School-based Approaches to Addressing Student Trauma

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Center for School Mental Health

MISSION
To strengthen the policies and programs in school mental health to improve learning and promote success for America’s youth

• Established in 1995. Federal funding from the Health Resources and services Administration.

• Focus on advancing school mental health policy, research, practice, and training.

• Shared family-schools-community agenda.

• Co-Directors: Sharon Stephan, Ph.D. & Nancy Lever, Ph.D. http://csmh.umaryland.edu, (410) 706-0980
How can trauma impair a child’s ability to learn?

A single exposure to a traumatic event may cause:

- Jumpiness
- Intrusive thoughts
- Interrupted sleep & nightmares
- Anger and moodiness
- Social withdrawal

These can interfere with concentration, memory and cognition.
How does distress from violence affect students in the classroom?

Academic, social and behavioral problems:

- Failing to understand directions
- Overreacting: comments from teachers & peers, bells, physical contact, doors slamming, lighting, sudden movement
- Difficulty with authority, redirection, or criticism
- Misreading context
- Failing to connect cause and effect
- Clinginess and worry about safety
- Somatic Complaints
- Incomplete school work or decreased school performance
- Absenteeism
Distress from Violence Has Negative Effects on Students in the Classroom

- Classroom performance declines due to...
  - Inability to concentrate
  - Flashbacks and preoccupation with the trauma
  - Avoidance of school and other places

- Other behavioral and emotional problems develop that can impede learning and interpersonal relations
  - Substance abuse
  - Aggression
  - Depression
These Effects Take a Measurable Toll

- Decreased IQ and reading ability (Delaney-Black et al., 2003)
- Decreased rates of high school graduation (Grogger, 1997)
- More days absent from school (Hurt et al., 2001)
- Lower grade point average (Hurt et al., 2001)
- More suspensions and expulsions (LAUSD survey, 2006)
The Treatment and Services Adaptation (TSA) Center for Resiliency, Hope, and Wellness in Schools

http://traumaawareschools.org

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Trauma Informed Schools
Sample Strategies

School Wide Ecological Strategies:
Positive, Safe School Climate

Psychosocial Education:
SSET Support to Students Exposed to Trauma

Crisis Counseling:
Psychological First Aid:
Listen, Protect, Connect

Early Intervention:
CBITS Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma In Schools

Intensive Intervention:
TF-CBT
Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

PBIS/RTI*
Guiding principals and framework

* Multi-Tiered Service Delivery Model/Use of Research Based Interventions/Intensity of Interventions Increasing at Each Level/Data Driven Decisions/Regular Monitoring of Student Progress
Core Concepts in Trauma Informed Schools – The Role Shared by Every Adult in a School

**Early Detection and Intervention**
Exposure to violence and trauma are detected early with early intervention

**Understanding Effects on Student Learning**
Students learn skills to cope more effectively with the distress that interferes with learning

**Informed Teachers and Parents**
Teachers and parents learn how they can support fearful and anxious students in the classroom and at home
PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID:
Listen Protect Connect/Model and Teach

Copyright M. Schreiber, R.H. Gurwitch, & M. Wong, 2006
Adapted, M. Wong, 2012
What is Psychological First Aid?

- Psychological First Aid is a set of supportive actions that help people cope more effectively during times of stress.
  - American Red Cross
With Psychological First Aid

Every adult who interacts with a child plays an important role.
Why is PFA Important?

• Knowing how to provide Psychological First Aid can help you to:
  – Create a compassionate environment for everyone in the school.
  – Assess what someone may need at the moment.
  – Provide immediate support to those in stressful situations.
  – Help others cope in the face of stressful events.
Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools

• School-based intervention
• Delivered by licensed mental health professionals
• Proven effective in research trials
• Visit: Rand.org OR cbitsprogram.org
But Although CBITS Is Effective, It Presents One Barrier

- CBITS can only be delivered by licensed mental health professionals
- It became clear that there was a shortage of trained people to meet the demand
- Concern grew that not enough kids who could benefit from the program would have access to it
Support for Students Exposed to Trauma (SSET)

- Modified version of CBITS
- Delivered by: Teachers, School Counselors, Graduate Interns
- Pilot tests: SSET Promising
An Intervention for Elementary School Children Exposed to Traumatic Events: The Bounce Back Program

• 10 Group Sessions—CBT Skills
• Parent Educational Session(s)
• 2-3 Individual Trauma Narrative Sessions (parent invited to 3rd)
• Weekly letters to parents
• Weekly emails to teachers

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Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)

Child’s Treatment
Coping Skills Training:
- Emotional Expression
- Cognitive Coping
- Relaxation

Gradual Exposure & Processing

Education:
- Child Sexual Abuse
- Healthy Sexuality
- Personal Safety

Caregiver’s Treatment
Coping Skills Training:
- Emotional Expression
- Cognitive Coping
- Relaxation

Gradual Exposure & Processing

Education (like child sessions)
- Behavior Management

Joint Sessions
Coping Skills Exercises
Gradual Exposure & Processing
Education Regarding Sexuality and Sexual Abuse
Personal Safety Skills
Family Sessions

From Deblinger & Heflin (1996)
Fully Integrated School Mental Health Services

**UNIVERSAL**
Policies and practices that promote a school-wide culture of respect, safety, and resiliency for students.
- Comprehensive student support
- Behavior management
- Modeling
- Classroom Consultation
- Positive Behavior Support Policies
- Second Step
- Staff & Parent Trainings:
  - Mental Health Awareness
  - Psychological First Aid
  - Promoting Staff & Student Resiliency
  - Suicide Prevention
  - Crisis Prevention, Intervention, and Postvention
  - Threat Assessment/Work Place Violence Prevention
  - Inhalants Abuse Prevention

**TARGETED**
Interventions that address risk factors and foster protective factors for students at-risk.
- Screening
- Monitoring
- Community Referrals
- Classroom Supports
- 504 Plans/IEPs
- Group Interventions (students & parents)
- Cognitive Behavior Intervention for Trauma in Schools
- Triple P Parenting
- Coordination of Services Team
- Student Success Team
- Risk Assessment and Management

**INTENSIVE**
Coordinated, comprehensive, and culturally relevant interventions.
- Evidence based mental health services
- Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavior Therapy (TFCBT)
- Managing & Adapting Practice (MAP)
- Families OverComing Under Stress (FOCUS)
- Intensive Case Management
- Crisis Intervention
- Psychiatric consultation & Medication support
- Psychiatric Hospitalization Reentry planning
The Power of School Relationships

• School is a place where it is possible for traumatized children to forge strong relationships with caring adults and learn in a supportive, predictable and safe environment.

• Mastering both academic and social skills are key to the healing process, the aim is to increase teaching and learning time and reduce time spent on discipline.

• Schools can partner with parents and guardians – who may themselves be struggling with symptoms of trauma – and give teachers the support they need to teach children how to regulate or calm their emotions and behavior.