

**Complex Trauma Treatment Network  
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**Establishing and Sustaining  
Trauma-Informed School Systems**

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# What is a trauma-informed system?

Fundamental shift in thinking and practice

Embracing a trauma informed culture requires:

- ✓ Understanding of how trauma impacts the individual
- ✓ Integration of knowledge into service
- ✓ Symptoms seen as attempts to cope
- ✓ Triggers
- ✓ Avoidance of re-traumatization
- ✓ Trauma-informed practices

# Building a Trauma-Informed System

## Core Principles:

- Safety
- Choice
- Collaboration
- Empowerment

# Building a Trauma-Informed System

- Administrative commitment to change
  - Identify changes needed
  - Allocation of resources
  - Building partnerships
  - Accountability measures
- Trauma policy or position paper
- Consumer/trauma survivor involvement
- Financing and mechanisms to support development

# Building a Trauma Informed System

- Needs assessment
- Hiring practices
- Trauma informed training and skill building for all staff  
Front line, support, administration
- Revision of policies and procedures

# Building a Trauma-Informed System

- Universal trauma screening and assessment
- Trauma informed services
- Trauma specific services including evidence based and promising practice treatment models

(Blueprint for Action: Building Trauma Informed MH Service Systems, Abt Associates, Inc., 2007)

# Leading Change

- Establish a sense of urgency
- Form a powerful guiding coalition
- Create a vision
- Empower others to act on the vision
- Plan for and create short-term wins
- Consolidate improvements
- Institutionalize new approaches

(Kotter, Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail, Harvard Business Review, 2007)

# Why Schools Need to be Trauma Informed?

Children are more likely to access mental health services through primary care and schools than through specialty mental health clinics. (Costello et al., 1998)

A Longitudinal study of children in the community found that mental health services are most often provided by the education system. (Farmer et al., 2003)

Children with mental health disorders struggle in a school environment and are less likely to succeed academically. (Mental Health America of Greater Houston, 2011)



# Creating a Trauma Informed School System

School staff, educators, and administrators should:

- Recognize the potential effects of trauma on education  
e.g., attendance, grades, test scores, classroom behavior.
- Be able to identify students who are in need of help, due to trauma

(NCTSN Service Systems Briefs v1 n1, July 2007)

# Creating a Trauma Informed School System (Cont'd)

- Consider students' trauma histories and needs in every aspect of service delivery.
- Focus on the whole child
- Consider family, social and cultural/community contexts

(NCTSN Service Systems Briefs v1 n1, July 2007)

# Counselors and School Psychologists...

- Teach students and their families about trauma and its impact on individuals.
- Focus on prevention of future trauma exposure
- See learning-interfering behaviors as coping with trauma symptoms
- Promote skill building and resiliency
- Support student empowerment
- Build on student strengths

(Keys to Trauma-Informed School Health, New Mexico Dept. of Health, 2008)

# Successful Trauma-Informed Schools Need...

- An administration that is committed and has a vision for change
- A school climate of respect and tolerance
- An Implementation committee
- New behavioral management approach (disciplinary policy)

# Successful Trauma-Informed Schools Need...

- Trauma –sensitive hiring practices
- Staff training and support (secondary trauma)
- Celebrations of success
- Measurement

(Adapted from Trauma Treatment for Children, 10 Essential Elements of a Successful Transformation to Trauma Informed Care, Patricia Wilcox, LCSW)

# Sustaining a Trauma-informed School System

## Opportunities and Challenges

- Funding (state, federal, Medicaid)
- Partnerships
- In-service training
- Staff turn-over (on going training, secondary trauma)
- Parental engagement
- Mental health vs. academics
- Counseling records, confidentiality, space, consents

# Resources

- *The Restorative Approach  
Trauma-Informed Care for Children and Adolescents  
By Patricia D. Wilcox, LCSW - Klingberg Family Centers*
- *The 3Rs of School Crises and Disasters: Readiness, Response  
and Recovery.* [www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org)
- *Creating Trauma Informed Child Serving Systems, NCTSN Briefs  
v1n1, July 2007* [www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org)
- *Psychological First Aid online training:*  
<http://learn.nctsn.org/login/signup.php>
- *Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators.* [www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org)