

## SOME FACTS ABOUT TRAUMA-SENSITIVITY AND SCHOOLS

Washington State determined that 13 out of every 30 students in a classroom will have toxic stress from 3 or more traumatic experiences. Those children are likely to be more “unruly”, more “unmotivated” or more absent than the others.

Source: Washington State Family Policy Council

When Lincoln High School implemented a trauma-informed approach to students, suspensions dropped by 83 percent and expulsions dropped by 40 percent in the year following implementation.

Source: *Unlocking the Door to Learning: McInerney, Esq. Senior Staff Attorney & McClindon, Amy., M.S.W. (December, 2014) Trauma-Informed Classrooms & Transformational Schools.* Education Law Center.

“We’re not trying to lower the bar for kids with trauma, but we have to make sure that we’re giving them tools so that they can learn. We have to make sure they have adults they can count on, who aren’t going to hurt them, who’ll be there to support their process, who will meet them where they’re at and build from there.” says Natalie Turner, Washington State University Area Health Education Assistant Director.

Source: Stevens, Jane Ellen. (August 20, 2013) *There’s no such thing as a bad kid in these, Spokane, WA, trauma-informed elementary schools.* ACEs Too High News

## TRAUMA-SENSITIVE SCHOOLS RESOURCES



**THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH**  
[www.thenationalcouncil.org](http://www.thenationalcouncil.org)

**ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES SURVEY**  
[www.acesurvey.org](http://www.acesurvey.org)

**THE NATIONAL CHILD TRAUMATIC STRESS NETWORK**  
[www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org)

**WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION**  
[www.dpi.wi.gov/sspw/mental-health/trauma](http://www.dpi.wi.gov/sspw/mental-health/trauma)

**TRAUMA LEARNING AND POLICY INITIATIVE**  
[www.traumasensitiveschools.org](http://www.traumasensitiveschools.org)

**STATE OF WASHINGTON OFFICE OF SUPERINTENDENT  
OF EDUCATION: The Heart of Learning and Teaching,  
Compassionate Schools**  
[www.k12.wa.us/CompassionateSchools/default.aspx](http://www.k12.wa.us/CompassionateSchools/default.aspx)

**THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR TRAUMA AND LOSS IN CHILDREN**  
[www.starr.org/training/tlc](http://www.starr.org/training/tlc)

**UCSF HEARTS Program:  
Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools**  
[www.coe.ucsf.edu/coe/spotlight/ucsf\\_hearts.html](http://www.coe.ucsf.edu/coe/spotlight/ucsf_hearts.html)

# UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA & TRAUMA- SENSITIVE SCHOOLS:

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT  
TO HAVE TRAUMA-  
SENSITIVE SCHOOLS?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN  
TO BE A TRAUMA-  
SENSITIVE SCHOOL?



1400 K St., NW, Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20005  
Phone: 202.684.7457



## WHAT DOES TRAUMA MEAN?

Trauma is a word to describe single or multiple distressing events. They may have long lasting and harmful effects on a person's physical, emotional and mental well-being. Some examples of events experienced as traumatic are:

- Physical, emotional or sexual abuse
- Parent with mental health and/or addiction issues.
- Childhood neglect or abandonment
- Violence (Witnessing or being the victim of domestic assault/street crime)
- Parent who has been incarcerated.



...there are hundreds of thousands of women and men who pass through our programs every day with painful histories of personal trauma — including sexual assault, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, and witnessing interpersonal violence — that we all too often ignore... We must offer trauma-informed services and supports. ”

*Linda Rosenberg, President & CEO, National Council for Behavioral Health*

## PRINCIPLES OF A TRAUMA-SENSITIVE SCHOOL

- Safe, calm and secure environment with supports for all students and staff.
- System-wide understanding of trauma, its prevalence and impact.
- System-wide understanding of trauma-sensitive school practices
- Cultural Competence
- Promotion of student and family voice, choice and self-advocacy
- Student-centered and trauma specific supports and services.
- Healing, hopeful, honest and trusting relationships.

## HOW DOES TRAUMA IMPACT LIFE AND LEARNING?

- Trauma exposure can impact the brain in such a way that learning is more difficult.
- Students impacted by trauma have difficulty trusting adults because of their previous experiences.
- Students can be activated/triggered if staff do not understand their needs.
- Students can be re-traumatized by exclusionary discipline and restraint if staff do not understand their needs
- Students are focused on their own safety and self-protection.



## EDUCATORS WHO UNDERSTAND THE PREVALENCE AND IMPACT OF TRAUMA AND TOXIC STRESS ON STUDENTS...

- Create safe and supportive learning environments for all students.
- Build trusting relationships with all students.
- Ask students “what do you need?” rather than “what is wrong with you?”
- Teach all students social and emotional skills.
- Provide classroom movement and mindfulness exercises.
- Work to build resilience skills in all students.
- Address behavior with positive and compassionate strategies.

## WHAT IS TRAUMA-SENSITIVE SCHOOL?

### DOMAIN 1 – Student Assessment:

Become aware of trauma-related needs throughout the existing multi-tiered process of student assessment.

### DOMAIN 2 – Student, Family and Guardian Involvement

Involve and engage student, family/guardian and community partners. Include student, family/guardian and community partners in school improvement efforts and multi-tiered student assessment/interventions.

### DOMAIN 3 – Trauma-Sensitive Educated and Responsive District and School Staff

Increase the entire staff's trauma-sensitive school awareness, knowledge and skills.

### DOMAIN 4 – Trauma-Informed, Evidence-Based and Emerging Best Practices

Increase student support staff's knowledge and skills to deliver evidence-based services that address the effects of trauma exposure.

### DOMAIN 5 – Safe and Secure Environments

Increase the awareness, knowledge and skills of school staff to create safe, trusting and healing environments.

### DOMAIN 6 – Community Outreach and Partnership Building

Assume a leadership role in educating and engaging community partners and parents in trauma-sensitive schools practices.

### DOMAIN 7 – Ongoing Performance Improvement and Evaluation

Ensure a system is in place to measure performance in each domain. Track, analyze and review data to identify ongoing challenges and/or reinforce progress.

