



Bureau of Special Education Back-to-School Meeting

Connecticut State Department of Education | September 18, 2019

Update from the Office of Student Supports and Organizational Effectiveness

Trauma-Informed Practices

Trauma is generally the result of an emotional experience that overwhelms an individual's ability to interpret, provide context for, and assimilate the experience within normal understanding. Typically associated with a sense of powerlessness, acute or complex trauma can leave permanent effects on how the brain functions, potentially resulting in long-term dysregulation of chemicals within the brain. The results of trauma may be observed in school through the resulting dysregulated behavior. With meaningful and appropriate structures in place, schools can begin to address the impact of trauma interfering with student learning and success.

The prevalence of trauma among youth is concerning:

- More than 25 percent of American youth experience a serious traumatic event by their 16th birthday, and many children suffer multiple and repeated traumas.
- About 25 percent of victims and witnesses of violence develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, or anxiety disorders.
- Traumatic stress can interfere with children's ability to concentrate and learn. Exposure in infancy and early childhood can seriously delay brain development.

(Excerpted from Wong, M., *Basic Facts about Child Trauma*, LAUSD Trauma Services Adaptation Center for Schools)

A trauma-informed approach and related practices adhere to six principles that include: safety, trustworthiness and transparency, peer support, collaboration and mutuality, empowerment, voice and choice, and relevance to cultural, historical, and gender issues.

School-based Treatment Options

With the necessary support structures in place, schools can provide various levels of group and individual support and crisis-intervention related services to meet short-term goals and overcome transitional and developmental obstacles. Students requiring more intensive, longer-term or medication-assisted therapy should be referred to an approved mental health provider. Schools, families, and health care providers should work together to develop best practice plans to support students' needs and remove barriers to communication.

The federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration awarded a grant to the Connecticut State Department of Education in 2018 to implement a variety of evidence-based practices to address student mental health and trauma. The Project AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resiliency in Education) grant is being conducted in partnership with the Department of Children and Families and the Middletown, Naugatuck, and Windham school districts.

The following programs are being implemented in Project AWARE districts with the goal of leveraging the results to assist all districts in developing comprehensive mental health and trauma systems of support.

- *Pyramid* helps preschool students develop early understanding of social rules, norms and behaviors necessary to enjoy success in larger social settings and groups <http://www.pyramidmodel.org/>

- *Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR)*, designed as a suicide prevention tool, provides all school staff with core skills necessary to engage appropriately with students who may be in distress.
<https://qprinstitute.com/>
- *RULER (Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing and Regulating emotions)*, is a social-emotional learning curriculum that helps students become more aware of their own emotional state, ability to put into words what they are feeling and managing their responses
<http://ei.yale.edu/ruler/how-ruler-works/>
- *Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS)* is school-based and provided in both group and individual formats. CBITS, like TF-CBT, uses cognitive behavioral techniques to help individuals change the narrative behind the experience to decrease the negative reinforcement from negative self-talk <https://cbitsprogram.org/>
- *Trauma Affect Regulation: Guide for Education and Therapy (TARGET)* is a strengths-based approach intended to help trauma survivors understand how trauma changes the body's normal responses to stress. Target-Teen specifically addresses the adolescent and pre-adolescent population <http://www.ptsdfreedom.org/>
- *Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)* (<https://www.goodtherapy.org/learn-about-therapy/types/trauma-focused-cognitive-behavioral-therapy>) is a psychoeducation model that helps individuals recognize and manage their stress reactions; develop improved coping mechanisms; restructure self-messaging associated with the trauma; and change negative behaviors. For a self-guided learning module on *TF-CBT*, visit <https://tfcbt2.musc.edu/>

General Resources

- [*Kids Mental Health Info*](#) provides information and resources for parents, caregivers and others. Topics include child trauma, mental health in schools.
- *Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators*, developed by The National Child Trauma Stress Network, provides school administrators, teachers, staff, and concerned parents with basic information about working with traumatized children in the school system <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/child-trauma-toolkit-educators>
- *Developing A Common Language In Connecticut: A Dictionary Of Terms Related To Trauma-Informed Schools* (<https://www.plan4children.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2019Trauma-Informed-Schools-Dictionary-1.pdf>) was created to build common language and terms related to trauma and trauma-responsive practices and was expanded to include other terms used in Connecticut that are relevant to school-based trauma-informed service delivery.
- The *Trauma-Sensitive Schools Training Package* offers school and district administrators and staff a framework and roadmap for adopting a trauma-sensitive approach school- or districtwide <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/trauma-sensitive-schools-training-package>
- *Second Step* is a social-emotional learning program for children in pre-K through middle school. The program includes resources and materials for developing trauma-informed schools <http://www.secondstep.org/second-step-social-emotional-learning>
- *Responsive Classroom* is another well established and evidence-based program for children in kindergarten through eighth grade that addresses social-emotional competencies aligned with the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) recommendations. <https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/> and <http://www.casel.org/>
- For a map with Connecticut listings of trauma-focused treatment for children, see <http://www.chdi.org/index.php/publications/resources/map-trauma-focused-treatments-children>