



Brief Guide: Comprehensive Actions for Trauma Sensitivity

Children are resilient, but only as resilient as the adults around them who help to build their resiliency.

Childhood trauma and toxic stress have ripple effects on the state's public health, education, and juvenile and criminal justice systems. Most educators and school deal with children who have experienced or will experience trauma and toxic stress. Yet, they are rarely trained on trauma affects children's [brains, bodies, and futures](#). We aren't suggesting that all school staff need to become child psychologists or behavioral scientists, but we are suggesting that all adults play a role in addressing the impact of trauma and toxic stress on their students. In fact, relationships may matter more than trauma.

Trauma shouldn't derail a child's attendance, academics, or health, but without informed, empathetic staff, who will be there to help these children heal and build resiliency? Instead of a piecemeal approach reacting to student misbehavior or absenteeism, a district-wide system can provide a continuum of support for all students. A district-wide system to address student's needs—academic and non-academic—can include the following components: alternative discipline; social-emotional learning in curriculum; and improving access to mental and behavioral health services. Although it may sound daunting, schools often have some of these components in place and already know which students are struggling with attendance and behavior.



The goal is for all school staff to understand the importance of relationships as a buffer for children facing trauma and as safety net for children who fly under the radar, in order to

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Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at UT Health San Antonio
7411 John Smith Drive, Suite 1000 | San Antonio, TX 78229
210.562.6500 | Fax 210.562.6545 | www.salud-america.org

connect students, families and employees to resources and services. This isn't something new to budget for. This is the soul of the district.

Learn more about trauma-sensitive schools

- [Unlocking the Door Learning: Trauma-Informed Classrooms and Transformational Schools](#)
- [Spokane's Transformation](#)
- [Schools with Informed Care](#)
- [Leading a Trauma-Sensitive School](#)

Alternative Discipline

Alternatives to suspension, for example, can diminish the negative outcomes of harmful discipline policies, boost academic achievement, reduce student misconduct, and build self-esteem and community, particularly among children facing trauma.

Disciplinary responses create dysregulation and activate the fight/flight/freeze brain response, which impairs a child's ability to learn. Restorative responses create optimizing the ability to think creatively and learn.

- Policy Snapshot: Alternative School Discipline Strategies by Education Commission of the States https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/Alternative_School_Discipline_Strategies.pdf
- [Instead of Suspension: Alternative Strategies for Effective Discipline](#) by Duke Center for Child and Family Policy and Duke Law School
- Community Truancy Boards
 - [Innovation Brief](#) from Models for Change Systems Reform In Juvenile Justice
 - [Spokane County Toolkit for Community Truancy Board Replication](#)
- Suspending Kids to School Initiative in Waco ISD
 - [Prevention, Intervention and Triage](#)
 - [Program Changes Culture of School Discipline](#)

Social and Emotional Learning in Curriculum

Social and emotional learning helps students manage emotional responses, manage conflict, make decisions, communicate successfully, and build and maintain relationships, all of which positively impact academics, behaviors, attitudes and skills. Attention, motivation and learning are driven and guided by emotion.

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The more we can build protective factors in elementary school, the more we can avoid problems in middle and high school and adulthood.

- Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) <https://casel.org/guide/>
- [Navigating Social and Emotional Learning from the Inside Out: Looking Inside and Across 25 Leading SEL Programs: A Practical Resource for Schools and OST Providers](#).
- [Navigating SEL From the Inside Out by \(Elementary School Focus\)](#) from the Harvard Graduate School of Education
- [Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies \(PATHS\)](#)
- [Reading, Writing, Respect & Resolution \(4Rs\)](#)
- [Mutt-i-grees](#)
- [LionsQuest](#)

Improve access to mental & behavioral health services

- [Brief Tips and Policy Recommendations for Trauma-Sensitive Schools](#) from the National Association of School Psychologists
- [State Information Request: Student Mental Health](#) in schools by Education Commission of the States
- In Fort Worth, Texas, an increase in the attendance rate of just 1.1%—from 93.8% in the 2002-03 school year to 94.9% in the 2003-04 school year—resulted in an additional \$4 million in funding for the district.

Various funding opportunities are available to implement more comprehensive systems

- Title IV Part A: Student Support and Academic Enhancement Grants (SSAEG)
 - Comprehensive school-based mental health services and supports and staff development for school and community personnel working in the school that are based on trauma-informed practices that are evidence-based.
 - Promise Neighborhoods
 - Full-Service Community Schools
 - 21st Century Learning Centers
- Maryland Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [provides Safe and Support School Grants](#)
- [Trauma-informed Approaches to Behavior in Schools](#) grant program in Texas

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