



# KENTUCKY'S HANDLE WITH CARE INITIATIVE

## Guide & Resource

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## KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



### Vision

*Ensure each and every student is empowered and equipped to pursue a successful future.*

### Mission

*To partner with districts, schools, families, students, business and industry, and communities to provide leadership and support to ensure success for each and every student.*

### About

*The Kentucky Department of Education is a service agency of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, and part of the Education and Workforce Development Cabinet. The department provides resources and guidance to Kentucky's public schools and districts as they implement the state's P-12 education requirements. The department also serves as the state liaison for federal education requirements and funding opportunities.*

# OBJECTIVE AND KEY CONCEPTS

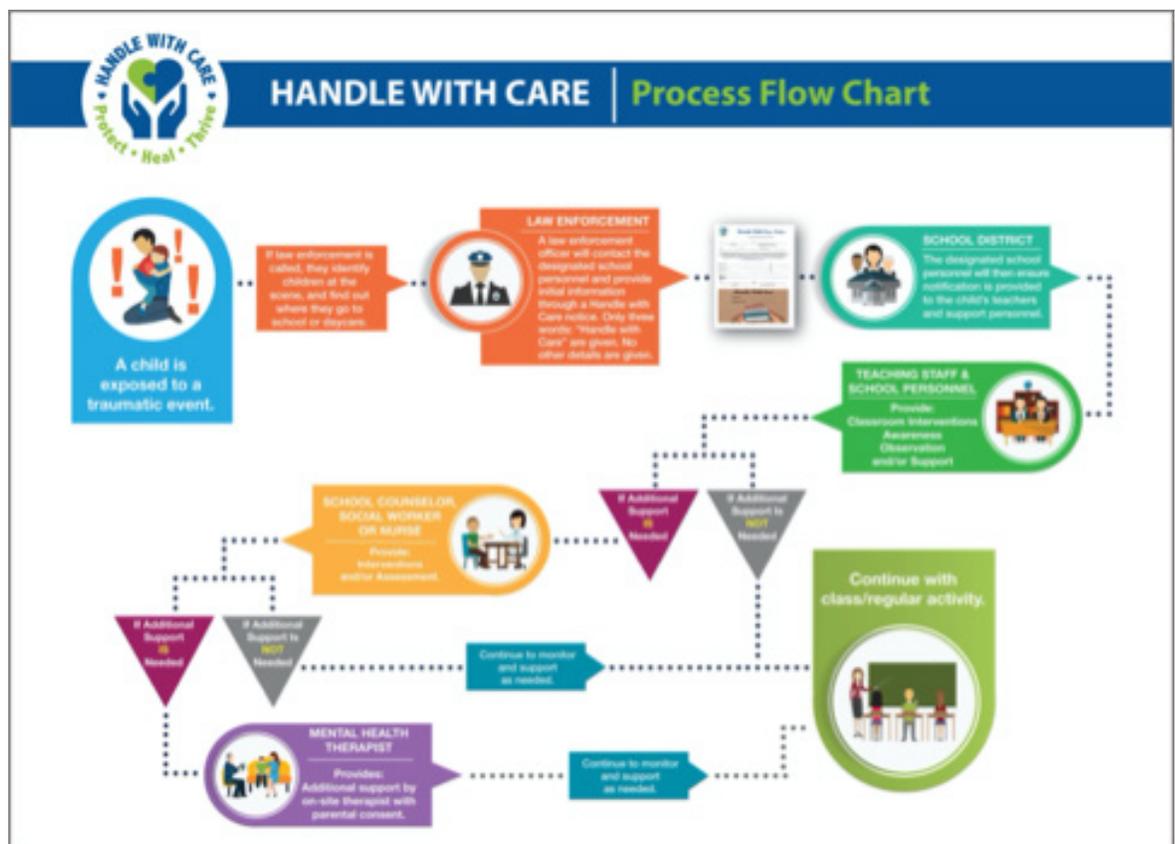
*Objective: Ensure students who may have been exposed to trauma are provided appropriate and needed supports at school.*

## KEY CONCEPTS

1. *Handle with Care enables schools to support and utilize early intervention for students they may not realize have been exposed to potentially traumatic events.*
2. *Handle with Care promotes universal trauma-informed practices in school settings.*
3. *Handle with Care enhances collaboration between schools and law enforcement to support student well-being.*

## WHAT IS HANDLE WITH CARE?

Handle with Care (HWC) is a notification process to schools via phone call, email and/or text message when a student may have been exposed to an incident involving law enforcement. This notification does not provide any details about the incident, only basic information including student name, age and school. Handle with Care promotes communication and collaboration between law enforcement and schools.



# WHAT ARE THE KENTUCKY REQUIREMENTS FOR HANDLE WITH CARE?

The School Safety and Resiliency Act (SSRA) of 2019 requires districts to include, as part of the plan for implementing a trauma-informed approach in its schools, strategies for “collaborating with the Department of Kentucky State Police, the local sheriff, and the local chief of police to create procedures for notification of trauma-exposed students” (KRS 158.4416). The Kentucky Department of Education describes Handle with Care on its website: [https://education.ky.gov/school/sdfs/Pages/School-Safety-and-Resiliency-Act-\(Senate-Bill,-2019\).aspx](https://education.ky.gov/school/sdfs/Pages/School-Safety-and-Resiliency-Act-(Senate-Bill,-2019).aspx)

This is an example of a Handle with Care notification:

**Message from KYSTATE POLICE, POST 17: Please handle with care. The children referenced below were on the scene of a police action in the last 24 hours and could exhibit academic, emotional and/or behavioral problems as a result of exposure to a traumatic event.**

**SCHOOL NAME: Springfield Elementary**

**SMITH JAMES AGE 7 2ND GRADE**

**SMITH SALLY AGE 8 3RD GRADE**



# HOW DO SCHOOLS PARTICIPATE IN HANDLE WITH CARE?

1. Identify staff who will receive the Handle with Care notification. Schools should identify three or more staff who are able to check e-mail first thing each morning, and who have flexibility to follow up on the notification. It is beneficial if staff who provide counseling, behavioral health or other social supports to students are designated. Please be sure to designate multiple staff to ensure receipt of notifications in the event of any staff absences.

2. Register the school for Handle with Care at your local KSP post (find your post on KSP's webpage here). The KSP Victim's Advocate at each post can assist you. If there is no victim's advocate, ask for someone who can help with Handle with Care. To register, you will provide the e-mail addresses and telephone numbers of designated staff in your school to receive the Handle with Care (HWC) notifications. Kentucky State Police suggest several contacts per school to ensure receipt of notifications in the event of any staff absences.

3. Develop a protocol to alert staff on a need-to-know basis

after receiving a HWC notification. Recipient staff should share the HWC notification with teachers or other staff directly interacting with the student, to alert them to provide additional support, be flexible and observe the student for any needs. HWC notification should only be shared with those who need to know in accordance with all required confidentiality and privacy regulations. Staff should wait for the student to share information, rather than questioning the student.

4. Plan ways to ensure students who have a HWC notification are in a safe, supportive environment and assist them in managing any adverse reactions in a confidential manner using the 4 Rs: Realize, Recognize, Respond, Resist Re-traumatization (see chart below).

5. Establish a plan for tracking data on HWC notifications. This will help you understand the needs of your students and guide you to effectively direct resources and develop programs to meet those needs. You probably need a simple database identifying school, student gender, student grade, and any services provided in response to HWC.

# WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY ABOUT HANDLE WITH CARE?

Handle with Care is based on concepts from the empirical literature establishing the benefits of early intervention for students experiencing traumatic stress (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2020, <https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/early-childhood-trauma/screening-and-assessment>) and recognizing that schools are a primary means of identifying students with trauma-related needs (Ko, Ford, Kassam-Adams, et al., 2008). The Handle with Care notification system is new and does

not yet have empirical evidence of efficacy. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Handle with Care raises awareness of school staff, promotes communication between schools and law enforcement and supports early identification of and intervention in response to student needs (see "Game Changer: San Antonio Police to Notify Schools if Kids Exposed to Trauma," on the Salud America! website: <https://salud-america.org/game-changer-san-antonio-police-to-notify-schools-if-kids-exposed-to-trauma/>).

# HANDLE WITH CARE AND THE 4 RS

<b>REALIZE</b>	<i>Realize that trauma exposure can result in a lasting stress response effecting brain and body functioning.</i>
<b>RECOGNIZE</b>	<i>Recognize which staff should receive the Handle with Care notification. Recognize the signs of traumatic stress, areas of need and ways in which you can support students following receipt of a HWC notification.</i>
<b>RESPOND</b>	<i>Respond to needs across all areas of well-being, including physical, emotional, social, cognitive and behavioral, using trauma-informed approaches.</i>
<b>RESIST RETRAUMATIZATION</b>	<i>Resist Re-traumatizing students by using trauma sensitive approaches and processes, and anticipating and preparing for potential trauma reminders or challenging situations.</i>

## TIPS FOR TRAUMA-INFORMED RESPONSES TO HWC

*What to look for after receiving a Handle with Care notification:*

- Does the student appear to need food, clean or fresh clothing, hygiene products or school supplies?
- Does the student seem different in demeanor and affect from usual, such as:  
More quiet or withdrawn? Louder or more aggressive? More impatient or interrupting more? More tearful? More angry? More sensitive? More clingy? More anxious or fearful? More depressed? More impatient? More rigid? Less flexible or adaptive? Less empathic or considerate?
- Is the student exhibiting difficulties with physical well-being such as: More physically agitated? Hyperactive? Unable to stay in one place? More lethargic, tired or sluggish? Hypervigilant or easily startled? Complaining of not feeling well, e.g. headache, stomachache, vague aches and pains? Very tired or falling asleep? More physically aggressive? More physically frightened, avoidant or timid?
- Is the student having trouble with cognitive or executive functioning, such as:  
More difficulty concentrating or staying focused? More easily frustrated and unable to persist in learning or tasks? Having trouble following or remembering directions? More disconnected from the environment or from others?
- Does the student need a referral for additional services based on:  
Difficulty accomplishing daily activities? Inability to regulate emotions, thoughts, speech or behavior? Feelings of wanting to hurt self or others? Uncontrollable crying, anxiety, depression, silence, aggression? Concerns expressed by caregivers at home?

*Create an environment to help the student feel psychologically safe:*

- Create psychological safety for all students, all the time, not only in response to specific HWC notifications.

- Keep things as predictable and routine as possible, and warn your class and students of any schedule changes.
- Clearly communicate that it is part of your job to make sure students are safe.
- Use a soft, calm tone of voice, speak at a moderate or slow pace, avoid complicated instructions or sentences.
- Pay attention when the student is talking, respond with acknowledgement and support.
- Focus on the here and now, and avoid making any promises about the student's safety elsewhere or for the future.
- Use every opportunity to promote a sense of connection and trust with all your students, not only the one who has the HWC notification.

### *Talking to a student you observe is distressed after a Handle with Care notification:*

- Create an environment that seems as psychologically safe, warm, welcoming and caring as possible.
- Ensure the space is private and confidential.
- Be honest about the confidentiality of your conversation – if you will need to share it with other staff or a team, explain that to the student.
- Try to create low lighting that is soothing.
- Maintain focus on the student (don't get distracted by email, phone, etc.).
- Give the student some time to get comfortable. You may need to offer some food or drink, or convey a sense of safety messages (see above).
- Have a "calm kit" with some toys, stress balls, markers and paper, etc., available.
- Focus on the here and now, and avoid making any promises about the student's safety elsewhere or for the future.
- Listen more than you talk: Use active listening to focus on the student's feelings and thoughts; offer support and acknowledgement; avoid directly questioning the student about the event.
- Remain neutral, avoid offering your opinion or judgement of events or people. Don't speculate about what happened.

### *Maintain your own emotional regulation while responding to a Handle with Care notification*

Just knowing that a student has been exposed to trauma can leave us feeling overwhelmed, sad, powerless, and sometimes even angry. Hearing more details or history from the student can add to feelings of powerless, stress and frustration. This may elicit our own stress responses and can cause secondary traumatic stress (STS) reactions. Please refer to the section about STS for strategies to cope with those feelings.



# ADAPTING HANDLE WITH CARE FOR DISTANCE LEARNING

With the prevalence of distance learning, virtual schooling, and non-traditional instruction (NTI) in schools across Kentucky, it is important to plan for how this process can be adapted to address the needs of students not located in a physical school building when the HWC notification is received by the school.

## HWC Notification:

- ☑ Make sure notification continues to be received by school staff:
  - School personnel receiving HWC notifications must continue to have daily access to the communication media (email, telephone, fax) by which notifications are received.
  - School personnel receiving HWC must check those communication platforms daily for HWC notifications.



- ☑ Make sure law enforcement agencies know you will continue to receive HWC notifications. Verify that contact information is correct in their notification system.

## HWC Response:

- ☑ Develop a confidential means of informing a student's teacher, counselor or other staff who may be in contact with the student about the HWC.
- ☑ Ensure at least one school staff reaches out to the student and/or family that day to assess for any changes, needs or concerns. You do not have to inform the family you are calling because of the HWC. You are checking in to identify any needs, not to query them about the events involving law enforcement.
- ☑ Have information about community resources (e.g. food banks, social and financial resources) available immediately so you can direct students and families quickly and in real time.
- ☑ If students and families don't reveal anything about the events, and don't seem to have any immediate needs, make a plan to check in again.
- ☑ During periods of distance learning or NTI, follow up with all students and families on whom you have received HWC notifications in the past and recently.
- ☑ You may want to develop a system to track contacts and share information among school staff. This ensures students and families are supported, but prevents too many calls or contacts from occurring.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- West Virginia Handle with Care: <http://www.handlewithcarewv.org/handle-with-care.php>
- Salud America! Handle with Care: <https://salud-america.org/toolkit/start-handle-with-care-for-traumatized-kids/>
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators: <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/child-trauma-toolkit-educators>
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network Self Care for Educators: <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/self-care-educators>
- Trauma-Sensitive Schools website: <https://traumasensitiveschools.org/>
- National Association of School Psychologists Trauma-Sensitive Schools webpage: <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/mental-health/trauma-sensitive-schools>
- Kentucky Department of Education Suicide Prevention and Awareness webpage: <https://education.ky.gov/school/sdfs/Pages/Suicide-Prevention-and-Awareness.aspx>

## REFERENCES:

- National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2020). Screening and Assessment, <https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/early-childhood-trauma/screening-and-assessment>
- Ko, S.J., Ford, J. Kassam-Adams, N., Berkowitz, S.J., Wilson, C., Wong, M., Brymmer, M.J. and Layne, C.M. (2008). Creating trauma-informed systems: Child welfare, education, first responders, health care, juvenile justice. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 39(4), 396-404.
- Merck, A. (2020, April 7). How Schools Continue “Handle with Care” for Kids Amid Closures, Coronavirus, Salud America!. <https://salud-america.org/how-schools-continue-handle-with-care-for-kids-amid-closures-coronavirus/>



300 Sower Blvd., 5th Floor  
Frankfort, KY 40601  
(502) 564-4772  
Fax (502) 564-5680  
[education.ky.gov](http://education.ky.gov)