



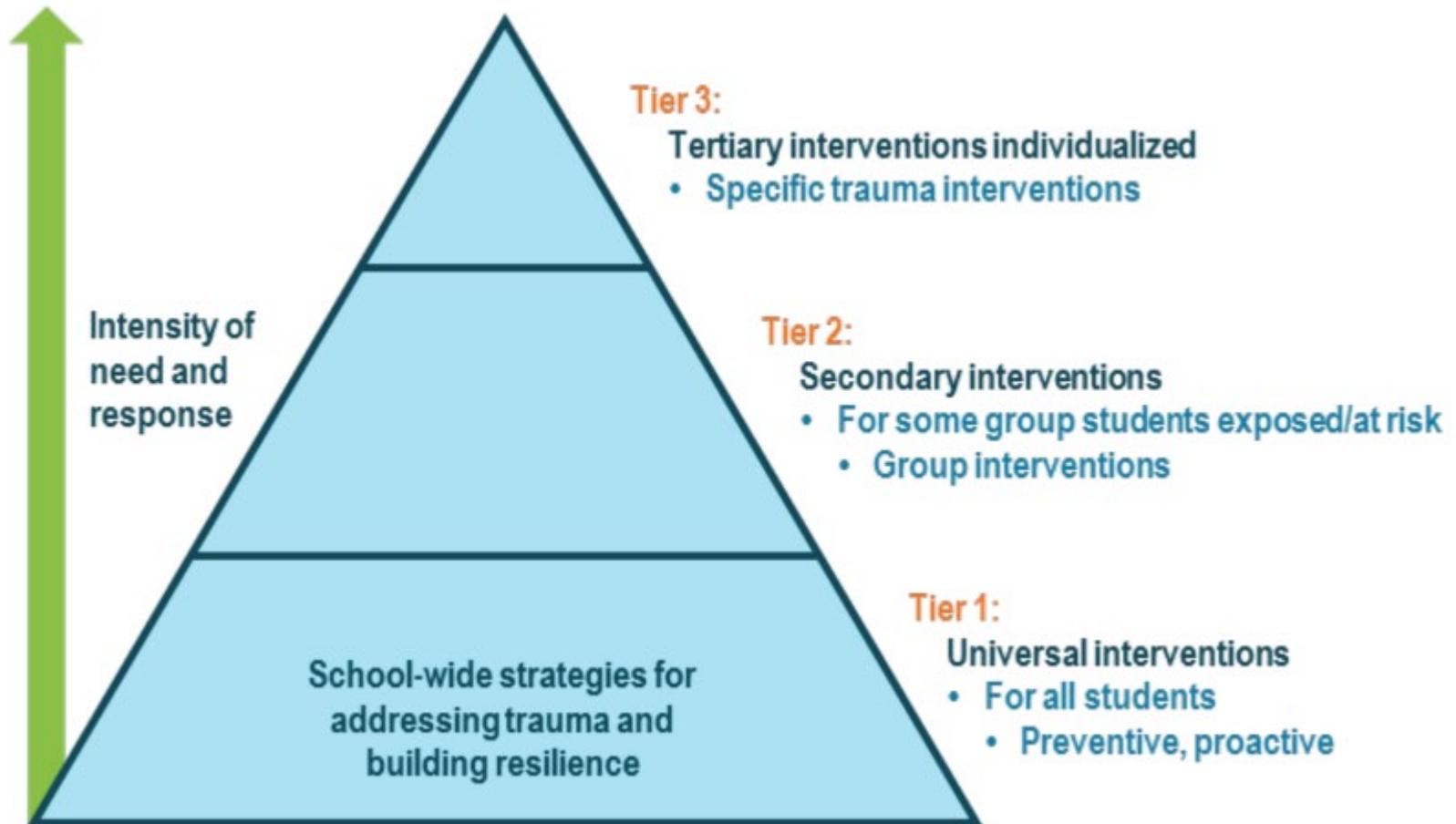
Trauma-Sensitive Practices in Schools

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Multitiered Approach to Trauma



In a trauma-sensitive school, **all aspects** of the educational environment—from workforce training to engagement with students and families to procedures and policies—are grounded in an **understanding of trauma and its impact** and are designed to promote resilience for all.

The approach may require changes to mission, vision, practices, policies, and culture.



Shifting Perspectives

Traditional Perspective

- Understands behaviors as the result of individual deficits (e.g., what's wrong with you?). Uses negative labels.
- Understands difficult behaviors as purposeful.
- Focuses on the individual.
- Views adult authority and control as critical to student success.
- Punitive discipline is the primary approach.
- Support for students exposed to trauma should be left to counseling professionals.

Trauma-Sensitive Perspective

- Considers whether behaviors may be ways of coping with traumatic experiences.
- Understands that difficult behaviors may be automatic responses.
- Considers the role of the environment
- Encourages student and family choice and control.
- Positive, strengths-based approaches to discipline are used most often.
- Assumes a shared responsibility for addressing trauma.

Shifting Perspectives

Trauma glasses off

Trauma glasses on

Manipulative

Getting needs met in ways that have worked in the past. Doing whatever is necessary to survive.

Lazy

Overwhelmed. Underdeveloped executive functioning skills.

Resistant

Mistrustful of others due to history of being hurt by others. Scared to make progress and then lose everything.

Unmotivated

Depressed. Fearful. Overwhelmed. "Frozen."

Disrespectful

Feeling threatened, unsafe, out of control.

Attention-seeking

Feeling disconnected, alone, or unheard by others. Looking for connection.

Core Principles

- **Understand** trauma and its impact.
- **Believe** that healing happens in relationships.
- **Ensure** emotional and physical safety.
- **View** students holistically.
- **Support** choice, control, and empowerment for students, staff, and families.
- **Strive** for cultural competence.
- **Use** a collaborative approach.



Trauma-Sensitive Practices

Establish physical safety.

- The physical environment is **well maintained, well lit, and well monitored**.
- The school environment **reflects the diverse backgrounds** and experiences of the students and communities served (in pictures, posters, media, and other materials).
- **Rules and student rights are posted**, and expectations for behavior are positively outlined.
- The school works to **keep students safe** from bullying and violence while at school.
- The school has safe, **quiet spaces** for students to go if they feel overwhelmed or dysregulated.

Trauma-Sensitive Practices

Support emotional safety

- Staff strive to be **responsive, calm, and respectful** in their interactions with students and parents.
- Student **expectations are clear** and enforced consistently.
- Adults actively address any and all instances of potentially traumatic experiences, such as **bias, bullying, exclusion, or disrespect**, that happen at school.

Trauma-Sensitive Practices

Support emotional safety

- Discipline practices are **safe, respectful, and reparative**.
- Adults are able to **recognize possible trauma-related responses**.
- School practices **minimize students' experiences of powerlessness**. The school conveys respect for cultural differences in communication styles, language, values, experiences with authority figures, and perceptions of safety.
- Students and parents are given **opportunities to voice their opinions** or concerns.

Trauma-Sensitive Practices

Recognize and reduce trauma-related triggers.

Trauma reminders/triggers: Reminders of past traumatic experiences that automatically cause the body to react as if the traumatic event is happening again in that moment.

Trauma-sensitive schools:

- Identify potential trauma reminders for students and parents.
- Recognize possible trauma responses.
- Minimize trauma triggers in the education environment.

Trauma-Sensitive Practices

Triggers for students include:

Survival responses to triggers include:

Triggers for parents include:

- Loud, chaotic environments;
- Physical touch, uncertainty about expectations, or changes in routine;
- Situations involving authority figures and limit setting, even appropriate ones;
- Hand or body gestures that appear threatening;
- Witnessing violence between others, such as peers fighting;
- Emergency vehicles and police or fire personnel;
- Particular reminders of an event (e.g., smells, weather, time of year); and
- Areas of the school experienced as unsafe, such as bathrooms or less well monitored areas.

Trauma-Sensitive Practices

Triggers for students include:

- Verbal and physical aggression or defiance;
- Running away, refusing to talk, avoidance, substance use, and other risky behaviors; and
- Appearing numb or disconnected.

Survival responses to triggers include:

Triggers for parents include:

Trauma-Sensitive Practices

Triggers for students include:

- Being called into a meeting to address their child's behaviors;
- Feeling disrespected by school staff;
- Uncertainty about what is happening;
- Lack of control over decisions being made about their child; and
- History of negative experiences with the education system.

Survival responses to triggers include:

Triggers for parents include:

Trauma-Sensitive Practices

Prevent and manage crises.

- Staff **recognize early warning signs** of students being triggered based on mood or behavioral changes that indicate agitation, fear, or anger.
- Adults attend to what is happening, **validate feelings**, listen, offer encouragement and choice, and provide positive reinforcement.
- Staff use **nonverbal strategies**, such as body language, space, and use of grounding techniques, to deescalate crises.
- Staff **avoid giving directions**, punishing, or arguing during a crisis.
- Adults **repair relationships** after a crisis and plan ahead for future challenges.



Classroom strategies for creating safety:

- **Establish and maintain clear, predictable routines** and rituals that foster self-regulation.
- **Plan for changes** and transitions, and anticipate student responses.
- **Set clear rules** and expectations, and enforce them consistently and respectfully.
- **Be aware of potential triggers** around limit setting.
- **Consider** possible underlying patterns/root causes of behavior.
- Consequences are directly related to the behavior and **emphasize repairing connections**.



Classroom strategies for creating safety:

- Use **respectful language** and tone.
- Adopt a positive, **strengths-based approach**.
- Use **praise** and reinforce positive behaviors.
- **Avoid public confrontations** that could be embarrassing or shaming for students.
- Provide opportunities for **student choice** and sense of control.
- **Check your assumptions and biases** about why a student may be reacting in a particular way and be aware of your own feelings before reacting.

Trauma-Sensitive Schools Framework

Domains of Trauma Sensitivity

1

Support Staff Development.

2

Create a Safe and Supportive Environment.

3

Assess Needs and Provide Services.

4

Build Social and Emotional Skills.

5

Collaborate With Students and Families.

6

Adapt Policies and Procedures

Universal Trauma-Sensitive Strategies

- **Educating** all school staff about trauma and its effects
- Promoting a **safe physical and emotional environment**
- **Eliminating retraumatizing practices** (e.g., harsh, punitive approaches)
- **Providing** trauma-sensitive assessments and services
- Building students' **social-emotional skills** to cope with adversity
- **Promoting** youth and family voice, choice, and empowerment
- **Adopting policies and procedures** that align with and support a universal, trauma-sensitive approach



Trauma-Sensitive Schools
TRAINING PACKAGE

UNDERSTAND • BUILD • LEAD

Understanding Trauma and Its Impact

- E-resource
- Companion slide presentation and activity packet for in-person training

Building Trauma-Sensitive Schools

- Online module for all staff
- Handouts
- Facilitation guide

Leading Trauma-Sensitive Schools

- Online module for leaders
- Action guide
- Facilitation guide

<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/trauma-sensitive-schools-training-package>

**Thank you for the work that
you do and your time today**

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Facilitated Practitioner Discussion

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Questions?



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