



CENTER FOR MENTAL HEALTH AMERICA
SCHOOL BEHAVIORAL HEALTH OF GREATER HOUSTON

Are the Kids Alright? Trauma

Educator, parent and student toolkits, PSAs and more at:

[www.mhahouston.org/
emotional-backpack-project](http://www.mhahouston.org/emotional-backpack-project)

PROMOTING
CHILDREN'S
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
THROUGH SYSTEMS CHANGE

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SCHOOL BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Introductions

- Your Name
 - What would you like to learn today that you don't already know?
- OR**
- What do you see that worries you?



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Roadmap for Today



Prevalence
Trauma and trauma-informed classrooms
Plan of Action

The Stats



How many youth, by age 18, will have experienced at least one traumatic event in their lifetime?

Approximately 2/3



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Scenario

“Ashley just transferred into my 5th grade classroom after being placed in foster care. I wanted to make her feel welcome. I moved to put my hand lightly on her shoulder when I was explaining an assignment & she slapped my hand away. Then she stared at me defiantly.”

Adapted from Susan Barrett and Lucille Eber, Midwest PBIS Network and National PBIS TA Center



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Teacher Response #1

“Why she just decided to slap me is beyond me. I was trying to be helpful & welcoming. Her reaction was totally out of proportion to the situation. Physical aggression simply cannot be tolerated or excused. She needed to learn that right away. There had to be immediate & significant consequences if I’m to maintain order in my classroom. When I tried to remove Ashley to the office, she just lost it. Instead of complying, she chose to struggle & started kicking me. I don’t like to see students suspended from school, but Ashley needs to learn that she cannot behave that way in school.”



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What is Trauma?

Trauma refers to extreme or chronic stress that overwhelms a person's ability to cope & results in feeling vulnerable, helpless & afraid



What is Trauma?

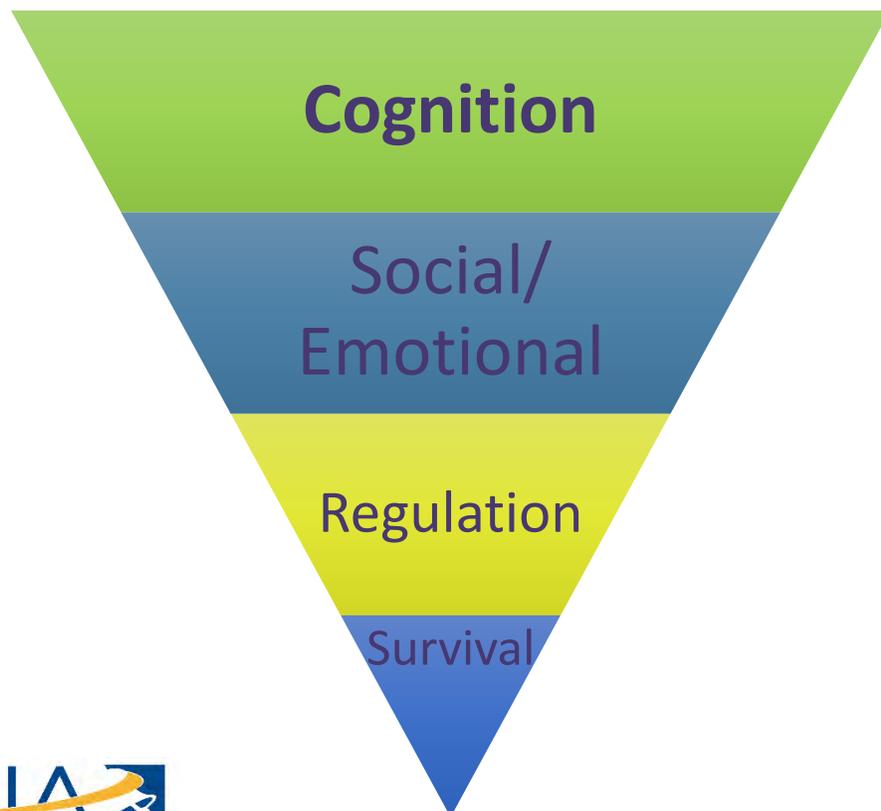


- Can result from one event or a series of events
- Event(s) may be witnessed or experienced directly
- Experience is subjective
- Often interferes with relationships; self regulation; & fundamental beliefs about oneself, others & one's place in the world

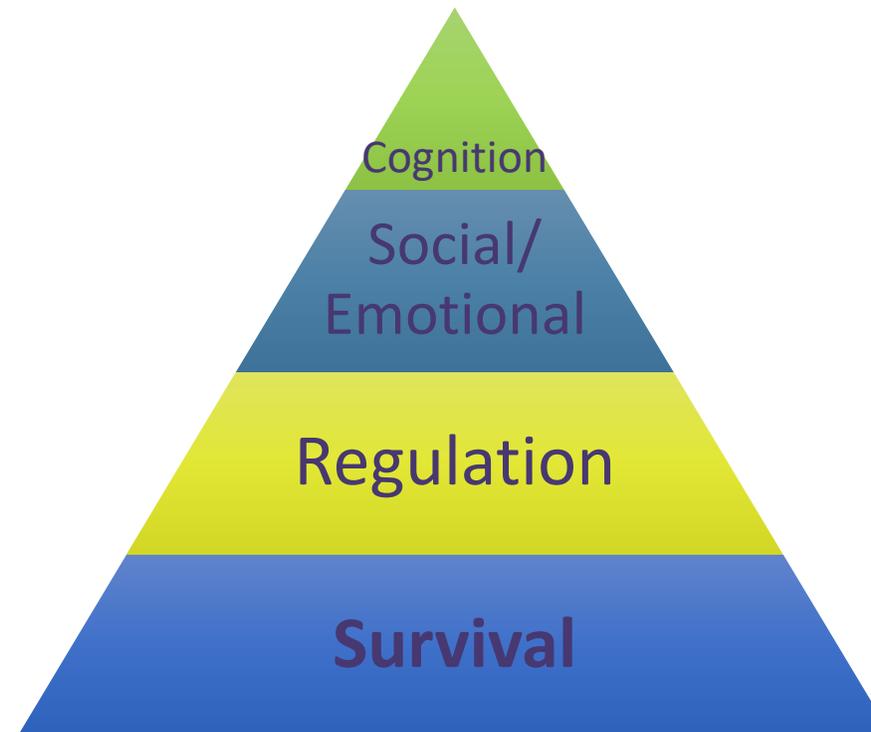


Trauma & Brain Development

Typical Development



Developmental Trauma



Adapted from Holt & Jordan, Ohio Dept. of Education

Higher Baseline State of Arousal

- These students may be in a persistent physiological state of alarm
 - constant “yellow alert”
- Likely to be more reactive than peers, as external stressors are introduced (e.g., complicated task at school, disagreement with a peer)
 - Fight, flight, freeze
- Over-reading possibility of threat leads to lower brain functioning & impulsive acts
 - e.g., striking out physically or verbally, leaving the classroom, shutting down



Student views his/her actions as defensive & justified

Adapted from Chris Dunning



Misreading Cues

Young children impacted by trauma spend much time in a low-level state of fear learning to read adults' non-verbal cues to keep themselves safe

- Their safety depends upon knowing when an adult becomes a “dangerous bear”

Student may not interpret innocent or neutral looks, actions, & touches from others at school as benign

- Difficult for student to re-learn these cues as meaning different things in different environments



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Key Triggers for Students Impacted by Trauma

- Lack of personal power or control
- Unexpected change
- Feeling threatened or attacked
- Feeling vulnerable or frightened
- Feeling shame
- Positive feelings or intimacy



Triggers can be internal and/or external

Trauma Effects Learning



Adversely affects students' ability to ...

- Acquire language & communication skills
- Understand cause & effect
- Take another person's perspective
- Attend to classroom instruction
- Regulate emotions
- Engage the curriculum
- Utilize executive functions
 - Make plans
 - Organize work
 - Follow classroom rules

Trauma Affects School Performance



- Lower scores on standardized achievement tests
- Substantial decrements in IQ, reading achievement & language
- 2.5x more likely to be retained
- Suspended & expelled more often

Daniel & Zarling (2012)

How do we see these students?

Typical

- Anger management problems
- May have ADHD
- *Choosing* to act out & disrupt classroom (e.g., disrespectful or manipulative)
- Uncontrollable, destructive
- Non-responsive

Typical response

Student needs consequences to correct behavior or maybe an ADHD evaluation

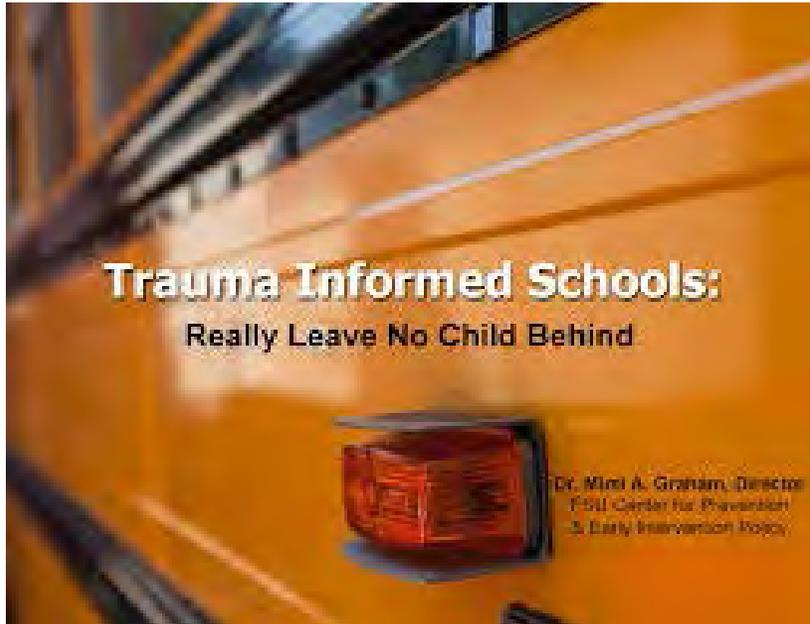
Trauma-informed

- Maladaptive responses
- Seeking to get needs met
- Difficulty regulating emotions
- Lacking necessary skills
- Negative view of world (e.g., adults cannot be trusted)
- Trauma response was triggered

Trauma-informed response

Student needs to learn skills to self-regulate

Trauma-sensitive Schools



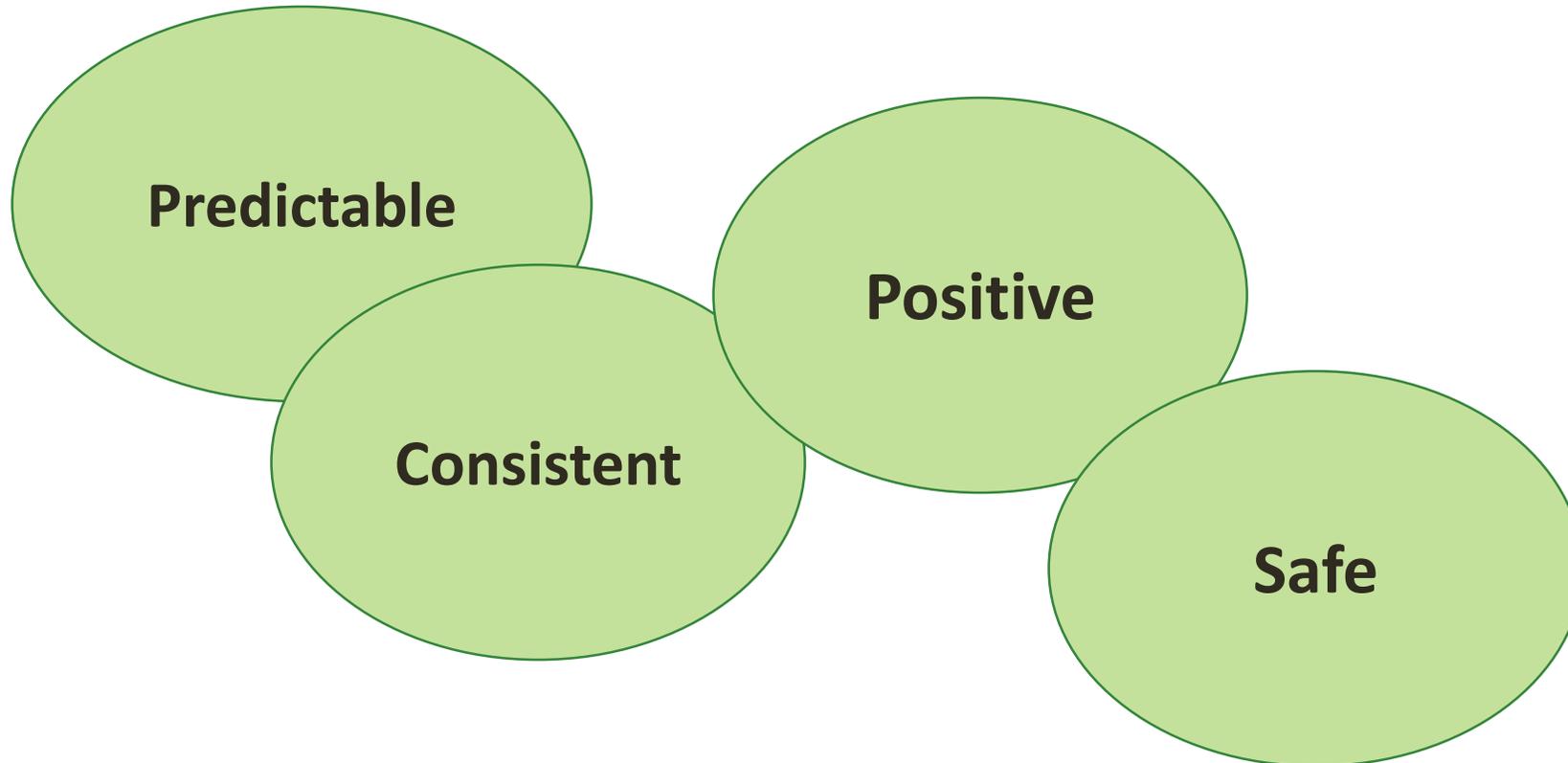
- Recognize the prevalence & impact of traumatic occurrence in students' lives
- Create a flexible framework that provides universal supports, is sensitive to the unique needs of students & is mindful of avoiding re-traumatization.

Adapted from *Helping Traumatized Children Learn*



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Trauma-Informed Schools



Trauma-Informed Classroom Strategies

1. Always give a 3-5 minute warning before switching activities, lining up, etc.

Example: Jayden is in trouble almost everyday because he doesn't line up when asked, always forgets his stuff, and gets flustered when asked to do something quickly. Giving a warning before any type of transition will allow Jayden to mentally prepare himself and be ready when it is time to move.

2. Pay attention to patterns. Take notes each time a child blows up, shuts down, etc., and you will likely determine the trigger. You can then change how you redirect that student.

Example: Bethany frequently talks back, gets aggressive and has to be removed from the class. You start keeping track of each time this happens and realize that it is always after you have called Bethany out in front of the whole class for misbehaving. You talk to Bethany and ask her what would be better for her, and you decide together that instead of calling her out, you will move to her and stand next to her as a sign to redirect her behavior.

Trauma-Informed Classroom Strategies

3. Instead of assuming a student is choosing to do or not do something, ask questions to get to the bottom of why they made that decision.

Example: Jackson is often in trouble for not doing his homework and doesn't seem to care. One day, you decide to ask him if there is something prohibiting him from doing his work, and you find out that he works at night to support his family and then takes care of his siblings when he gets home. You are able to develop a schedule with him so that he can complete his homework in a manner that fits with his additional obligations.

4. Give students the opportunity to feel in control as much as possible and make decisions.

Example: Ana often snaps back at you when you tell her to do something, and then refuses to do it. Instead of always telling her what to do, you try and give her small choices. Before a test, you ask her if she would like to sit in her desk or at the table at the back of the room. She doesn't have a choice on whether she takes the test, but giving her the choice of where to sit may help her relax and feel in more control.



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Teacher Response #2

Planning

What can I do to provide a trauma-sensitive classroom?

Action 1: _____

Action 2: _____





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Mental health is inextricably linked to academic achievement



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