



# WHAT IS A TRAUMA INFORMED SCHOOL?

## Guide & Resource

July 2020



# 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: Understand what it means to be a trauma-informed school or district.*

## KEY CONCEPT

*A trauma-sensitive school is one in which all students feel safe, welcomed and supported, and where addressing trauma's impact on learning on a schoolwide basis is at the center of its educational mission. (Trauma Learning and Policy Initiative, 2013)*

# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE TRAUMA-INFORMED?

Trauma-informed care has become a focus for child-serving professions and services over the last several decades, including educators and educational systems. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2017) describes a trauma-informed child-serving system as:

One in which all parties involved recognize and respond to the impact of traumatic stress on those who have contact with the system, including children, caregivers, staff and service providers. Programs and agencies within such a system infuse and sustain trauma awareness, knowledge

and skills into their organizational cultures, practices and policies. They act in collaboration with all those who are involved with the child, using the best available science, to maximize physical and psychological safety, facilitate the recovery or adjustment of the child and family, and support their ability to thrive.

The Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has developed the Four Rs to conceptualize the key assumptions of a trauma-informed approach:

| Four Rs                        | Concept  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>Realize</b>                 | The widespread impact of trauma and understand potential paths for recovery                          |
| <b>Recognize</b>               | The signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff and others involved with the system     |
| <b>Respond</b>                 | By fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures and practices                  |
| <b>Resist Retraumatization</b> | Of all participants and stakeholders (including those being served and the staff providing services) |

A trauma-informed approach can be applied to many different types of systems, is not a set of prescribed activities, and is augmented by Six Key Principles:

## Six Key Principles of Being Trauma-Informed

Safety

Trustworthiness & Transparency

Peer Support

Collaboration & Mutuality

Empowerment, Voice & Choice

Cultural, Historical & Gender Issues



## WHAT IS A TRAUMA-INFORMED SCHOOL?

There are a number of different definitions and measures for what it means to be a trauma-informed school. In fact, there are even different terms for how to describe integrating a focus and awareness of trauma and its impact on students, families and staff into the educational system. Trauma-aware, trauma-sensitive, trauma-responsive and trauma-informed often are used interchangeably, but also may have distinct meaning. The Kentucky Department of Education's Trauma-Informed Toolkit will use the term trauma-informed as the goal for schools and recognize being trauma-informed as encompassing

aspects of trauma awareness, trauma sensitivity and trauma responsiveness.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) promotes the creation of trauma-informed schools as part of the effort to ensure students are safe, supported and ready to learn. The NCTSN emphasizes that "becoming 'trauma-informed' should be an essential component of the overall mission of our educational system" (NCTSN, 2017).

The Trauma Learning and Policy Initiative (2013) provides a definition specific to schools in its guide *Helping Traumatized Children Learn, Volume 2*:

A trauma-sensitive school is one in which all students feel safe, welcomed and supported, and where addressing trauma's impact on learning on a schoolwide basis is at the center of its educational mission. It is a place where an ongoing, inquiry-based process allows for the necessary teamwork, coordination, creativity and sharing of responsibility for all students, and where continuous learning is for educators as well as students.

A number of trauma-informed school programs and several guidance frameworks have been created that may prove beneficial as teams engage in planning and development of their own trauma-informed approaches. Research continues to emerge as widespread efforts to become trauma-informed, and to study implementation and outcomes, are relatively recent. Tools to measure how trauma-informed a school is across the range of service areas also are emerging; many blend knowledge about implementation science and sustainability with the understanding of trauma-informed systems.



Several common characteristics of successful trauma-informed schools have emerged across the plethora of programs, frameworks and tools, reflecting SAMHSA's key assumptions and principles. These schools:

1. **Recognize the prevalence** of trauma and adversity among students, families and staff, **and the impact** on learning and school functioning.
2. Embrace a **holistic approach** to supporting students, teaching and learning.
3. Are guided by a **multidisciplinary and diverse team** of trauma-informed champions drawn from all sectors of the school community, with strong commitment and support from **leadership**.
4. Provide a **continuum of trauma-informed practices** at all levels of intervention that are grounded in universal (tier 1) supports, and include targeted and intensive strategies (tiers 2 and 3). Trauma-informed practices are embedded across the continuum of educational supports and interventions from prevention, to screening and assessment, to intervention.
5. **Embed trauma-informed practices into existing frameworks, structures and teams**, and recognize the need for a trauma-informed, safe and supportive school culture and climate to support trauma-informed delivery of educational services and supports (rather than a content-focused, add-on curriculum).
6. Rely on school and community **data** to measure, monitor and assess needs, and use that data to change and drive decisions and planning.
7. Clearly articulate **goals and a plan**.
8. Utilize a **structured** process for **implementation and evaluation**.

As schools move to become trauma-informed, preparation and planning are critical to supporting successful implementation and sustainability. The Kentucky Department of Education's Trauma-Informed Toolkit will provide resources to assist in these processes.

# RESOURCES ON TRAUMA-INFORMED SCHOOLS

- [HEARTS](#) (Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools)
- Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education: [The Trauma-Informed Schools Initiative](#) (Missouri Model)
- National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments: [Trauma Sensitive School Training Package](#)
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network:
  - [Creating, Supporting and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools](#)
  - [Trauma-Informed Schools for Children in K-12: A System Framework](#)
  - [Network Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators](#)
- Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration: [SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach](#)
- [Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative](#)
- [Treatment and Services Adaptation Center](#)
- Trauma Responsive Educational Practices Project: [Becoming a Trauma Responsive School](#)
- Wisconsin Safe and Healthy Schools Center: [Trauma Sensitive Schools](#)



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