

Evidence-based strategies to support students who have experienced trauma

As students and staff prepare to return to school after COVID-19–related closures, it is important to acknowledge the impact that trauma—which can adversely affect teaching and learning—can have. Given that, this handout is intended to offer evidence-based strategies to support students who have experienced trauma and promote the well-being of students and staff.

Trauma-informed approaches do not necessarily refer to a service or program designed to treat symptoms related to trauma. They refer to a way of interacting based on being informed about, and sensitive to trauma-related experiences in survivors. The following table contains some research-based, [trauma-sensitive practices](#) that support students’ well-being. It will also guide the districts with turning the recommendations into a practical map of what already is being implemented and what may be needed.

Table 1. Action plan based on trauma-informed strategies

DESCRIPTION OF NEED	
GOAL	
SUCCESS INDICATORS	
DATA	

Evidence-based strategies		Current practice	Changes to current practice	Ways to monitor whether planned changes are supporting students
1. Understanding students’ experiences and needs				
1.1	Recognize early warning signs.			
1.2	Recognize and mitigate students’ trauma related triggers.			
1.3	Connect students to trauma-specific mental health services.			

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1.4	Eliminate retraumatizing practices (e.g., harsh, punitive approaches).			
1.5	Provide trauma-sensitive assessments and services.			
<u>2. Being responsive to your students</u>				
2.1	Create a physically and emotionally safe environment.			
2.2	Listen to and validate your students' experiences and feelings.			
2.3	Help students develop self-regulation skills.			
2.4	Use nonfiction or fiction literature to help students see parallels to real-life situations and learn about alternatives to deal with challenges.			
2.5	Prevent and effectively manage crises.			
2.6	Implement classroom strategies for creating safety.			
<u>3. Connecting with families</u>				
3.1	Use culturally responsive, and trauma-informed techniques to communicate with families.			
3.2	Share resources that support students' well-being.			
3.3	Collaborate with students and families to understand trauma and work together in constructing goals and monitoring progress.			
<u>4. Equipping staff to support students</u>				
	Connect students with school psychologists and counselors.			
	Partner teachers with psychologists to support students.			
	Offer professional development around trauma to teachers at the school.			
	Adopt policies and procedures that align with and support a universal, trauma-sensitive approach.			

Guide for completing the action plan

Current practice

- What is your district doing in relation to this strategy?
- Who is involved in this process?
- Does your current strategy involve culturally responsive and specific elements?
- What problems have you encountered with your current approach?
- What data do you have on hand that may be used as a baseline or evidence of your current practices?
- How do you monitor your progress and record what works and what does not work?

Changes to current practice

- What activities do you need to implement that are aligned with the evidence-based strategies?
- What resources do you need to implement these strategies?
- Is your staff trained to implement these strategies? If not, how can you better prepare them?
- What limitations or challenges can you anticipate?
- What specific, actionable goal do you have in implementing this practice?

Ways to monitor whether planned changes are supporting students

- What instrument will you use to compare the outcome to the baseline or previous information you had about students?
- How can you involve different stakeholders (families, counselors, psychologists, teachers, students) into data collection to monitor your progress?
- What information you need to gather to check on progress and make adjustments to the plan when needed?
- What does success/victory look like?



Resources

REL Southwest webinar: *Research-Based Trauma-Responsive Education Practices: Research Perspective*.
https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southwest/events/pdf/Trauma_archive/Presentations/SWTPPD_TrauResponsPracWebP2-508.pdf

REL Southwest webinar: *Trauma-Sensitive Practices in Schools*.
https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southwest/events/pdf/Trauma_archive/Presentations/SWTPPD_TrauResponsPracWebP3-508.pdf

REL Southwest handout: *Do's and Don'ts of a Trauma Informed Compassionate Classroom*.
https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southwest/events/pdf/Trauma_archive/Handouts/RELSW_Trauma_Webinar-Dos_Donts_508.pdf

REL Southwest infographic: *Supporting student mental health and responding to trauma*.
<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southwest/pdf/infographics/reldsw-infographic-trauma-508.pdf>

REL Southwest blog post: *Taking off our blindfolds, while we wear our masks*.
<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southwest/blogs/swtppd-trauma-0720.aspx>

REL Mid-Atlantic fact sheet: *Trauma-informed planning strategies to help students transition back to school in the era of COVID-19*.
https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midatlantic/app/Docs/Infographics/Trauma_informed_FactSheet_081020_508.pdf

National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments training package: *Trauma-Sensitive Schools*.
<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/trauma-sensitive-schools-training-package>