLE/INSIDE-LOOK-TRAUMA-INFORMED-PRACTICES](https://www.edutopia.org/article/inside-look-trauma-informed-practices)





# A TOOL: TRAUMA-SENSITIVE SCHOOL CHECKLIST

## Trauma-Sensitive School Checklist

**Lesley University**

*Center for Special Education*

**Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative**

*of Massachusetts Advocates for Children*

*and the Legal Services Center of Harvard Law School*

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[https://www.learningforjustice.org/sites/default/files/general/trauma%20sensitive%20school%20checklist%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.learningforjustice.org/sites/default/files/general/trauma%20sensitive%20school%20checklist%20(1).pdf)

A trauma-sensitive school is a safe and respectful environment that enables students to build caring relationships with adults and peers, self-regulate their emotions and behaviors, and succeed academically, while supporting their physical health and well-being.

### School-wide Policies and Practices

1  2  3  4

1  2  3  4

1  2  3  4

1  2  3  4

1  2  3  4

1  2  3  4

1  2  3  4

1  2  3  4

- School contains predictable and safe environments (including classrooms, hallways, playgrounds, and school bus) that are attentive to transitions and sensory needs.
- Leadership (including principal and/or superintendent) develops and implements a trauma-sensitive action plan, identifies barriers to progress, and evaluates success.
- General and special educators consider the role that trauma may be playing in learning difficulties at school.
- Discipline policies balance accountability with an understanding of trauma.
- Support for staff is available on a regular basis, including supervision and/or consultation with a trauma expert, classroom observations, and opportunities for team work.
- Opportunities exist for confidential discussion about students.
- School participates in safety planning, including enforcement of court orders, transferring records safely, restricting access to student-record information, and sensitive handling of reports of suspected incidents of abuse or neglect.
- On-going professional development opportunities occur as determined by staff needs assessments.

# CONCLUSION, SUMMARY & BIG IDEAS

- The implementation of trauma-informed practices and creating a trauma-informed school has several benefits that far outweighs the alternative.
- Creating an environment that is safe, positive, understanding and empathetic will reach our students that have experiences one or more ACE.
- The COVID-19 Pandemic has only heightened our need to focus on a trauma-responsive school. The negative affects of the pandemic have significantly increased the ACEs our students will experience.
- Utilize restorative justice techniques and strategies to help all students.
- Curious about your personal experience(s) with ACE? Take this [quiz](#) to find out how ACEs have affected your life.
- What can you do to help make your school (or parenting) more trauma-informed? Utilize the links and resources to learn more!

# FOR MORE INFORMATION: NATIONAL GROUPS



**Program Office of the  
National Child Traumatic  
Stress Initiative**

Center for Mental Health  
Services  
Substance Abuse and Mental  
Health Services  
Administration  
Department of Health and  
Human Services  
5600 Fishers Lane  
Parklawn Building, Room 17C-  
26  
Rockville, MD 20857



**Trauma and  
Learning Policy  
Initiative (TLPI)**

A collaboration of  
Massachusetts  
Advocates for  
Children  
and Harvard Law  
School

[617-998-0106](tel:617-998-0106)



**The Center for  
Resiliency, Hope, and  
Wellness in Schools**

**Staff contact:** Pamela  
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**Phone Number:** (323)  
536-8694 ext. 101  
**Email:** [info@traumaawareschools.org](mailto:info@traumaawareschools.org)



# FOR MORE INFORMATION: WEBSITES



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
CDC 24/7: Saving Lives, Protecting People™



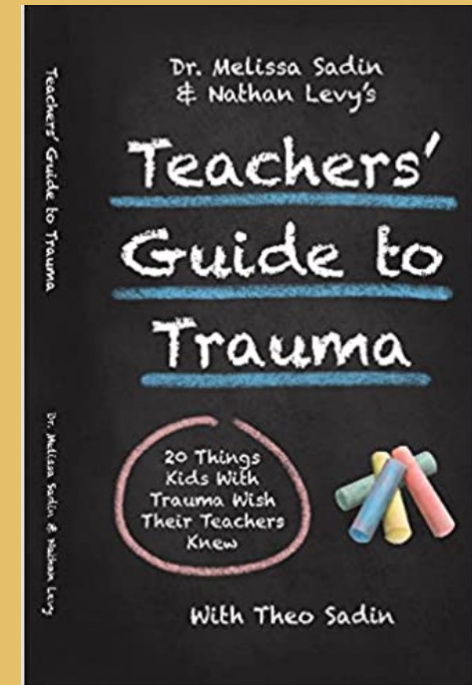
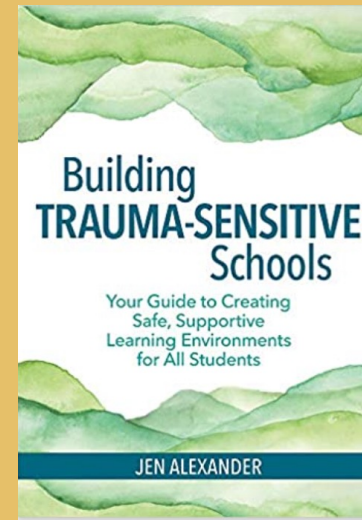
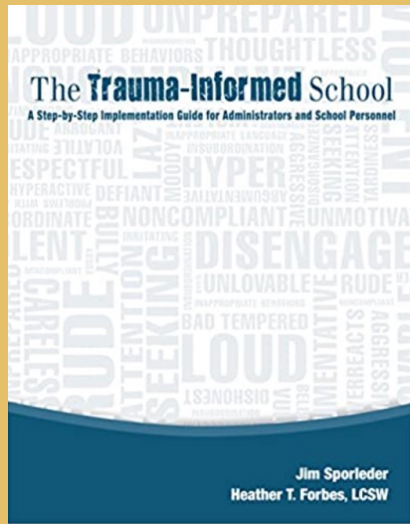
School Health Assessment  
and Performance Evaluation System



CRISIS PREVENTION®  
INSTITUTE

\*\*All photos have clickable links. Also note that the links are found in the notes section.

# FOR MORE INFORMATION: BOOKS



\*\*All photos have clickable links. Also note that the links are found in the notes section.

# APA INFORMATION FOR BOOKS

- Alexander, J., & Hinrichs, C. (2019). *Building trauma-sensitive schools: Your guide to creating safe, supportive learning environments for all students*. Paul H. Brookes Publishing, Co.
- Greene, R. W. (2014). *Lost at school: Why our kids with behavioral challenges are falling through the cracks and how we can help them*. Scribner.
- Sadin, M., & Levy, N. (2019). *Teachers' guide to trauma: 20 things kids with trauma wish their teachers knew*. Nathan Levy Books, LLC.
- Sporleder, J., & Forbes, H. T. (2016). *The trauma-informed school: A step-by-step implementation guide for administrators and school personnel*. Beyond Consequences Institute.

# FOR MORE INFORMATION: JOURNAL ARTICLES

- McInerney, M., & McKlindon, A. (n.d.). *Trauma-Informed-in-Schools-Classrooms-FINAL-December2014-2.pdf - quick facts trauma is common: It is estimated that one half to two-thirds of: Course hero*. QUICK FACTS Trauma is Common: It is estimated that one half to two-thirds of | Course Hero. Retrieved from <https://www.coursehero.com/file/79321601/Trauma-Informed-in-Schools-Classrooms-FINAL-December2014-2pdf/>
- Oehlberg,, B. (n.d.). Why Schools Need to Be Trauma-Informed. *Trauma and Loss: Research and Interventions*, 8(2). Retrieved from [http://www.traumainformedcareproject.org/resources/WhySchoolsNeedToBeTraumaInformed\(2\).pdf](http://www.traumainformedcareproject.org/resources/WhySchoolsNeedToBeTraumaInformed(2).pdf).
- Overstreet, S., & Chafouleas, S. M. (2016, February 3). *Trauma-informed schools: Introduction to the special issue - school mental health*. SpringerLink. Retrieved from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12310-016-9184-1>
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- Srivastav, A., Richard, C. L., McRell, A. S., & Strompolis, M. (2021, October 26). *The unintended consequence of Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on racial inequities associated with adverse childhood experiences (ACES): Findings from a population-based study*. Frontiers in public health. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8576168/>