



# Social and Emotional Learning and Trauma-Informed Research

For many schools and systems, a focus on social and emotional learning (SEL) and trauma-informed instruction might be new, so this compilation of research and resources on trauma-informed and SEL practices provides a jumping off point around these priorities and initiatives. The compilation begins with a broad range of trauma-informed and SEL writing and research. Towards the end, topics narrow to include trauma-informed practices within the context of distance learning and the global pandemic.

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## Core Competencies: Trauma-Informed Practices

### *Executive Summary:*

These Core Competencies in Trauma-Informed Practices were designed by Multiplying Connections (MC), a Philadelphia-based collaborative, in 2008. In designing these competencies, MC reviewed numerous sets of competencies from relevant professional fields. They used the following guiding principles to create their final guidance:

- honor children's relationships
- promote relational health for children and families
- close/reduce the developmental gap experienced by many trauma-exposed children by intervening between ages zero and five
- increase (front-line workers' and families') knowledge and skills for supporting typical brain development as well as trauma-affected development
- build resilience/protective factors for children using evidence-based practices

These competencies guide organizations who work with children ages zero to five and their families toward building a workforce that has two key characteristics. First, their workforce is knowledgeable about trauma and its impact. Second, their workforce employs skills and strategies that prevent, reduce, and ameliorate the effect of trauma on young children, thus closing the gap between what we know about trauma, and what we do about trauma. The intention is not that each employee has all competencies, but rather that organizations serving children zero to five and their families are composed of individuals that collectively are proficient in the set of competencies. The competencies are organized into six domains:



knowledge, attitudes/values, communication, practice, communities, and organizations and systems.

## Trauma-Informed Teaching Strategies

### *Executive Summary:*

This article was written in ASCD's publication, *Educational Leadership*, in October of 2019, and provides concrete strategies for teachers to use to foster a feeling of safety in their classrooms, positively impacting their students' ability to learn.

The first suggestion is to understand that seemingly unexplainable emotional reactions from students can be a result of a trigger, and that trigger may be seen or unseen by the teacher. Next, teachers can build positive relationships with students strategically by creating time each day to talk to the student about their interests. Within the instructional setting, teachers can provide predictability and consistency with strategies such as a visual schedule and preview any changes to the routine privately beforehand. Students should experience the feeling of competency every day; that may include scheduling time for them to help a younger student, for example. When interacting with students, teachers can offer choices when possible, provide reasoning when directives are necessary, and avoid public directives whenever possible. Furthermore, teachers can use the "positive, constructive, positive" model when giving feedback, and teach students to distract themselves with a book or task when upset, to limit negative ruminating. Finally, teachers can avoid using exclusion as a punishment, such as sitting at a table by themselves, as well as avoid inclusion as a reward, such as spending time with a trusted adult.

## How & Why of Trauma-Informed Teaching

### *Executive Summary:*

This article summarizes a recent twitter chat hosted by Edutopia, in which teachers discussed topics of trauma and social-emotional learning. From the chat, two distinct but related ideas emerged. Teachers must focus on the individual needs of the student, and the personal bonds and relationships that support them; however, the ability to serve and center the individual student is contingent upon a broader culture and prioritization of trauma-informed practice for all stakeholders, including students, teachers, and staff.

The article briefly discusses three pieces of advice for teachers to meet these two goals. First, personal relationships with students in the classroom above all else. Second, systems and structures for supporting a trauma-informed culture at the



school and even the district level must be in place; teachers cannot be islands in this work. Finally, social and emotional work must start with the adults themselves, to understand the skills they can model for students and to guard against secondary traumatic stress.

## Trauma Aware Schools

### *Executive Summary:*

This article, found on the website for the Treatment and Services Adaptation Center (TSAC), defines and describes trauma-informed schools. According to TSAC, a trauma-informed school is one in which all adults in the school community, including administrators, teachers, staff, parents, and law enforcement, are prepared to recognize and respond to those who have been impacted by traumatic stress.

Specifically, a trauma-informed school employs a tiered approach. Tier 1 services for all students include a healthy, safe, and compassionate school environment, as well as systems and structures for social and emotional learning and development. Tier 2 services include discipline policies that are responsive rather than punitive, such as restorative practices and therapeutic small groups for certain populations of students. Finally, Tier 3 services include one-on-one mental health supports, either provided by school staff or in partnership with outside organizations. The end of the article includes links to further reading for those interested in building a trauma-informed culture in their school with the following topics: impact of trauma on students, trauma services in schools, threat assessment, student behavior, secondary traumatic stress, and bullying and cyberbullying.

## Navigating SEL from Inside Out

### *Executive Summary:*

“In our work as researchers and educators, our team frequently receives questions about the content, implementation, and effectiveness of SEL programs and interventions. While good resources exist to identify evidence-based programs (see CASEL’s guides, 2003, 2013, 2015), there are currently no available resources to help stakeholders look inside these programs to see how they differ from one another and what makes each program unique.

For example, some programs are focused on ‘character traits’ such as honesty, while others focus on skills like understanding emotions and solving problems, or a core theme like identity development. Some programs use discussions as the primary learning activity, while others are movement-based or game-oriented. Some



programs have extensive family engagement or teacher professional development components, while others have none. Some programs are designed to be highly flexible and adaptable to context, while others are scripted and uniform.

These differences matter to schools, families, out-of-school-time organizations, researchers, and policymakers because they signal differences in what gets taught and how. This report was designed to provide information about the specific features that define SEL programs and that may be important to stakeholders who are selecting, recommending, evaluating, or reporting about different SEL programs, or to those who are aligning efforts across multiple schools, programs, or regions.

This report consists of the following:

**Section 1: Background Information on SEL**, including a framework to help stakeholders consider the broader context and developmental issues that should be part of any SEL-building effort.

**Section 2: Recommendations for Adapting SEL for OST settings**, including common challenges and practical steps for selecting and aligning SEL and OST efforts.

**Section 3: Summary Tables for Looking Across Programs**, presented through a set of summary tables that illustrate which programs have the greatest or least emphasis on specific skills/skill areas, instructional strategies, and program components.

**Section 4: Individual Profiles for 25 Programs**, describing in more detail the skill focus, instructional strategies, program components, as well as additional findings and cross-program similarities and differences that emerged from our analyses of each program's curriculum and/or explicit activities.

**Appendices**, including detailed information about the coding system and methodology used to document, compile, and analyze information about each program.

**Accompanying Tools**, including a Quick Reference to help stakeholders identify programs that have the highest emphasis on a particular skill area, instructional strategy, or program component; and worksheets to help stakeholders use information in the Summary Tables and Program Profiles to make informed decisions about program selection, based on their unique settings and needs or objectives.”

## Four Core Priorities for Trauma-Informed Distance Learning

### Executive Summary:

This article, posted on KQED's Mind/Shift blog, summarizes the key points from a webinar on trauma-informed teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic by Alex Shevrin



Venet, a college professor and consultant who facilitates professional development on implementing trauma-informed practices in schools. In the spring of 2020 alone, 1,200 teachers and educators attended her webinars, evidence that many are looking for ways to weave trauma-informed practices into their distance teaching.

Venet stresses four key priorities for trauma-informed distance teaching. First, predictability is important. For example, one teacher posts a check-in video for her students at the same time every day. Others transfer predictable class practices into the distance learning framework; one teacher always started her morning meeting with roses and thorns, and so she continues this practice through video chat. Flexibility is another key priority. Some schools have achieved this by avoiding mandatory login times, and understanding that different children need different things at this time. Next, personal connection is crucial. Structures for both teacher to student and student to student connection should be considered along with resources for parents to support connections within the family unit. Empowerment is Venet's final key priority. She encourages schools to avoid power struggles around uniform or dress code compliance in video chats, and assigning relevant and empowering tasks and assignments rather than mindless worksheets.

### **Trauma-Informed Practices Through Coronavirus**

#### *Executive Summary:*

This article, posted on the Teaching Tolerance website, is written in a question and answer format. The questions were summarized from the Teaching Tolerance community of educators and answered by members of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN).

The article summarizes a basic understanding of trauma for educators, highlighting key components such as a sense of safety, connectedness, and hope, and offering some simple strategies for educators to help foster these conditions with their students. Experts from the NCTSN recommend that right now, educators establish a routine for students and maintain predictable communication, as well as prioritize relationships and wellbeing first, before assignment and behavioral compliance. Strategies include using relational rituals before providing academic feedback and encouraging mindfulness and self-awareness by offering assignments for movement and self-reflection. Additionally, assignments should be designed to offer opportunities to affirm students' competence and expose them to stories of hope, with a particular consideration for any students who may be at risk because of mental health challenges or personal life experiences such as family illness or economic hardship.



Finally, the article includes strategies for educators who are experiencing high levels of stress and trauma themselves, as well as additional resources for learning more about trauma-informed practices.

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