



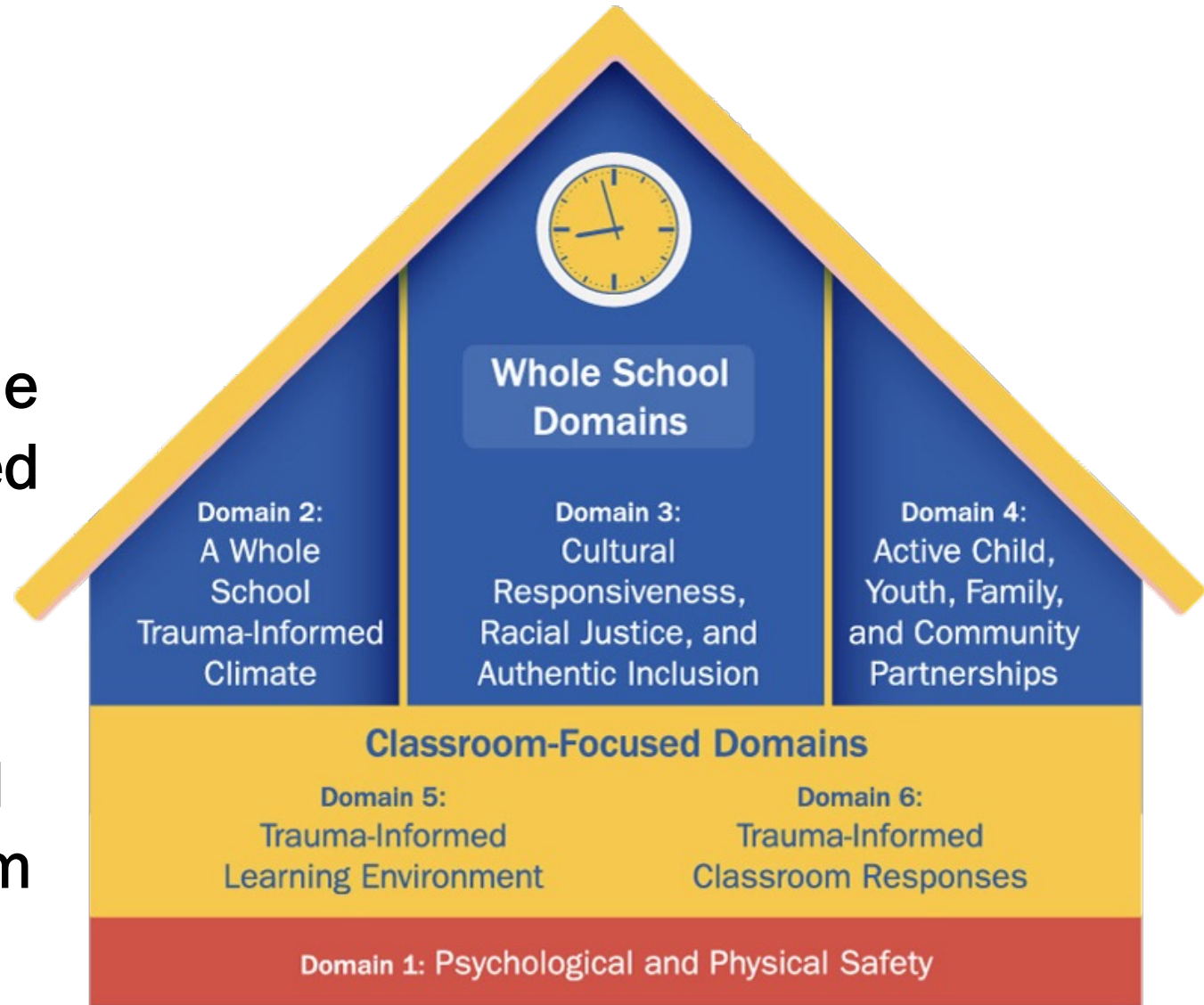
An Introduction to Trauma-Informed Schools

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The goal:

To help school systems become trauma-informed in order to increase the time that students spend in the classroom



Trauma-Informed Schools

Mission

To assist schools as they:


- *Infuse trauma informed practices* within their school environment.
- Assess interactions between students and staff, policies, discipline approaches, and how staff think about students.
- Recognize it is challenging to support youth impacted by trauma and help educators become as prepared as possible, personally and professionally.



Change Components

- **Macro-level** : large scale changes/processes at an organizational level.
 - Generally would be a “whole school” type of change.
- **Micro-level** : small scale change processes; happen during face-to-face interactions between people.
 - Within person change
 - Informal delivery of TI content and information, that we call, “microventions”.

We Believe:

- 
- All educators are equipped with discipline and empathy skill-sets.
 - Educators under stress tend to default to a discipline skill-set
 - An empathy skill-set may be more effective in supporting trauma-impacted youth.


The TIPS program aims to help educators understand these skill-sets and to make well considered decisions regarding their use.

Tenets of TIPS



- All students are **responsible** for their behaviors; regardless of their trauma history.
- Strategies that benefit students impacted by trauma **are beneficial to all students** .
- Educators are **not expected to be mental health professionals**; rather they need concrete skills to help trauma-impacted students reach optimal regulation in order to **maximize learning**.
- The TIPS program builds on **preexisting relationships** and programs within a school building and can be flexibly tailored to meet the needs of a building.

A Trauma-Informed School System



Is one in which **all** school administrators, staff, students, families and community members involved with the school recognize and respond to the potentially negative behavioral, relational, and academic impact of traumatic stress on those within the school system including children, caregivers, teachers, and other school staff, as well as on the school as a system.

National Child Traumatic Stress Network

A Trauma-Informed School System

Within a trauma-informed school setting, youth who have experienced trauma:

- Are seen as hurt kids rather than bad kids
- Are held accountable for their actions
- Feel safe within the school setting (emotionally and physically)
- Are identified and triaged into appropriate services
- Are better able to learn once trauma issues have been addressed
- Have decreased behavioral problems as trauma issues are addressed.





Why the Need for Trauma- Informed Schools?



Let's Talk Numbers



- National Survey of Children's Health (2017-2018)
 - Measured exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)
 - N=27,577
 - ACE=0 58.5%
 - ACE=1 23.0%
 - ACE=2 8.9%
 - ACE=3 4.3%
 - ACE=4+ 5.3%
 - Rural status associated with increased likelihood of ACE exposure

Let's Talk Numbers



- Most youth (61%) report experiencing one or more types of victimization in past year
(Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, & Hamby, 2009; Finkelhor, Turner, Shattuck, & Hamby, 2013).
- Since 2013, reports of child abuse and neglect increased by 10 % and substantiated reports increased by 3%
(Children's Bureau of the U.S. Dept of Health, 2017).
- Likely an underestimate, given many incidents remain undetected
(Child Trends, 2018).

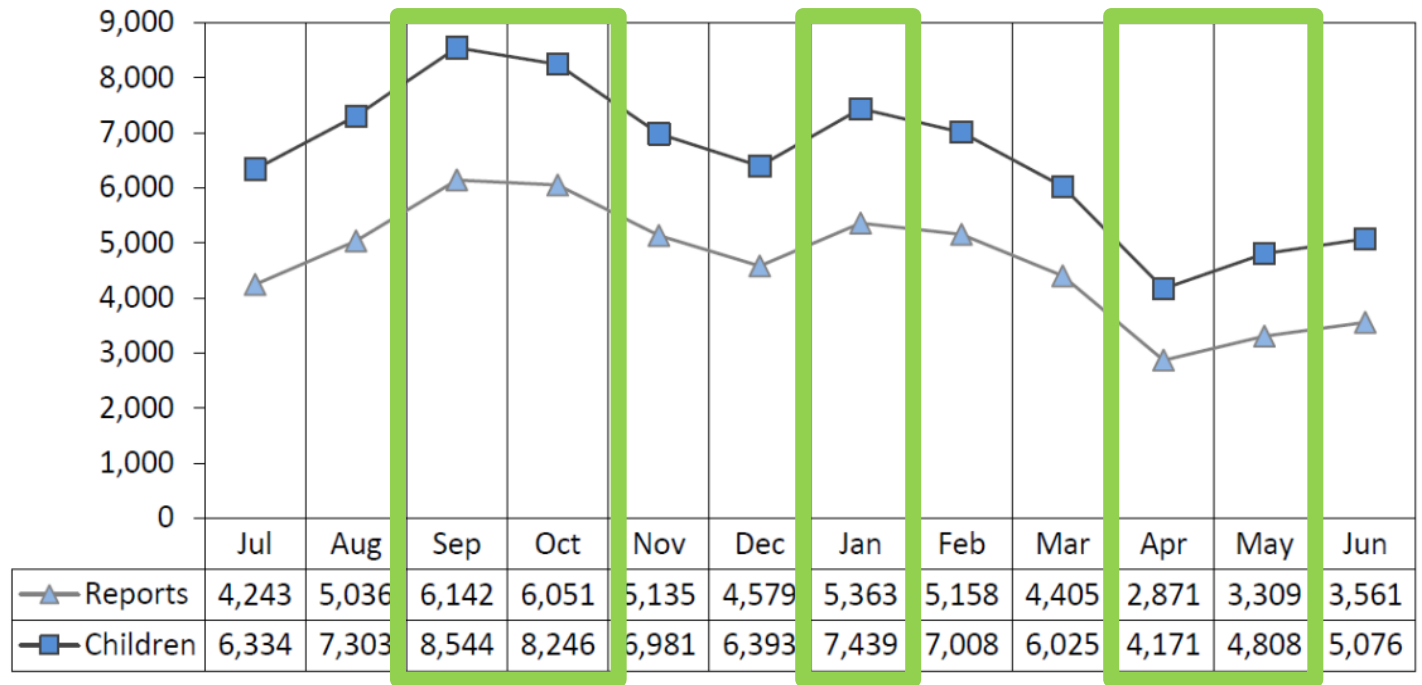
Who makes reports?


Reporters of Child Abuse/Neglect during FY 2020
by Occupation

	Number	Percent
Permissive	16,695	24.6%
Peace Officer or Law Enforcement Official	9,484	14.0%
Principal or other school official	9,406	13.9%
Social worker	8,320	12.3%
Mental Health Professional	5,163	7.6%
Teacher	3,864	5.7%
Nurse	3,829	5.7%

When are reports made?


FY 2020 Child Abuse/Neglect Reports and Children by Month of Report





This information may make
being trauma-informed
seem like an obvious choice.

However, beyond these
numbers are societal factors
that can be barriers to
creating a trauma-informed
school system



Societal Factors Relevant to Trauma-Informed Schools

At a societal level, and within the history of education, factors that contribute to this unrest include:

- Discrimination
- School to Prison Pipeline
- Implicit Bias



School to Prison Pipeline



- School to Prison Pipeline
 - metaphor that describes the increasing pattern of contact students have with the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems (Heitzeg, 2009)
 - This is a subset of the larger criminalization process which is "the process by which behaviors and individuals are transformed into crime and criminals" (Amster, 2008)

School to Prison Pipeline

FROM SCHOOL TO PRISON

STUDENTS OF COLOR FACE HARSHER DISCIPLINE AND ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE PUSHED OUT OF SCHOOL THAN WHITES.

40%



OF STUDENTS **EXPELLED** FROM U.S. SCHOOLS EACH YEAR ARE BLACK.

70%



OF STUDENTS INVOLVED IN "IN-SCHOOL" **ARRESTS** OR REFERRED TO LAW ENFORCEMENT ARE BLACK OR LATINO.

3.5 X



BLACK STUDENTS ARE THREE AND A HALF TIMES MORE LIKELY TO BE **SUSPENDED** THAN WHITES.

2 X




BLACK AND LATINO STUDENTS ARE TWICE AS LIKELY TO **NOT GRADUATE** HIGH SCHOOL AS WHITES.

68%

OF ALL MALES IN STATE AND FEDERAL **PRISON** DO NOT HAVE A HIGH SCHOOL **DIPLOMA.**



Implicit Bias

- 
- Automatic biases that we are often unaware of, reflecting implicit attitudes and stereotypes.
 - These biases influence our expectations of others and guide how we interact.
 - Implicit biases are malleable and can change.


Everyone has implicit biases → everyone is responsible for being aware of these biases and needs to make efforts to address them.



How can these
factors impact
students who
experience
trauma?



Consider




Robert, Ben, and Raul were walking home from high school. A car drove by playing loud music. Ben recognized a gang member in the car who had earlier threatened him. "Let's get out of here!" he said. **Before the boys could get away**, the car stopped and four gang members surrounded them. All three boys were **beaten and threatened at gunpoint**. Ben's nose was broken, Robert's front teeth were knocked out, and Raul received a black eye and a fractured rib. In the weeks that followed, each had a very different reaction in school.

NCTSN

So What is Trauma?



Exposure to **actual or threatened** death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways:

- Directly experiencing the traumatic event(s)
 - Witnessing, in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others.
 - Learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend
 - Experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s)
- 

Traumatic Events

- Traumatic events consist of a series of **smaller traumatic moments**
 - Often a chain of events
 - Important to understand the moment-to-moment experience of a child/teen.
- **Secondary adversities** can be just as upsetting to children/teens
- The **traumatic experience** doesn't end once a child/teen has physical safety restored.



How Do Hurt Kids Respond?



-
- Survival states of mind:
 - Hypervigilant
 - Numb
 - Survival behaviors
 - Fight
 - Flight
 - Freeze
 - Surrender
 - Cry for help

Trauma Triggers and Students:

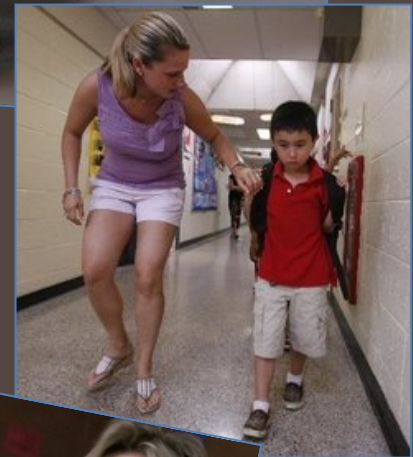
- Seemingly innocuous stimuli provoke extreme survival-motivated responses
- Schools can be full of potential trauma triggers



Trauma Triggers: External Signals of Danger

- People/Things/Places
- Events/Activities
- Dates/Times
- Changes in routine
- Sensory input
- Interpersonal experiences

(Layne et al, 2008)



Trauma Triggers: Internal Signals of Danger

- Thoughts
- Memories
- Emotions
- Body sensations

(Layne et al, 2008)

Embarrassed

"I'm an idiot"

Anger

"I feel stupid"

Shame

Excitement

Heart beating fast

"I am bad"

Anniversary of a trauma



Trauma Triggers: Interpersonal Signals of Danger

- Safety
 - Expression of emotion
 - Personal space
- Trust/Honesty
 - Are you true to your word?
- Intimacy
 - Attunement vs. Appropriate boundaries
- Power/Control
- Self-concept
 - Disrespect vs. Constructive criticism



What happens next . . . Robert



Robert became reluctant to attend school. When he went to school, he did not participate in discussions as much as before and was more irritable with his friends and teachers. Previously a conscientious student, Robert began giving excuses for not completing his homework and did poorly on his most recent exam.



Teachers notice he is under-performing

Teachers call Robert out

School staff decide that he has "Lost his motivation"

Robert avoids more, does worse academically

Robert is labeled: Another unmotivated kid who doesn't care about his future

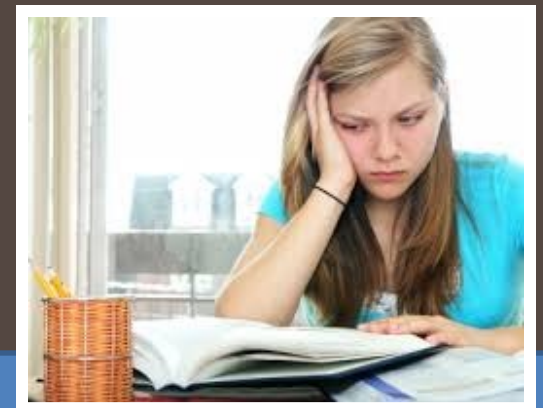
Trauma and Learning



“Instead of **exploring** the world so that we can grow, develop, and engage fully in our lives – using what I’ve called the “learning brain” – the brain of a PTSD victim shifts to hypervigilance and a fight-flight state – a “**survival brain.**” Julian Ford

Traumatized youth experience academic difficulties associated with...

- Learning and retrieving new verbal information
- Social and emotional communication
- Problem solving and analysis
- Sequential memory/organization
- Cause-and-effect relationships
- Perspective taking
- Attentiveness to classroom tasks
- Regulating emotions
- Executive functioning
- Academic engagement



What happens next . . . Ben



Ben seemed to enjoy the notoriety given him from being jumped, and tended to become more aggressive and outspoken with his peers. In class, Ben expanded his role as class clown, now including the teacher in his sarcastic remarks, for which he was repeatedly sent to the office.



Teachers notice the change in behavior

Reprimanded more often

School staff "give up" because "nothing works with Ben"

Robert acts out more to avoid feeling "small and scared"

Ben is labeled: A bad kid with no future

Trauma and Behavior Problems

- Reactivity and impulsivity
- Aggression
- Defiance
- Withdrawal
- Perfectionism
- Regression
- Traumatic reenactment
- Somatic complaints
- Tension reduction behaviors (“MUPS”)



What happens next . . . Raul



Raul showed no obvious signs at school following the experience. He continued in the same manner with his friends and in the classroom. His friends noticed that Raul spent more time with his family and, talked to his coaches more often, and started going to his church youth group again.



Teachers notice that Raul is adjusting well

Staff praises Raul for doing well socially and academically

School staff enjoy spending time with Raul

Raul works harder following encouragement from school staff

Raul is labeled: A good kid who is going places



Defining Resilience

“A pattern of being able to positively adapt in past or present adversity” (Masten, 2001)



Factors that Enhance Resilience



Consider instead

A school response that includes:



**Caring
Counselor**



**Talented
Teacher**



**Savvy
Social
Worker**

Trained School Staff

- Collaboratively monitor Robert, Ben, and Raul
- Recognize the trauma responses and triggers
- Help the youth communicate their needs to building staff
- Link youth to community services to address those needs
- Partner with the families as needed

Consider instead

Trained School Staff

- Collaboratively monitor Robert, Ben, and Raul
- Recognize the trauma responses and triggers
- Help the youth communicate their needs to building staff
- Link youth to community services to address those needs
- Partner with the families as needed



Robert is relabeled: A Hurt Kid



Ben is relabeled: A Hurt Kid

A trauma lens in schools = learning increases and behavior problems decrease



So how do we get there?

We need your help!



Trauma Screening: Why is it Important?

- Andre's Story
- What conclusions would you make about this tree?



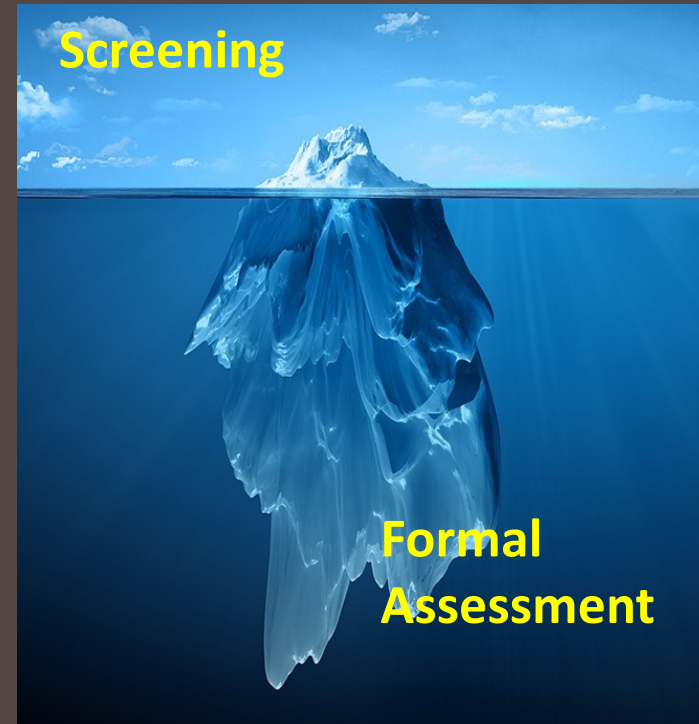
Not Screening Can Have Consequences!

- Failure to protect
 - Mandated reporting
 - Prevention
- Implicit bias
 - Misdiagnosis
 - Misguided treatment planning
- Long-term consequences
 - Missed window of intervention
 - ACEs study




Trauma-Informed Assessment: What is It?


- Trauma-informed assessment can be split into two categories
 1. **Screening**
 - Tip of the iceberg
 - Identification & triage
 - “Front line” professionals
 2. **Formal assessment**
 - Rest of the iceberg
 - Diagnosis & treatment planning
 - Mental health professionals




Trauma Screening: What is It?

- 
- Trauma screening should evaluate for:
 1. Exposure to potentially traumatic experiences
 2. Traumatic stress symptoms/reactions
 - Screening usually covers the following trauma reactions:
 - Avoidance of trauma-related thoughts or feelings
 - Intrusive memories or nightmares about the event
 - Hyper-arousal or exaggerated startle response
 - Irritable or aggressive behavior
 - Behavioral problems
 - Interpersonal problems
 - Other problems based on development/age

Trauma Screening: What is It?

- 
- Screening mainly gets answers to “yes” or “no” questions
 - “Has this student experienced a trauma?”
 - “Does this student need further assessment regarding trauma-related symptoms?”
 - Positive screens only indicate that further assessment is warranted
 - **Negative screens do not necessarily mean that an individual doesn’t have symptoms that warrant intervention.** (SAMHSA, 2014)

Yeah, But Won't it Upset Them and Make Things Worse?

- 
- Asking about trauma exposure does not seem to distress the large majority of children
 - Especially when done carefully and with respect to privacy
 - Almost all who report distress say they would do it again


(Finkelhor, Vanderminden, Turner, Hamby & Shattuck, 2014).

Kids can handle a lot more than you think they can. It's when they get to be grown up that you have to start worrying.


— Anne Ursu —

AZ QUOTES

Trauma Screening: How is it Done?

- 
- Who should be screened?
 - Targeted vs. universal screening
 - When should they be screened?
 - ASAP!
 - Repeat periodically as needed
 - Consider student’s schedule (What are they doing now? Next?)
 - Length of time needed for screening may vary from 5-25 min (Gonzalez et al., 2016)
 - Where can screening occur?
 - Almost anywhere
 - Privacy is critical
 - Ideal to provide “symbols of safety” (SAMHSA, 2014) as well as ACTUAL safety!

Making Screening Easier for Students


- 
- Discussing trauma can feel unsafe
 - Don't want to encourage avoidance, but...
 - Be sensitive
 - Offer education and support from the start
 - Explaining screening gives student sense of control/safety
 - Students should understand:
 - The screening process
 - Why specific questions are important
 - That he or she may delay a response or not answer a question at all.
 - Initial questions should be general and gradual.

(SAMHSA, 2014)


What Happens with a Positive Screen?

- The staff member with the **STRONGEST** existing relationship with the student's caregiver should inform the caregiver of the referral
- May include a referral for a program **within** the school building or to an **external** referral source.
- Please develop a referral list for use in your buildings.

Trauma Screening and Mandated Reporting


- 
- New disclosures of child abuse and neglect may occur
 - ALWAYS inform student you are a mandated reporter
 - DO NOT shut down a new disclosure if it occurs
 - Encourage some narrative if possible
 - Non-verbals (e.g., nodding head encouragingly)
 - “Tell me some more about that.”
 - Who, what, where, & when – just the basics
 - Normalize and validate the disclosure
 - If a hotline is warranted, inform the student/family (unless you are concerned about safety)

TIS Basic Principles: #1


- 
- **Give traumatized students appropriate support from educators: relationships between staff and students.**
 - School staff play a vital role in the lives of children and families impacted by trauma
 - Strengthening these relationships facilitates the creation of a safe, trusting, and collaborative learning environment.

“The relationship between educator and student is incredibly important; for these children, this is what creates space for learning”

TIS Basic Principles: #2


- 
- A decorative graphic on the left side of the slide features several colored pencils (red, green, blue, orange, teal) pointing towards the right, arranged in a slightly overlapping, fan-like pattern.
- **Give educators appropriate support for working with traumatized students:**
 - The ultimate goal at school is learning → **coordinated** response within and outside the school to mitigate trauma.
 - Trauma-sensitive supervision for educators
 - Linkages to outside services and supports.

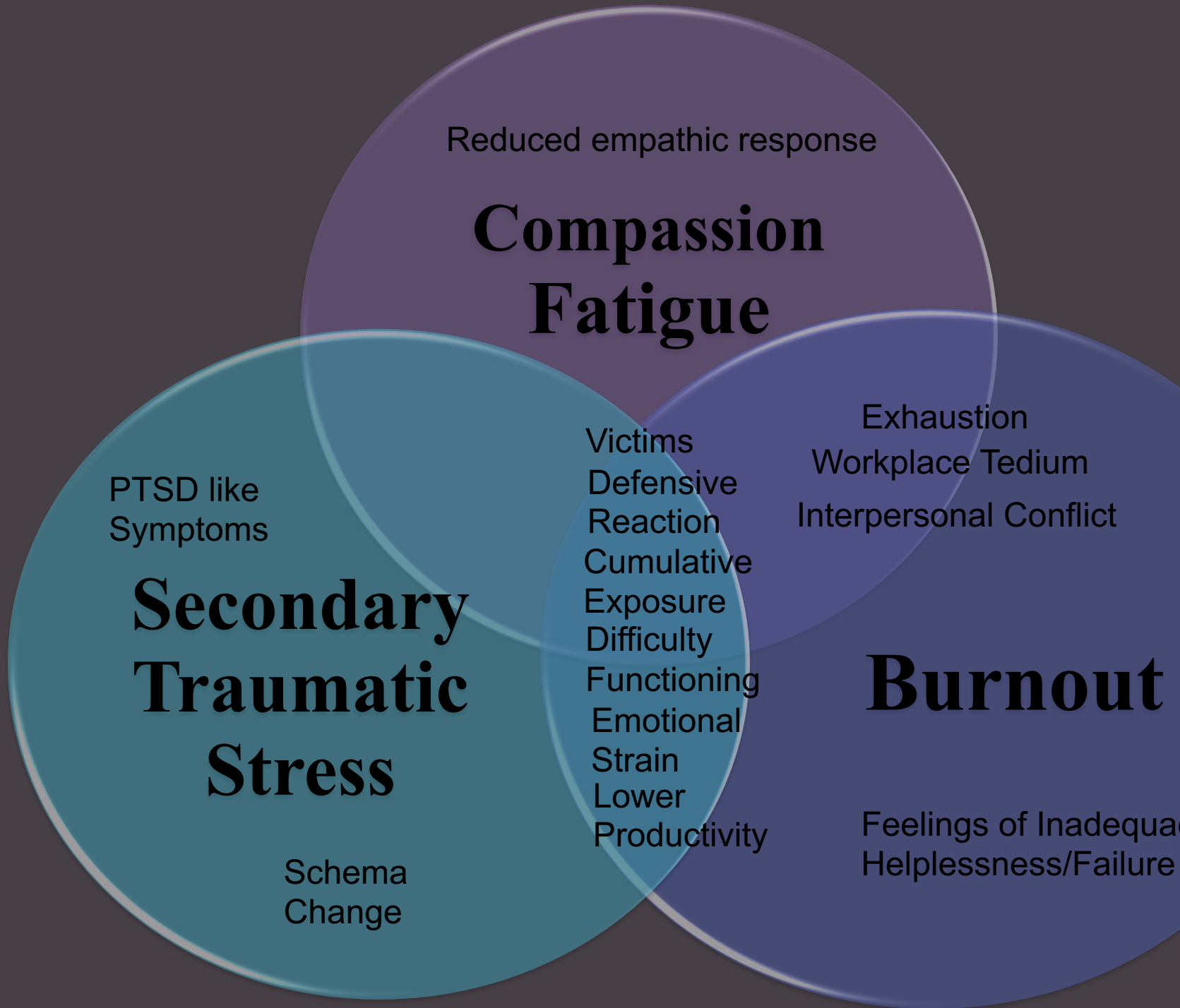
TIS Basic Principles: #3

- 
- **Help children modulate their emotions:**
 - Facilitates academic competence
 - Facilitates social skill development
 - Reduces disciplinary actions for children.

“ . . . A child who can move from hyperarousal into a calm state will be more available for academic and social learning.”

BUILDING RESILIENT EDUCATORS

- 
- **Be Well to Do Well** → the best way to help other is to help yourself too
 - Compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, and burnout are experiences that can have profound effects professionally and personally
 - There are many different ways to practice self-care. It is important to recognize what works for each individual and plan how to practice self-care.



Reduced empathic response

Compassion Fatigue

PTSD like
Symptoms

Secondary Traumatic Stress

Schema
Change

Victims
Defensive
Reaction
Cumulative
Exposure
Difficulty
Functioning
Emotional
Strain
Lower
Productivity

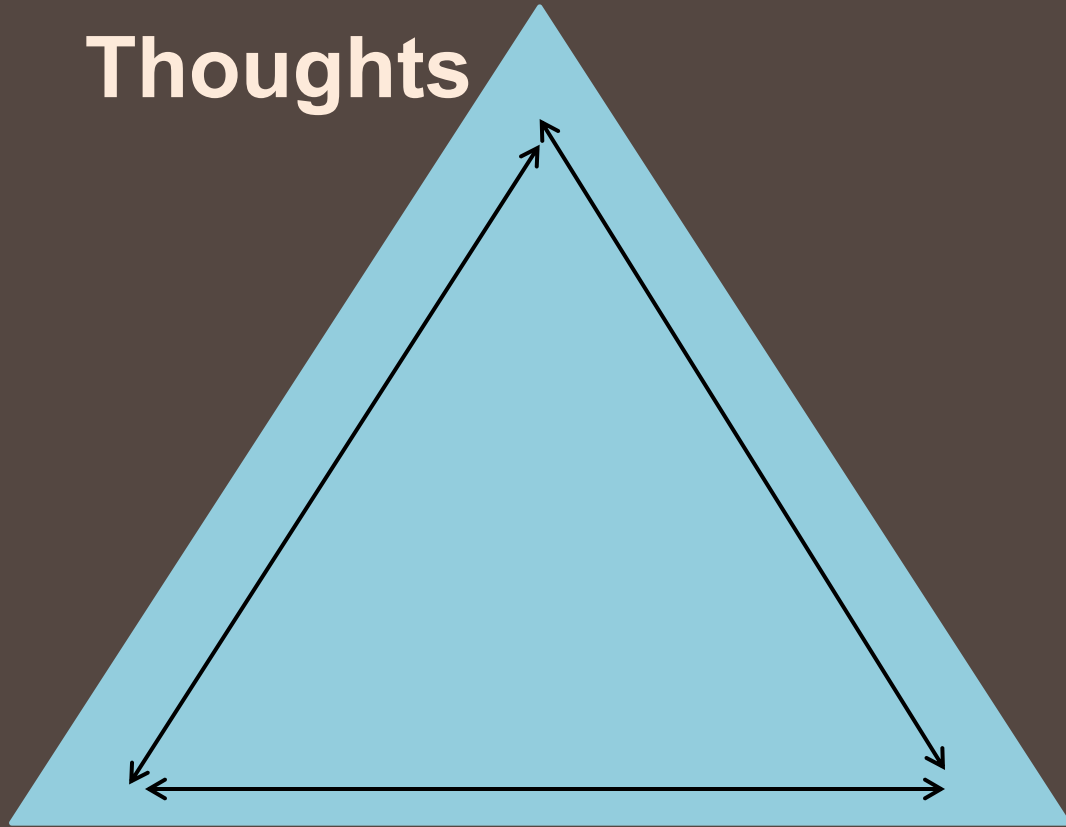
Exhaustion
Workplace Tedium
Interpersonal Conflict

Burnout

Feelings of Inadequacy
Helplessness/Failure

Cognitive Triangle

Thoughts




Feelings

Actions

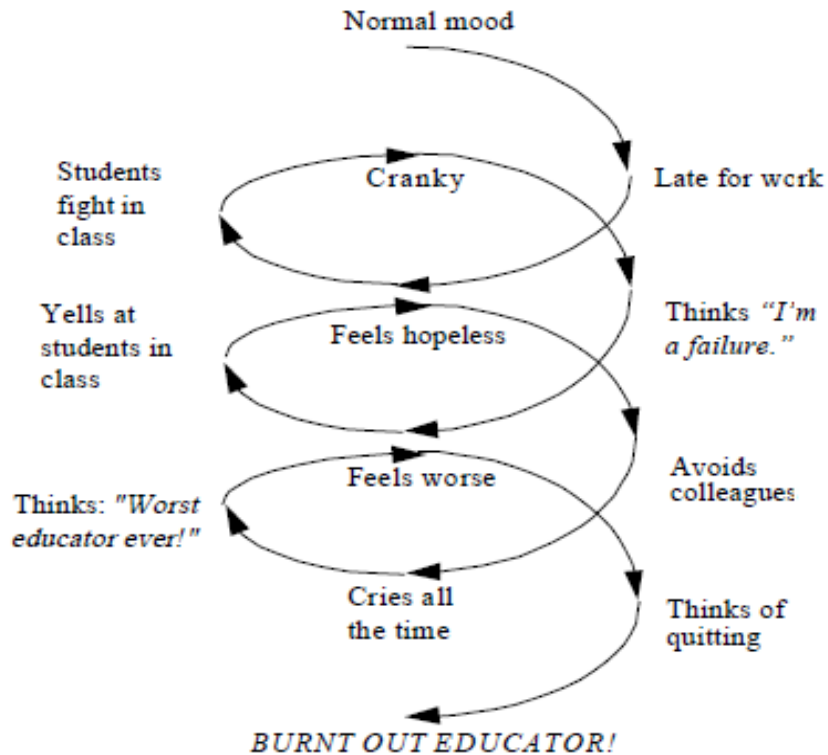


What's in a Thought?

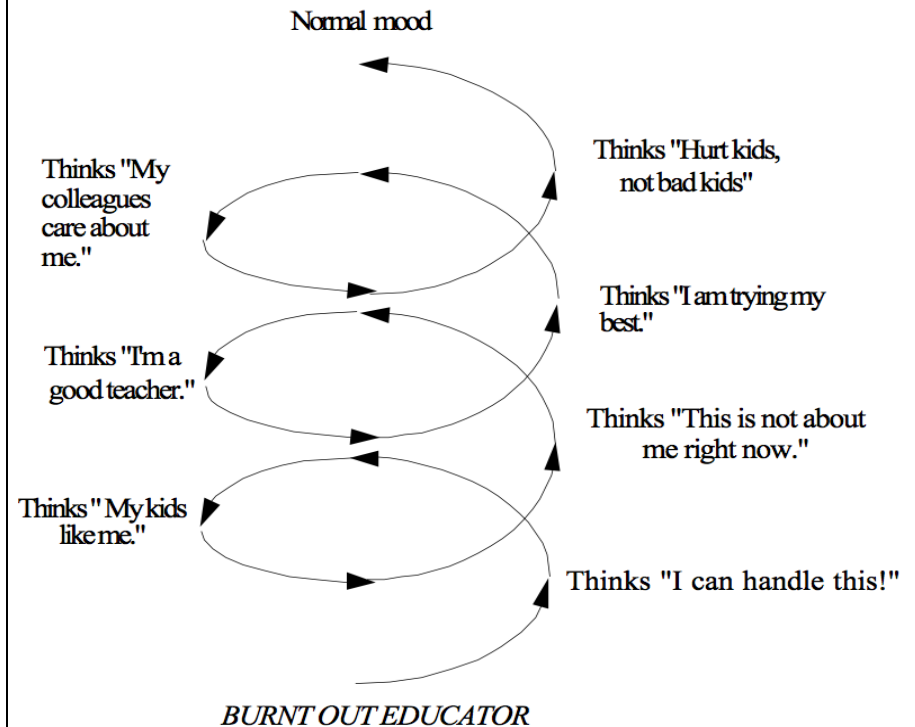


Initial Thoughts	What's the implication of the initial thought?	Helpful Thoughts for Educators
<i>"Great, now I am going to have to deal with him because he is going to be in a bad mood- I already had too much on my plate today"</i>	<i>"I can't handle this"</i> Emotion(s): frustration, hopelessness Behavior(s): give up, avoid student, snap at the student	<i>"I can handle this – this is nothing new to me and we always get through it"</i>

Downward & Upward Spiral



Downward Spiral



Positive Spiral

TRAUMA REMINDERS IN THE SCHOOL

Hurt kids not bad kids

- kids are responsible for their behavior, but we have to think differently about them.
- Responding to children in a trauma-sensitive manner is the responsibility of **ALL** staff.
- Trauma reminders are “signals of danger” such that youth are responding to past trauma rather than current events
- You can never be completely free of trauma reminders in a school context

Why Trauma Reminder Awareness is Important

Possible Reminder	How Might a Traumatized Student Respond to this Reminder?	How Might School Staff Respond to this Student?	Helpful Coping Thoughts for School Staff
Being told, "No."	May become angry or push boundaries	"This kid is a thug!" May yell, threaten, etc.	"Something set him off. Losing my cool isn't going to help calm things down."

Possible Reminders at School

Identifying Possible School Triggers

- A teacher gives me feedback / constructive criticism.
- Someone or something interrupts me while I am working.
- A teacher tells me to correct a mistake.
- When I don't understand what someone is saying to me.
- When I disagree with classmate.
- When a classmate asks for help.
- Homework.
- When a teacher tells me to do something.
- Group work with peers / classmates.
- When others make suggestions on how to do something.
- When one of my ideas is not included in a project / activity.
- When someone starts "small talk" with me.
- When I am excluded from an activity or conversation.
- Meeting new people.
- Getting a lower grade on a test, quiz, or paper.
- When someone points out a mistake I made.
- Greeting people.
- Taking tests.
- When I make a mistake.
- Reporting to school on time.
- Writing papers.
- Wearing specific clothing (i.e. long pants, coat)
- School bells or loudspeaker announcements.
- Fire drills.
- When a classmate disagrees with me.

Adapted from: Do2Learn.com, © Copyright 2010

Talking about Reminders with Students



- **Never force a child to talk about triggers!**
- Invite children into the conversation. Important to practice your language (verbal and non-verbal).
 - For example: “I wanted to check in with you because I know that there have been some tough things that have gone on in your life. If you are comfortable sharing a little information, I would appreciate your help in learning about what are some of the things at school that bring up stuff from the past, so I can help you feel more comfortable at school”.


TRAUMA-INFORMED RESPONSES WITH TRIGGERED STUDENTS

Repair, don't react

- strong reactions make it worse, how can you help the child repair the situation to promote learning?
- Better to intervene early to prevent an escalation
- Reduce a trauma stress reaction by:
 - Staff's own response
 - Staff's interaction with students
 - School environment



DO: Go Low and Slow

- 
- Low
 - Lower your body
 - Lower your voice, both in volume and pitch
 - Lower the complexity of your language; speak in short sentences using simple words; don't ask a lot of questions; don't preach
 - Slow
 - Slow your own heart rate and breathing rate
 - Slow down your rate of speech; pause between sentences
 - Slow down your movements; if you must move quickly, do so in full view of the child
 - Slow down your agenda; it takes as long as it takes

[Precious video clip](#)

Bolick, 2001

Don't: Eat the TACOS

- To avoid triggering traumatized students, do not...
 - **T**hreaten
 - **A**rgue with or contradict
 - **C**hallenge
 - **O**rder or command
 - **S**hame, blame or disrespect



[The Wire video clip](#)

Guest, 2008

PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY WITHIN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT



SAFE TO LEARN

- students need physical AND psychological safety to successfully engage in learning
- Telling students they are safe does not equal a perception of safety
- Increase safety through:
 - Safe interpersonal relationships
 - Safe school environment
 - Outside referrals to shore up safety at home

Signals of Care vs. Signals of Danger

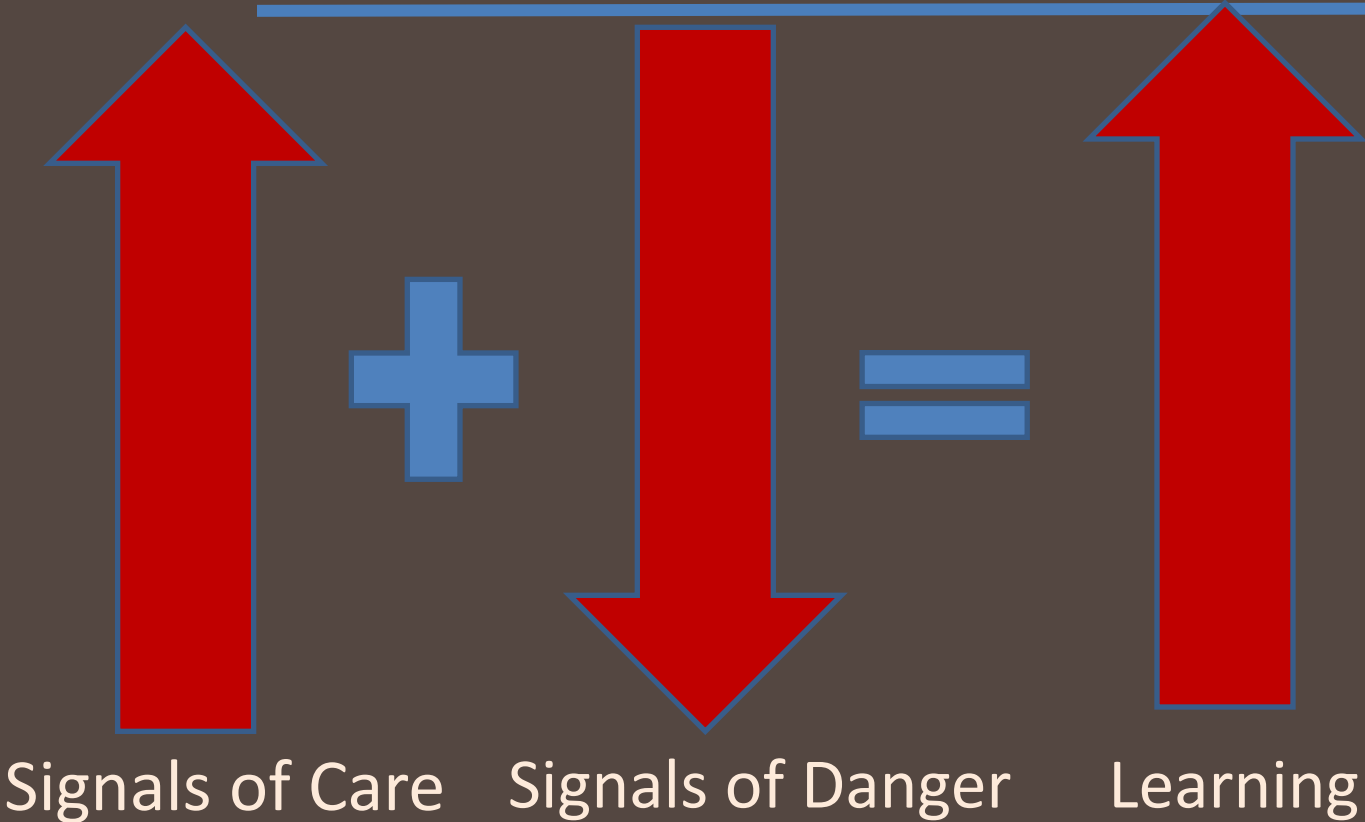
Signals are:

- Subtle interpersonal messages that people send each other, all the time, wittingly or unwittingly
- These signals can be signals of care or carelessness; signals of safety or danger; signals of love or hate
- We all have a balance of positive and negative signals in our lives. We base our expectations of the world largely on this balance


Heidi Ellis, 2014 Plenary Talk




Our Goal



Sending a Safety Message:

- 
- Empathize.
 - Acknowledge that the child's feelings make sense in light of past experiences.
 - Be reassuring and realistic about what you can do.
 - Be honest about what you do and don't know.
 - Help the child to express his or her concerns to other significant adults in their life.

Impact of TIS

- 
- Staff reported increased presence of trauma-informed mindset in work.
 - Shifts in mindset led to changes in practice.
 - School leaders reported positive changes in school climate and culture.
 - school feeling “safer” and “calmer”
 - fewer behavioral crises and discipline referrals
 - improved staff cohesion
 - improved staff-student relationships
 - increased parent engagement.

Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI): Trauma-Sensitive Schools Descriptive Study Final Report (2018)



Thank you!

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