Trauma Informed Approaches in Schools: Universal Practices to Address Mental Health

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Four Agreements of a Courageous Conversation

- Stay Engaged
- Speak your truth
- Experience discomfort
- Expect and accept non-closure

(Singelton & Linton, 2006)

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Trauma Definition: Act 18 of 2019

1. Exposure to an event, series of events or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotional harmful or threatening.

2. Lasting adverse effects

3. Creates significant difficulty in cognitive functioning and physical, social, emotional, mental or spiritual well-being.

Trauma-Informed Care Values

- Safety
- Trustworthiness
- Collaboration & Mutuality
- Empowerment, Choice & Voice
- Cultural Sensitivity

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WELCOME

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Physiological Safety

"Anything that has an impact on kids' bodies can ultimately translate to the emotional climate of the classroom."
- Bluestein

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Academic Safety

Academic safety is about the adult's willingness to stimulate and encourage students by accepting them where they are without ridicule.

"Real education should consist of drawing the goodness and the best out of our own students."
- Cesar Chavez

Emotional Safety

Emotional safety is being able to share feelings both positive and negative in an atmosphere of trust without repercussions.

[PA Career Ready Skills](#)

Social safety is about belonging and one's interpersonal competence.

Behavioral Safety

- Behavioral safety exists when the relationship between the student and adult is not power-based

- Safe and acceptable behaviors are taught

- Punishment is not used to change behaviors

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Prevalence and Impact of ACEs

Early Adversity has Lasting Impacts
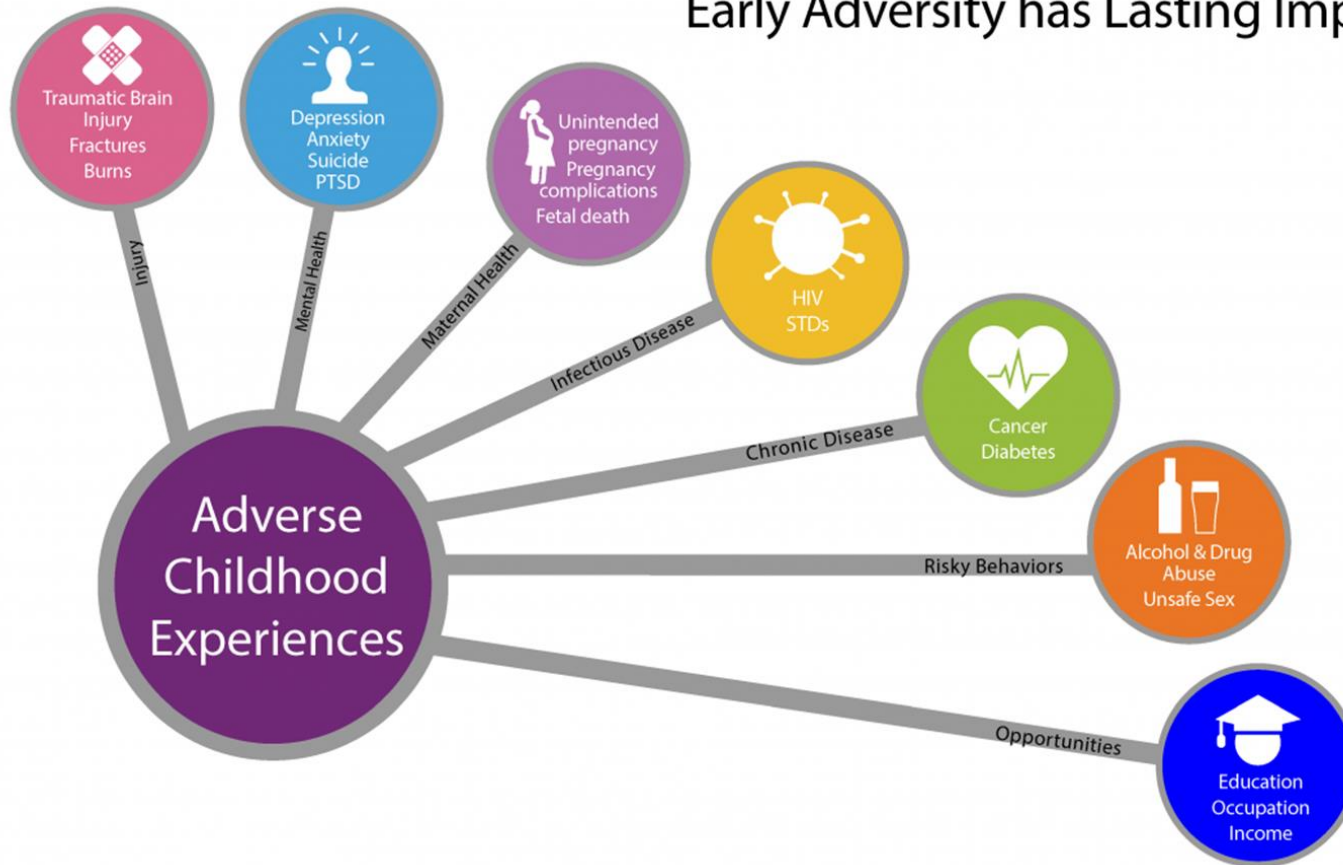
Prevalence of ACEs

Figure 1: Prevalence (%) Estimates (N=5,705) of Individual ACEs in Pennsylvania, 2016

Prevalence of Individual ACEs, 2016

Category	Prevalence (%)
Emotional Abuse	35
Separated or Divorced	25
Alcohol Abuse	23
Mental Illness	19
Witnessed Domestic Violence	16
Physical Abuse	16
Drug Abuse	11
Touched by Someone 5+ Years Older	10
Incarcerated Household Member	8
Forced to Touch Someone 5+ Years Older	7
Forced Into Sex with Someone 5+ Years Older	4

Abuse
Household Dysfunction

Prevelance (%)
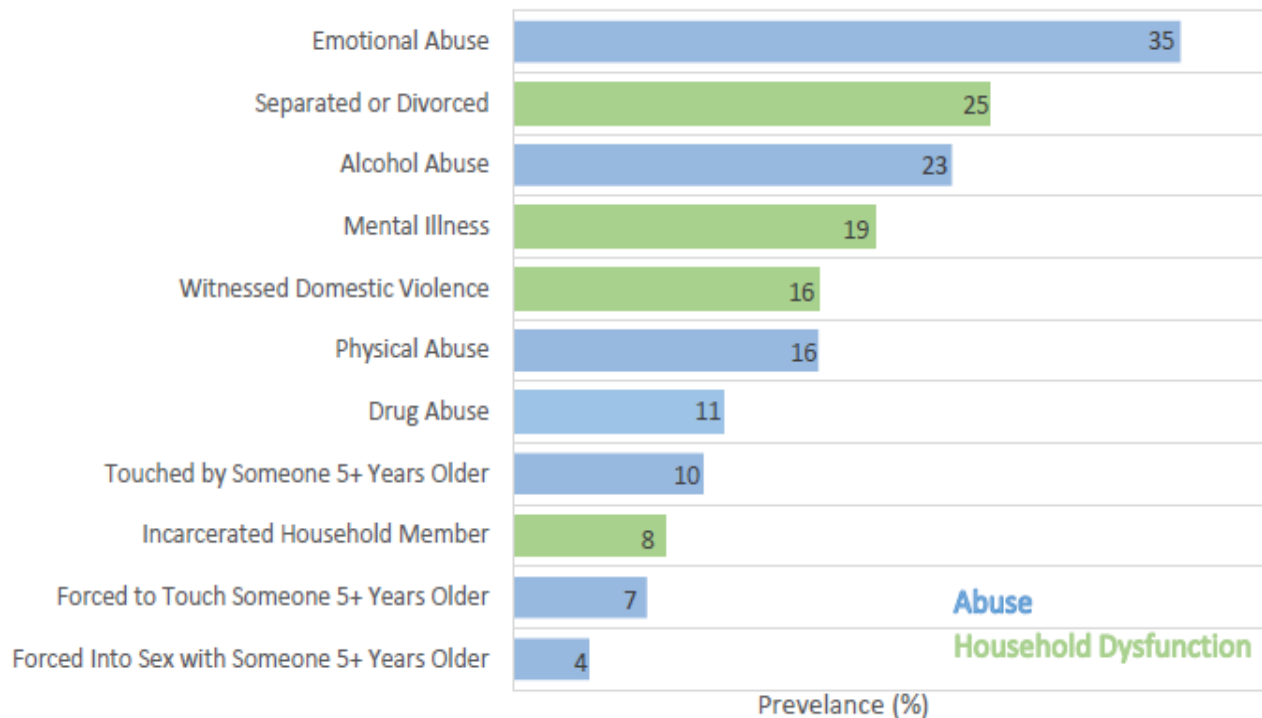
ACE Score

Percentage of Respondents Reporting ACEs.
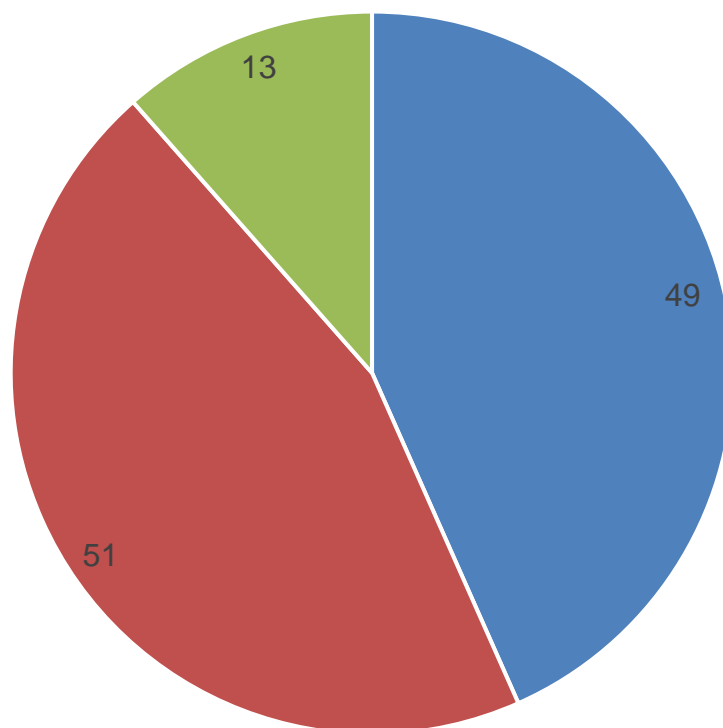
Legend:
- Zero ACEs
- 1 or more ACE
- 4 or more ACEs

Pie chart values: 49, 51, 13

Community Level Adversity

Witness Violence – 40.5%	**How often, if ever, did you see or hear someone being beat up, stabbed, or shot in real life?**
Felt Discrimination – 34.5%	While you were growing up…How often did you feel that you were treated badly or unfairly because of your race or ethnicity?
Adverse Neighborhood Experience – 27.3%	Did you fell safe in your neighborhood? Did you feel people in your neighborhood looked out for each other, stood up for each other, and could be trusted?
Bullied – 7.9%	How often were you bullied by a peer or classmate?
Lived in Foster Care- 2.5%	Were you ever in foster care?

Philadelphia ACEs Study

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The Pair of ACEs

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Maternal Depression

Physical & Emotional Neglect

Emotional & Sexual Abuse

Divorce

Mental Illness

Substance Abuse

Incarceration

Domestic Violence

Homelessness

Adverse Community Environments

Poverty

Violence

Discrimination

Poor Housing Quality & Affordability

Community Disruption

Lack of Opportunity, Economic Mobility & Social Capital
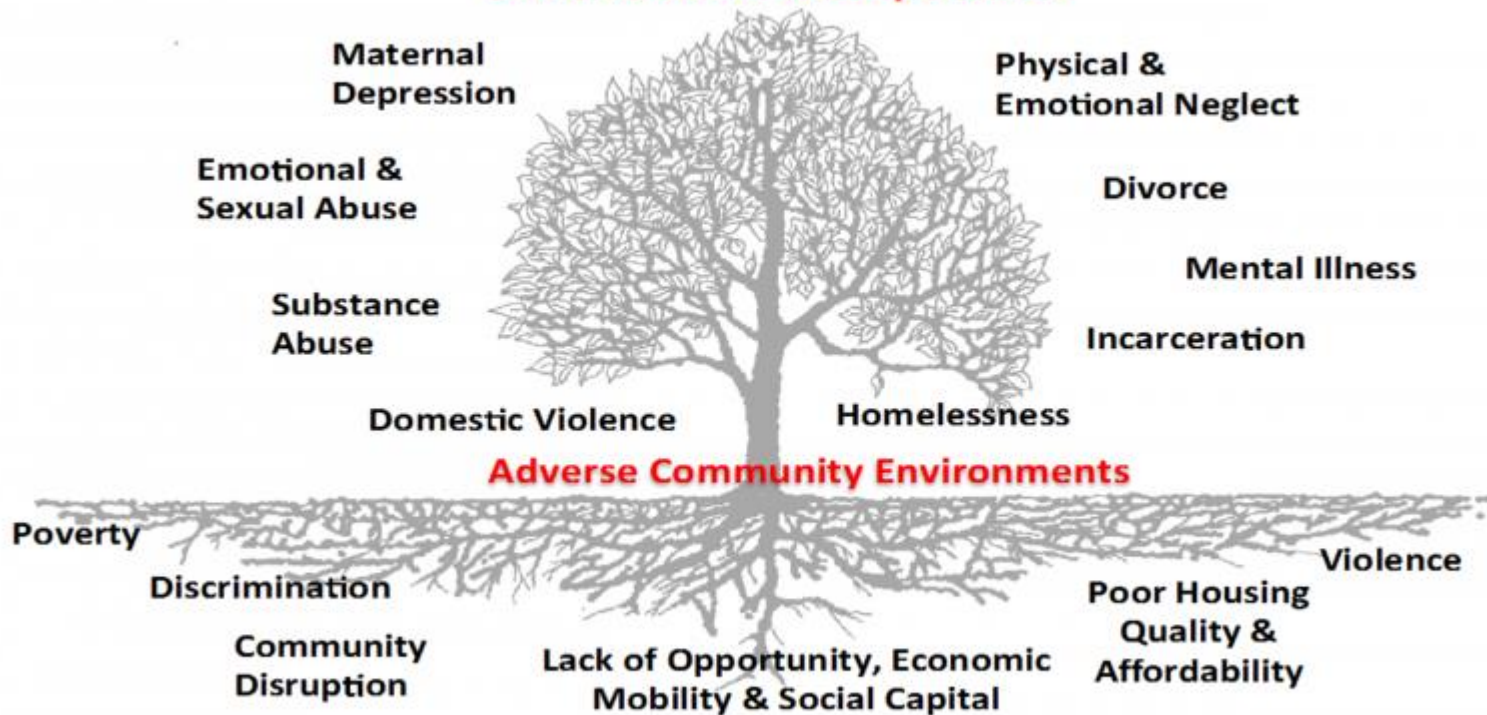
Ellis, W., Dietz, W. (2017) A New Framework for Addressing Adverse Childhood and Community Experiences: The Building Community Resilience (BCR) Model. Academic Pediatrics. 17 (2017) pp. S86-S93. DOI information: 10.1016/j.acap.2016.12.011

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ACEs in the Classroom

In the past 12 months…	2015	2017	2019
Risk Factors			
Family History of Antisocial Behavior	32.9%	32.8%	30.9%
Family Conflict	35.3%	34.8%	34.0%
Parental Attitudes Favorable Toward Drug Use	31.6%	32.8%	32.8%
Poor Family Management	37.3%	36.0%	35.4%
Protective Factors			
Family Attachment	63.2%	62.9%	62.3%
Rewards for Prosocial Involvement	53.9%	51.9%	48.1%

PCCD: PAYS

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ACEs and School Performance

- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Depression
- Asthma
- Kidney disease
- Stroke
- Coronary heart disease
- Cancer

- Diabetes
- Overweight/obesity
- Heavy drinking
- Smoking
- Unemployment
- Suicide attempts
- High-risk sexual behavior

CDC: ACE Health Outcomes

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Life Span

Early Death

Disease, disability, and social problems

Adoption of health-risk behaviors

Social, emotional, & cognitive impairment

What can educators do?

Disrupted neurodevelopment

Adverse childhood experiences

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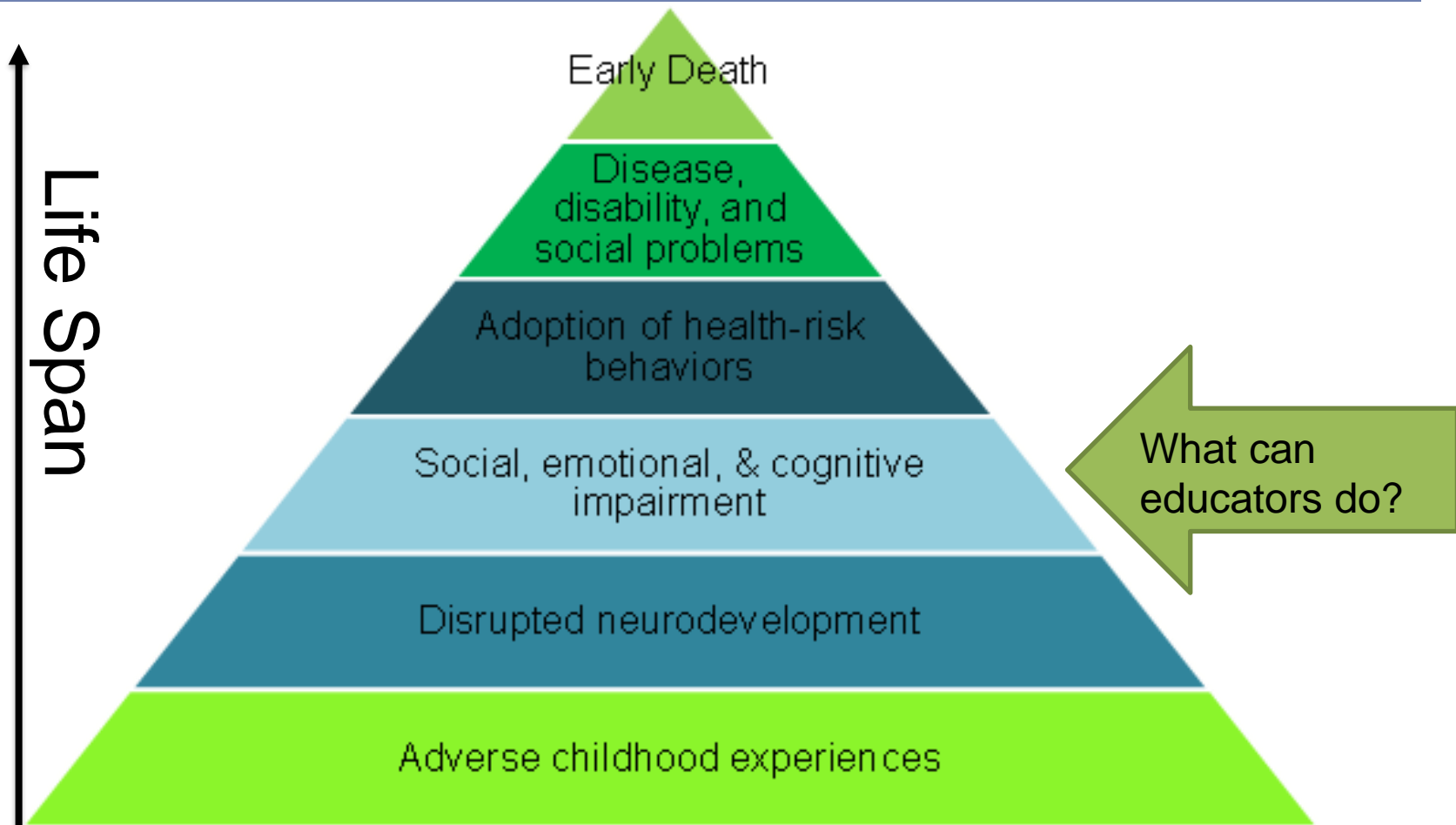
Impact of Trauma

- Trauma exposure vs. trauma impact
- Universal precautions: building positive learning environments

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How Do We Respond to Stress?

Neocortex

"Thinking brain"

Limbic System

"Emotional brain"

Brainstem

(Guarino, K. & Chagnon, E. 2018)

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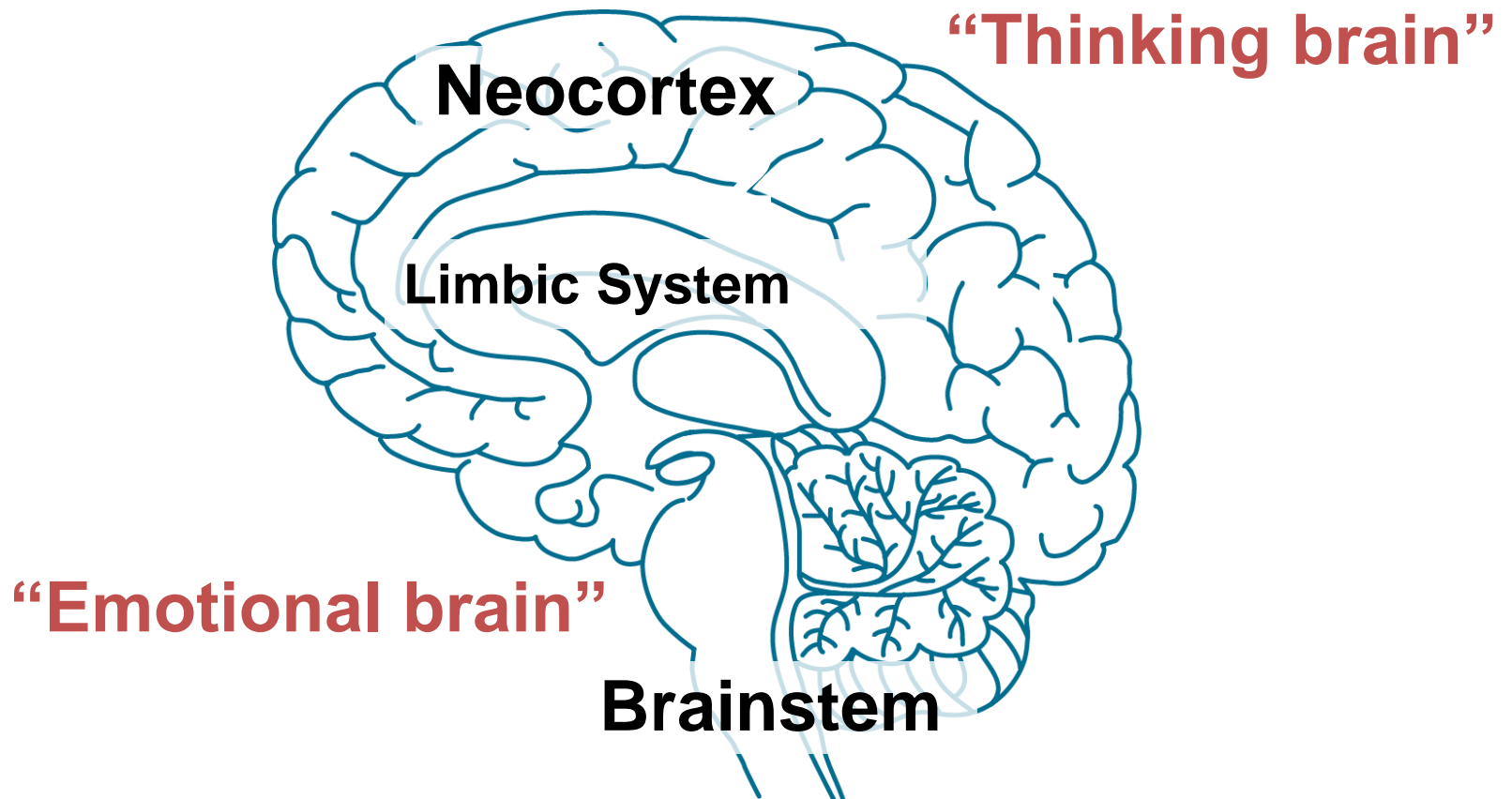
The Stress Response System

1. The amygdala senses threat and sets off the alarm.
2. Thinking brain assesses the situation.
3. Thinking brain goes off-line. Emotional brain activates fight or flight response.
4. Thinking brain helps shut off the alarm and helps us to calm down.
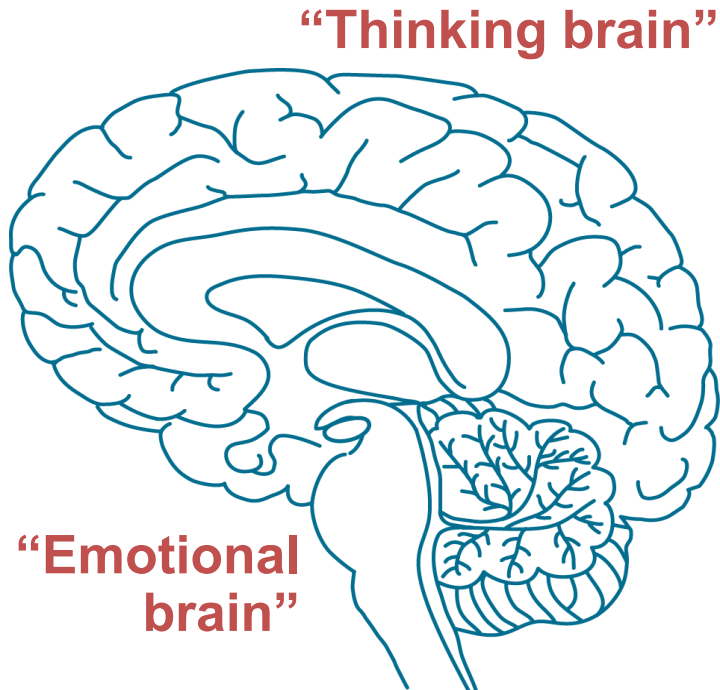
"Thinking brain"

"Emotional brain"

(Guarino, K. & Chagnon, E. 2018)

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The Stress Response System

- An experience becomes TRAUMATIC when it overwhelms our system for responding to stress.

- The emotional brain continues to sound the alarm and send messages to fight or flee, even after the threat has passed.

"Thinking brain"

"Emotional brain"

(Guarino, K. & Chagnon, E. 2018)

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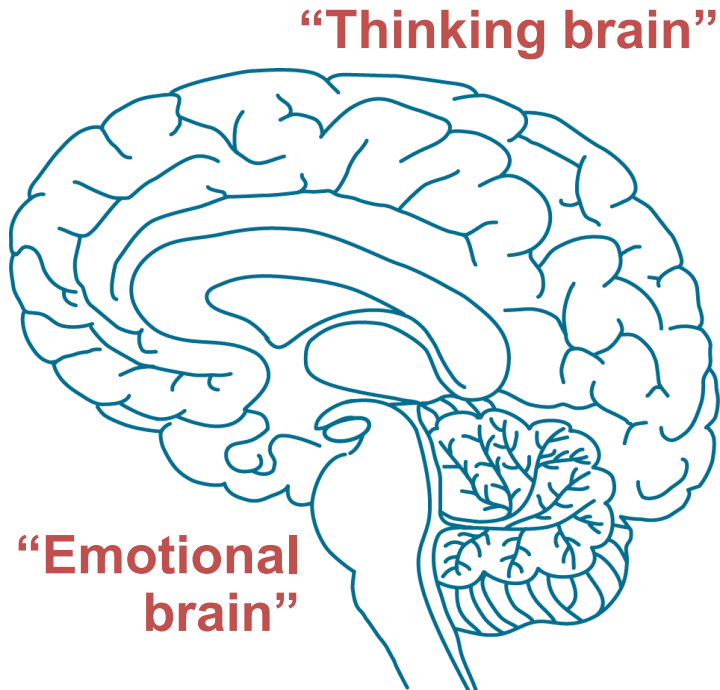
Trauma & Brain Development

Reptilian Brain ●
Limbic System ●
Neocortex ●

Typical Development

Cognition
Social/Emotional
Regulation
Survival

Developmental Trauma

Cognition
Social/Emotional
Regulation
Survival
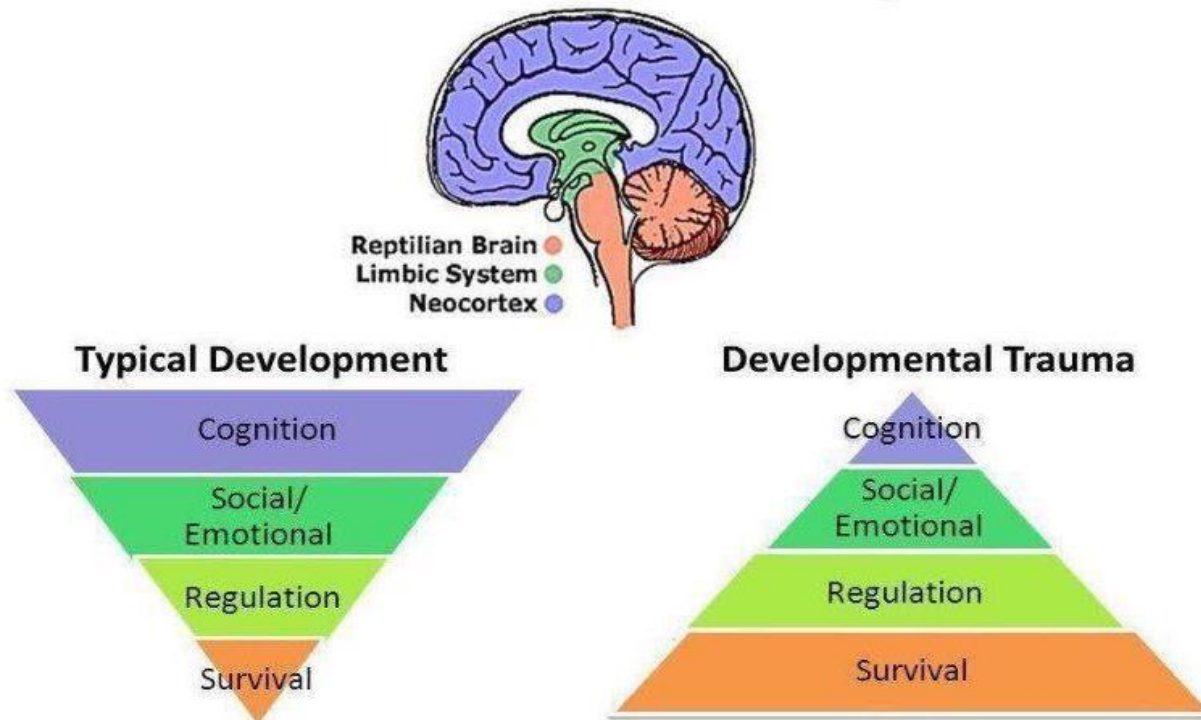
Adapted from Holt & Jordan, Ohio Dept. of Education

Common Responses to Trauma

School-Age Children

- Fear, anxiety, worry

- Feelings of guilt, shame, and self-blame

- Headaches, stomachaches

- Nightmares, disrupted sleep

- Difficulty concentrating

- Angry outbursts, aggression, and withdrawal

- Over- or under-reactions to situations in the environment (e.g., sudden movements, loud noises, physical contact)

(Guarino, K. & Chagnon, E. 2018)

Common Responses to Trauma

Adolescents

- Fear, anxiety, worry

- Concerns about how others will view them after the event

- Shame, guilt, responsibility, embarrassment

- Withdrawal from family, peers, activities

- Avoid reminders of the event

- More intense mood swings

- Decline in school performance

- Increase in risk-taking behaviors (e.g., alcohol/drug use, sexual behaviors, fights, self-harm)

(Guarino, K. & Chagnon, E. 2018)

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What Does This Mean for Schools?

Impact of Trauma on Students, Parents, Staff and Schools |
Trauma-Sensitive Schools: A Universal Response

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What is a Trauma-Informed Approach?

1. Includes a school-wide approach to education and a classroom-based approach to student learning
2. Recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma
3. Responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, professional learning, procedures and practices
4. Purposes of recognizing the presence and onset of trauma, resisting the reoccurrence of trauma and promoting resiliency tailored to a school entity's culture, climate and demographics and the community as a whole.

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Impact of Trauma on Students

- Difficulty paying attention and learning
- More time out of the classroom
- Increased isolation
- School absences
- More suspensions or expulsions
- Higher referral rates to special education
- Poor test scores and an increased risk of failing grades

Impact of Trauma on Parents/Guardians

- Difficulty managing emotions and controlling behaviors when interacting with school staff
- Difficulty forming relationships
- Increased risk for substance abuse, depression, and PTSD that negatively impact parenting
- Trouble managing stress related to their child's difficult behaviors
- Feelings of embarrassment, shame, fear, or guilt about their child's behaviors or needs
- Difficulty helping their children cope

Impact of Trauma on Staff

- Increased anxiety
- Reduced energy and focus
- Trouble regulating emotions
- Difficulty managing responses to students and parents
- Diminished capacity to maintain positive teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships
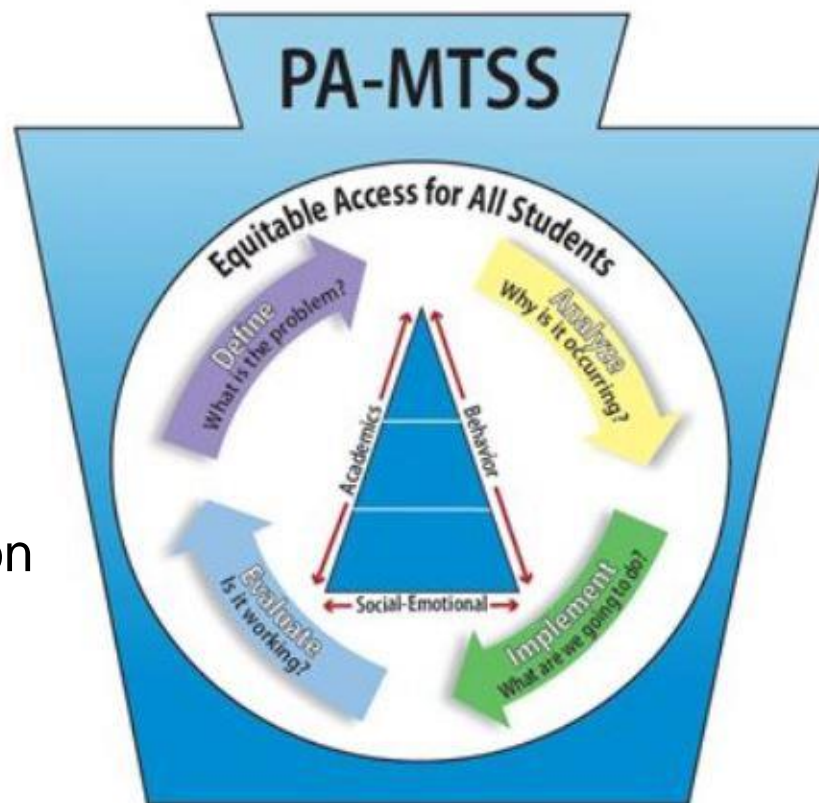- Poor attendance or work performance

Impact Of Trauma On Schools

- Students more likely to escalate
- Adults more reactive, controlling, and punitive
- Negative impact on school safety and culture
- Increased risk for harm
- Decrease in academic achievement

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MTSS as a Guiding Framework

Key Areas:
Academics
Assessment and screening
Behavioral supports
Cognitive skills
Community partnerships
Crisis prevention and response
Educator capacity
Emotional and physiological regulation
Environment, culture, climate
Leadership
Parent and caregiver involvement
Policies
Relationships
Social-emotional learning

PA-MTSS

Equitable Access for All Students

Define
What is the problem?

Analyze
Why is it occurring?

Implement
What are we going to do?

Evaluate
Is it working?

Academics
Behavior
Social-Emotional

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Guiding Questions for Policy and Procedures
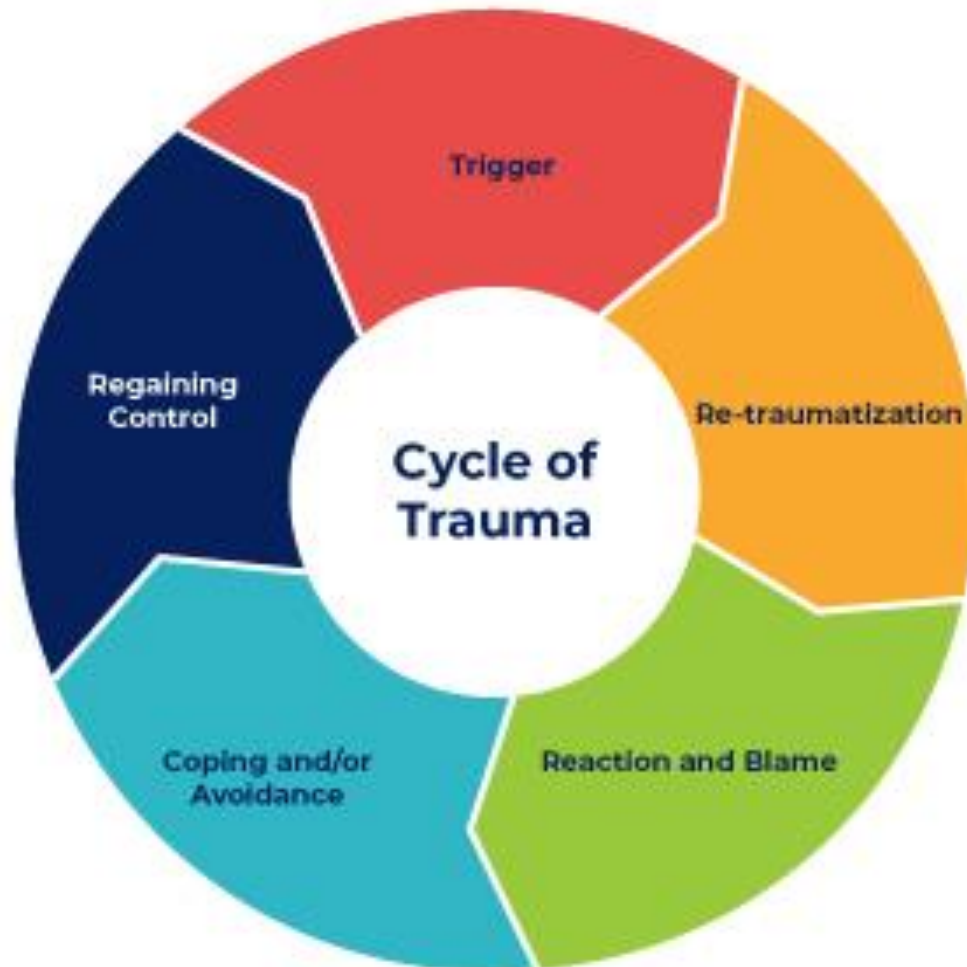
Discipline

Communication

Safety

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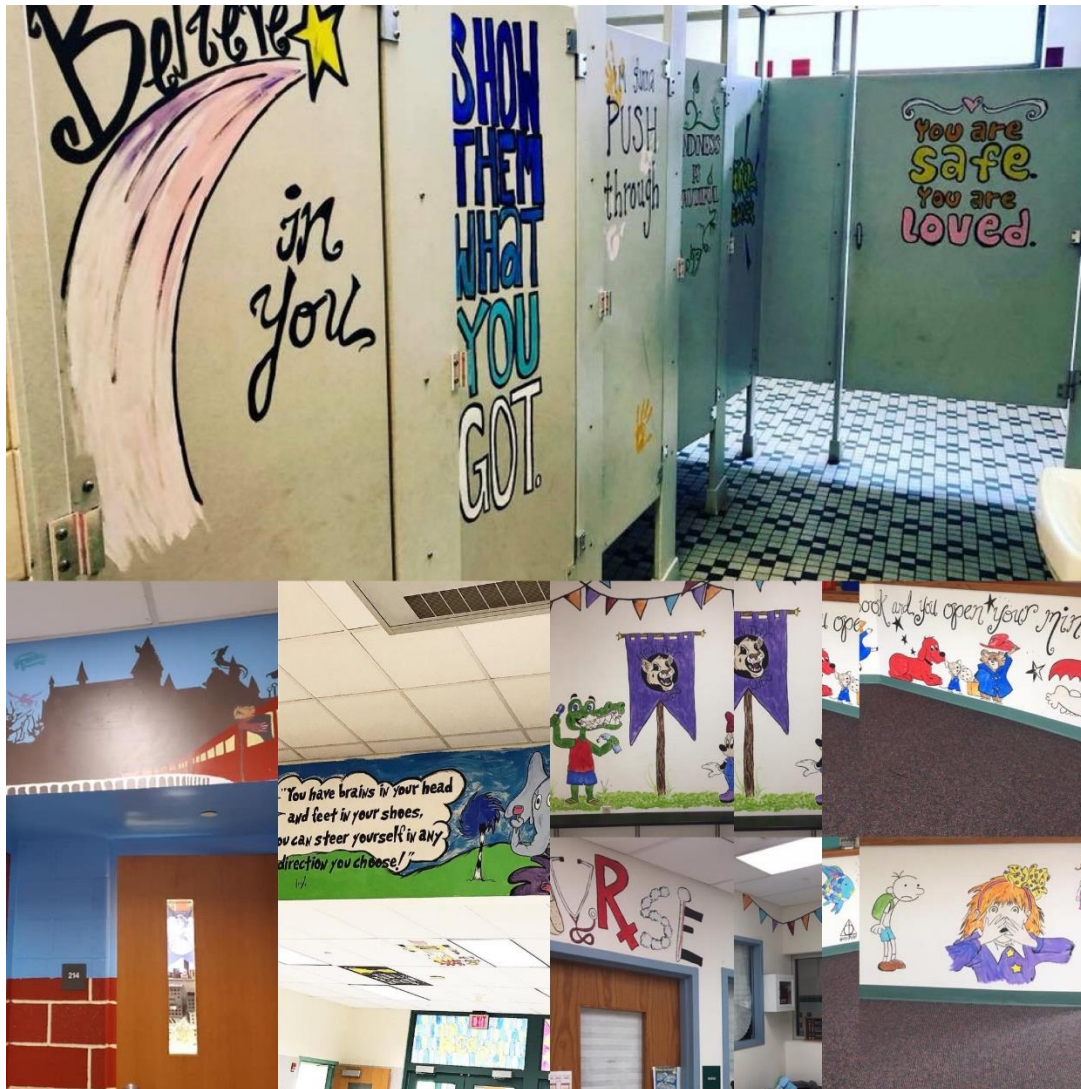
Positive Learning Environment

Building Blocks of Positive Learning Environments

Engagement
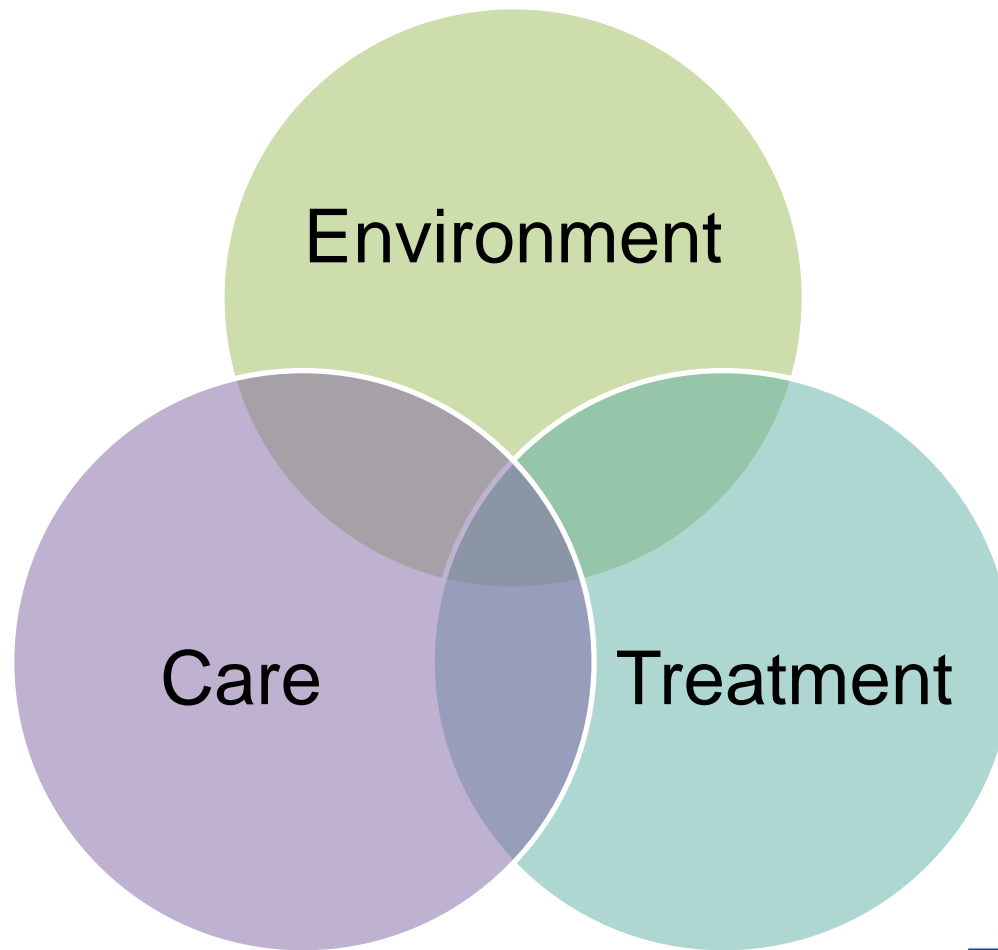- Relationships
- Respect for Diversity
- School Participation

Safety
- Emotional Safety
- Physical Safety
- Substance Use

Environment
- Physical Environment
- Academic Environment
- Wellness
- Disciplinary Environment

National School Mental Health Curriculum, 2018

Elements of Trauma-Informed Practice

Tim Grove, Saint A, 2015

Trauma-Informed Physical School Environment

Supports all students impacted by trauma and toxic stress by:

- Designing all physical aspects of the school to set a tone for positive learning environments by being physically welcoming, comfortable, and safe
- Including the signage and messaging, visual look of all areas
- Reminding all about the importance of each member of the community and how to interact

Resources

- [PDE: Equitable Practices Hub](#)
- [PDE: Accelerated Learning Through an Integrated System of Support](#)
- [PDE: Empowerment Through Common Language in Pennsylvania: A Dictionary of Terms Related to Trauma-Informed Approaches in Schools](#)
- [Social and Emotional Wellness Resources for Families](#)
- [PDE– SEL Best Practice Resources](#)
- [PDE Safe Schools Website](#)

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- Pennsylvania Department of Education (2020). Equitable Practices Hub. https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/equityandinclusion/EPH/Pages/default.aspx

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For more information on resources or education related to Trauma-Informed Approaches please visit PDE's website at www.education.pa.gov.

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