

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

Dr. Dana Milakovic

September 15, 2021

# ▶ Four Agreements of a Courageous Conversation

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

## ➤ 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



# ➤ Trauma-Informed Care Values

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



# ▶ Building Safety

**WELCOME**

# Physiological Safety

“Anything that has an impact on kids’ bodies can ultimately translate to the emotional climate of the classroom.”

- Bluestein



# 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](#)

**Career Ready Skills**  
Educating for Employability

The Pennsylvania Career Ready Skills (PA CRS) are aligned to Pennsylvania's Career Education and Work (CEW) Standards and are consistent with the intent of the Future Ready PA Index. The PA CRS are learning progressions to support the development of student competence in the following three domains: self-awareness and self-management, establishing and maintaining relationships, and social problem solving-skills. These domains clarify the types of employability skills a well-prepared workforce needs to demonstrate.

	<b>Self-Awareness and Self-Management</b> The ability to accurately recognize and regulate one's emotions and thoughts in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals.
	<b>Establishing and Maintaining Relationships</b> The ability to establish and maintain healthy, mutually rewarding relationships with diverse individuals. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed.
	<b>Social Problem Solving-Skills</b> The ability to demonstrate empathy and understand the perspective of others from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on a realistic evaluation of the consequences of various actions, including the well-being of self and others.

Source: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (casel.org)

**pennsylvania**  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

333 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17126  
[education.pa.gov](http://education.pa.gov)

PADepartmentofEducation  
 PADeptofEd  
 PADeptOfEd

# Social Safety

## Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging in Pennsylvania:

### Perceptions and Clarity

Educational communities are seeking clarity around the purpose, intention, and need for equity, inclusion, and belonging in educational spaces. This information is provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Education to help address perceptions and offer clarity on equitable practices in education.

#### ① Equity

**Equity** in education is defined as every student having access to the resources and rigor they need at the right moment in their education across race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, family background and/or family income. (adapted from [www.ccsso.org](http://www.ccsso.org))

#### ② Inclusion

**Inclusion** is defined as engagement within a community where the equal worth and inherent dignity of each person is honored. An inclusive community promotes and sustains a sense of belonging. (adapted from Cobb & Krownapple, 2019)

#### ③ Belonging

**Belonging** is defined as experiencing appreciation, validation, acceptance, and fair treatment within an environment. (adapted from Cobb & Krownapple, 2019)



Perception	Clarity
Equity, inclusion, and belonging is only for urban educational spaces with diverse populations.	Equity, inclusion, and belonging helps create access, opportunity, and a healthy learning environment for ALL learners, regardless of demographic (urban, rural, suburban). Educational communities include people of varying lived experiences who have diverse needs and a variety of strengths.
Equity, inclusion, and belonging is another way of promoting Critical Race Theory.	Critical Race Theory is not part of or taught in any state required curriculum. Equity, inclusion, and belonging in education helps create spaces for ALL learners and staff to be their authentic selves. Discussions about cultures and identities in education are important to ensure equitable access for ALL learners.
Equity, inclusion, and belonging is only about funding.	Equitable funding is an important consideration to ensure fair access and opportunity for students across Pennsylvania. Funding is one part of the process to create healthy learning environments - but it cannot shift systems in isolation.
Equity, inclusion, and belonging suggests that I am not a good person or that my education system is bad.	It is important to understand who we are as we interact with others. Self-Awareness, one of the <a href="#">PDE equity pillars of practice</a> , invites people to explore and reflect upon their own thoughts, ideas, and beliefs. Self-awareness supports how to engage in healthy relationships with people of diverse backgrounds—but it is not intended to encourage guilt, shame, or hopelessness. Discussing equity, inclusion, and belonging may be uncomfortable, however, it is important to ensure we can engage with individuals, families, and communities who are different from us.
Equity, inclusion, and belonging does not allow for diverse viewpoints.	Diverse viewpoints are an important part of our democracy and help our nation thrive. Equity, inclusion, and belonging help create the conditions for civil dialogues to occur. Equity in voice, inclusion of different perspectives, and honoring the lived experiences of others is a vital part of preparing youth for global citizenship, as well as a global workforce and marketplace.

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



# ▶ Trauma-Informed Care Values

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





# ▶ Trauma-Informed Care Values

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



# ▶ Trauma-Informed Care Values

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



# ➤ Trauma-Informed Care Values

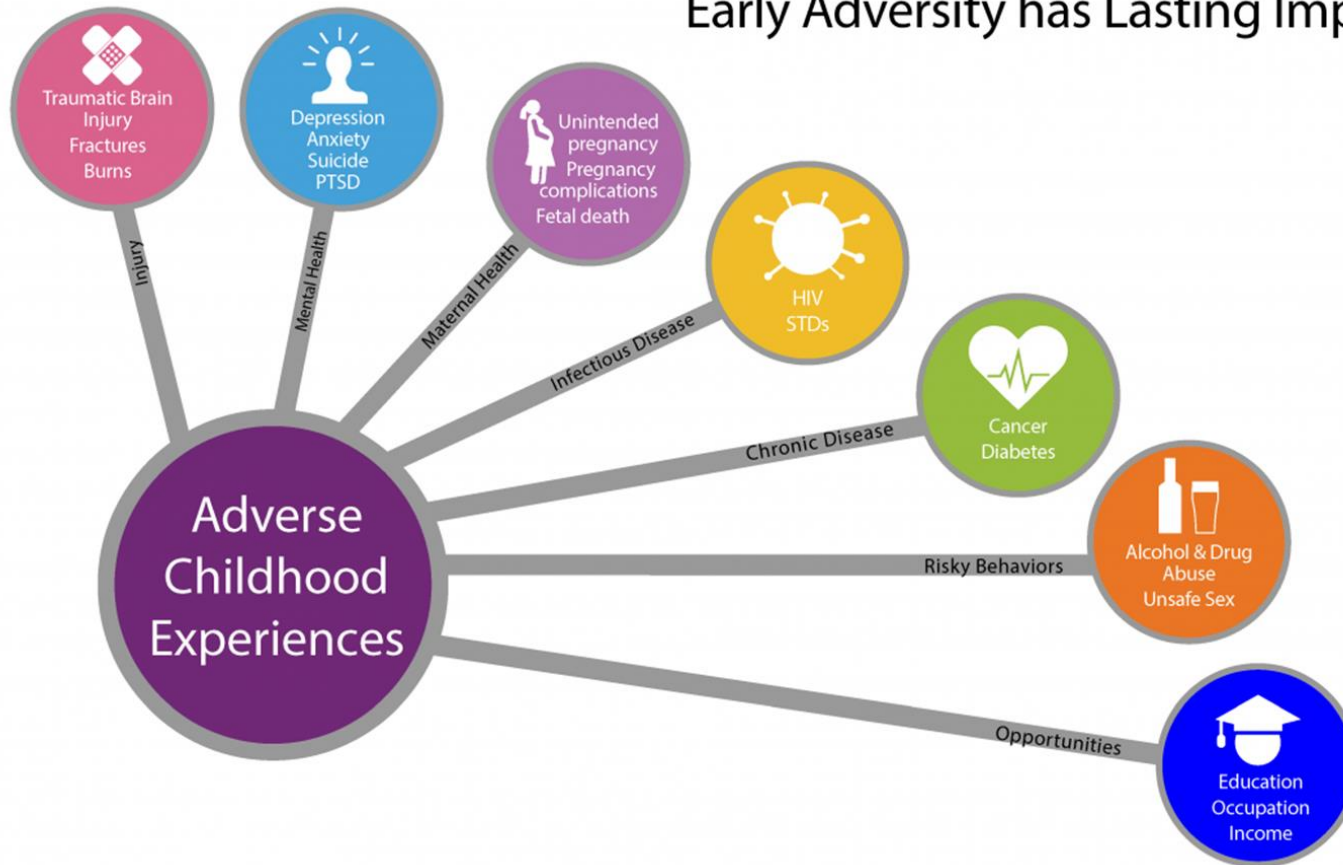
- Safety
- Trustworthiness
- Collaboration & Mutuality
- Empowerment, Choice & Voice
- **Cultural Sensitivity**



# Prevalence and Impact of ACEs



## Early Adversity has Lasting Impacts

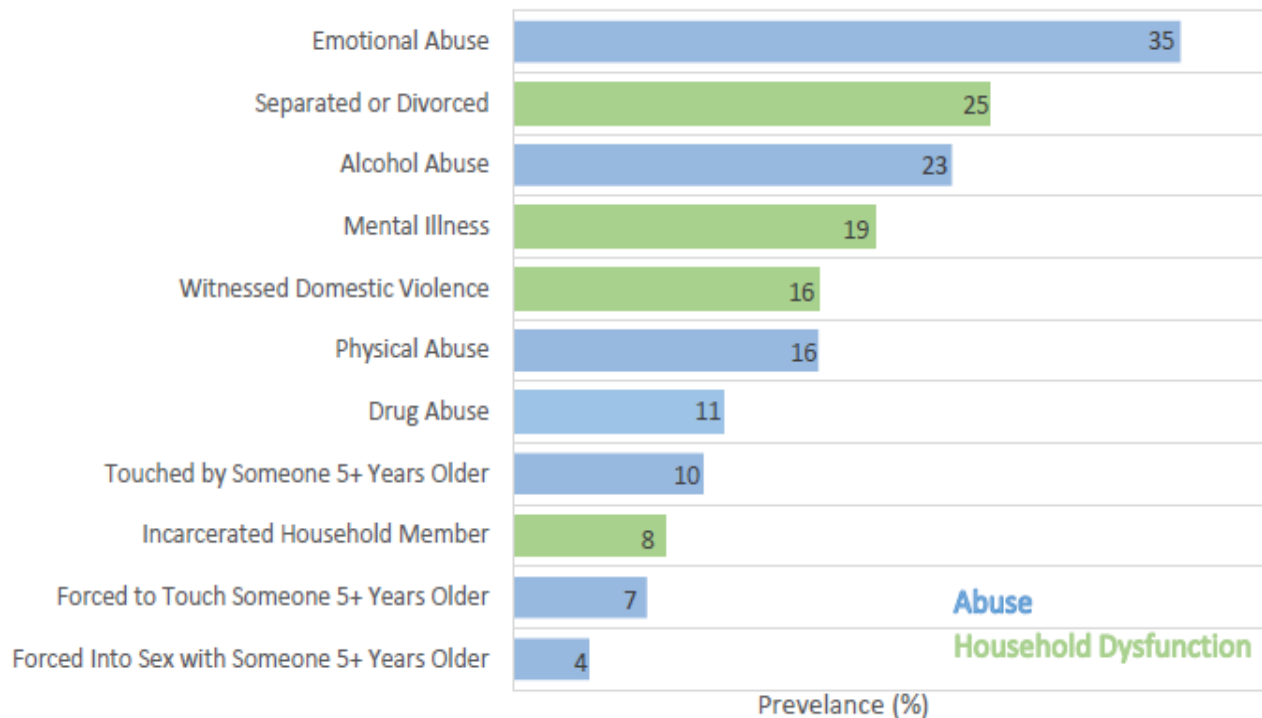


**pennsylvania**  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

# ➤ Prevalence of ACEs

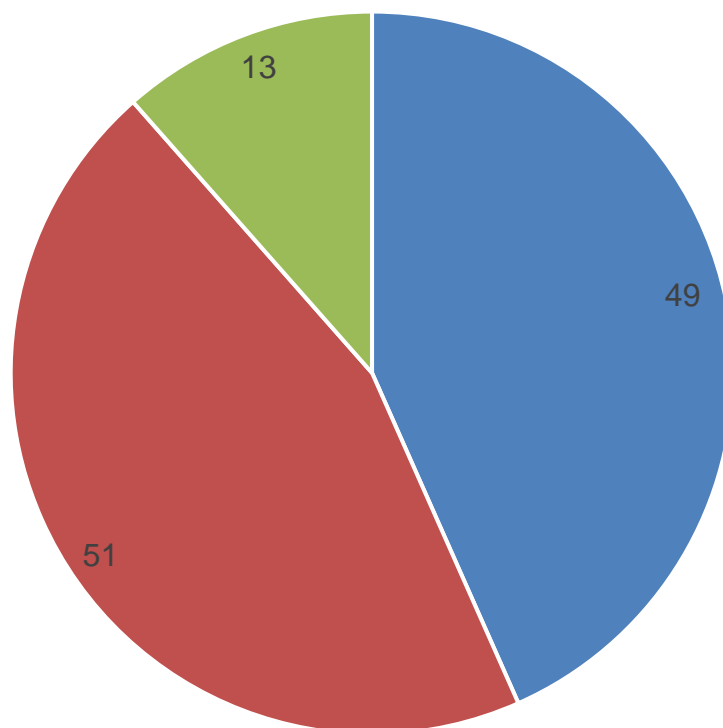
Figure 1: Prevalence (%) Estimates (N=5,705) of Individual ACEs in Pennsylvania, 2016

## Prevalence of Individual ACEs, 2016



# ACE Score

Percentage of Respondents Reporting ACEs.



■ Zero ACEs ■ 1 or more ACE ■ 4 or more ACEs ■



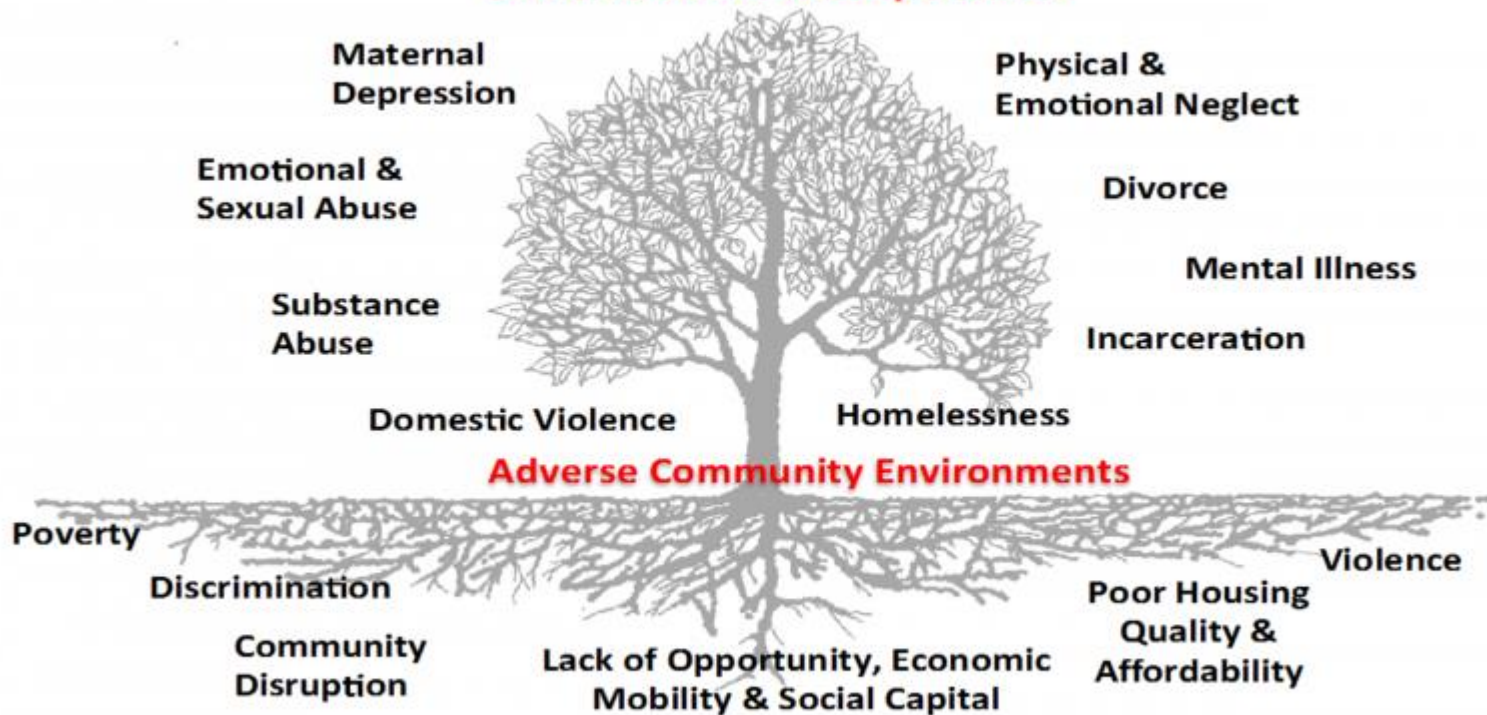
**pennsylvania**  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

# Community Level Adversity

<b>Witness Violence – 40.5%</b>	<b>How often, if ever, did you see or hear someone being beat up, stabbed, or shot in real life?</b>
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 feel 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?

## The Pair of ACEs

### Adverse Childhood Experiences



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



**pennsylvania**  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

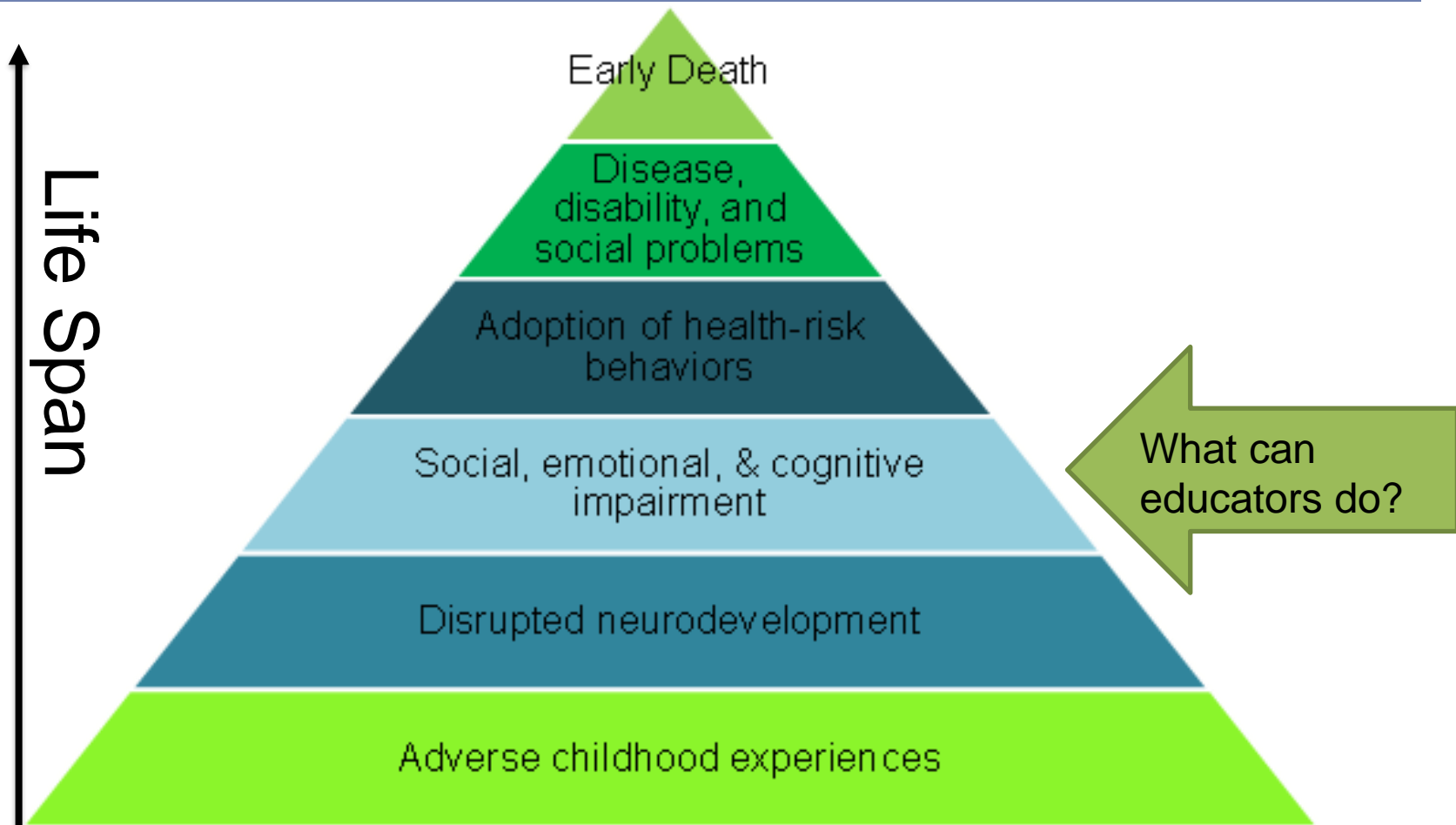
# ACEs in the Classroom

In the past 12 months...	2015	2017	2019
<b>Risk Factors</b>			
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%
<b>Protective Factors</b>			
Family Attachment	63.2%	62.9%	62.3%
Rewards for Prosocial Involvement	53.9%	51.9%	48.1%

[PCCD: PAYS](#)

# ▶ 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



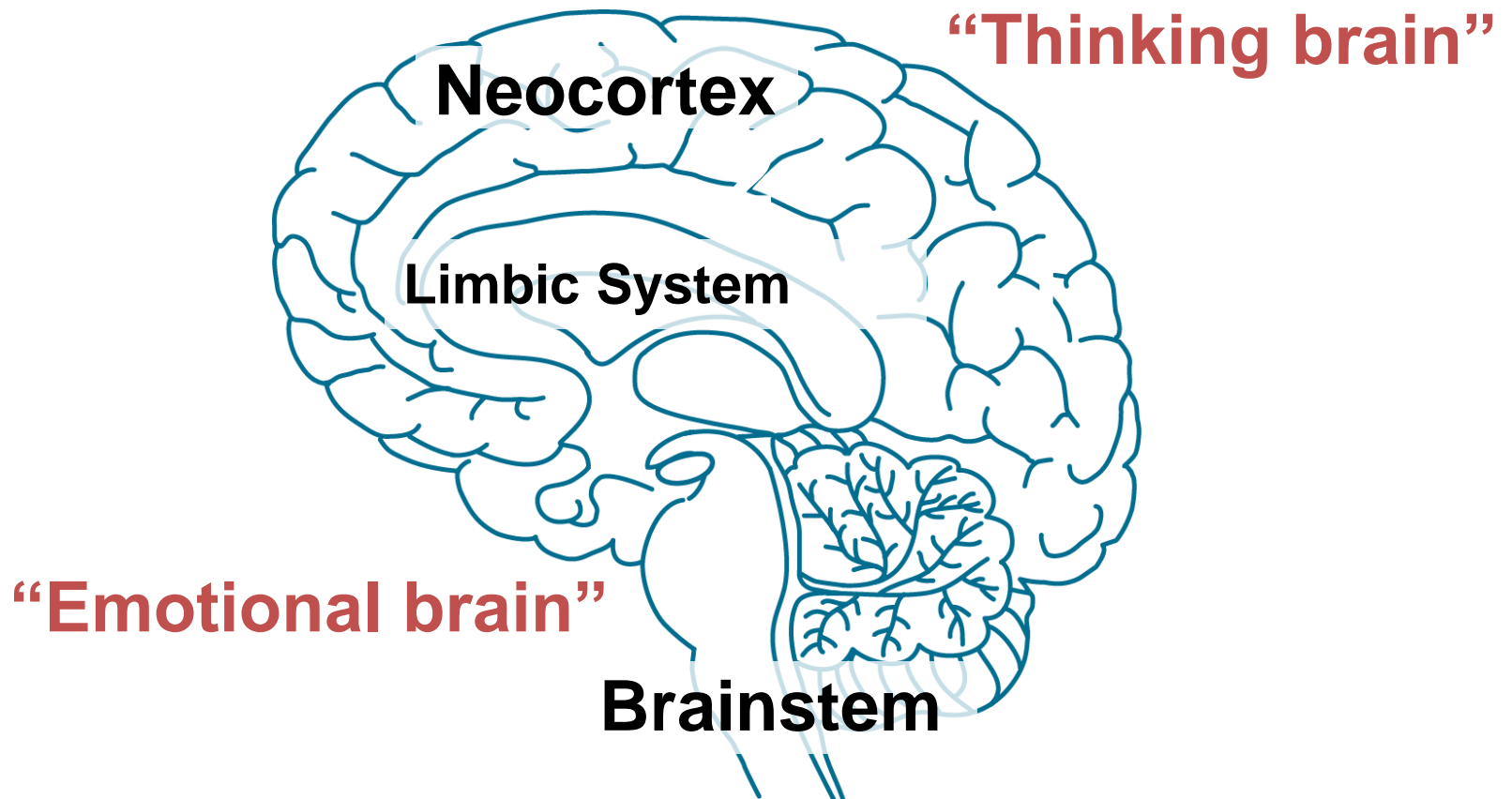


# ➤ Impact of Trauma

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

# How Do We Respond to Stress?

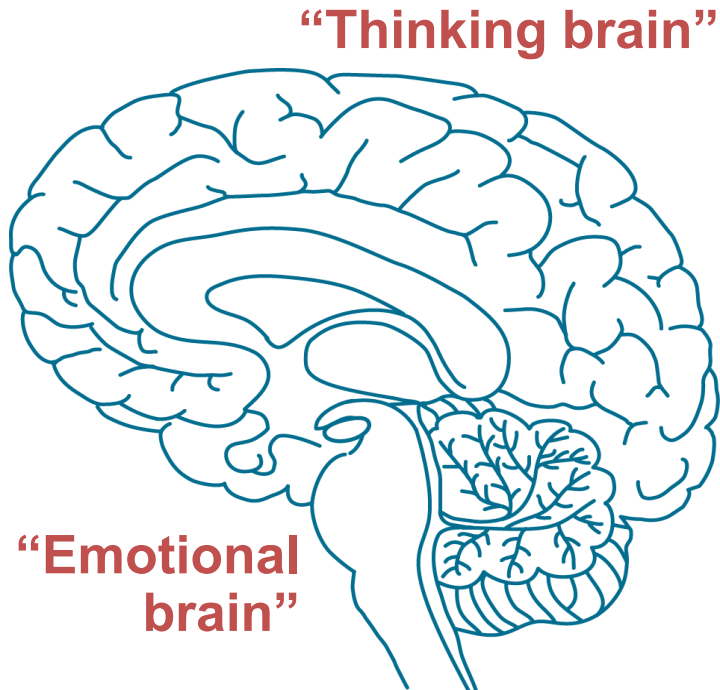
# THE STRESS RESPONSE SYSTEM



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

# 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.



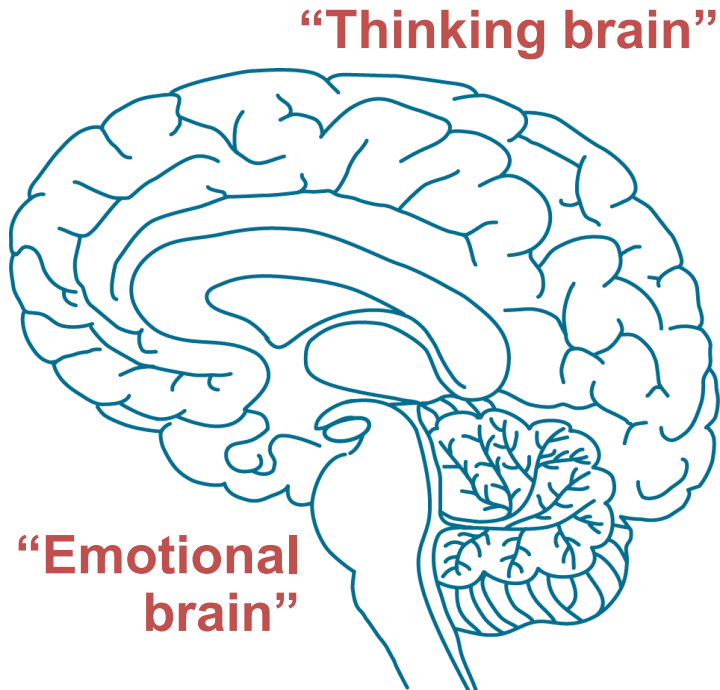
(Guarino, K. & Chagnon, E. 2018)



**pennsylvania**  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

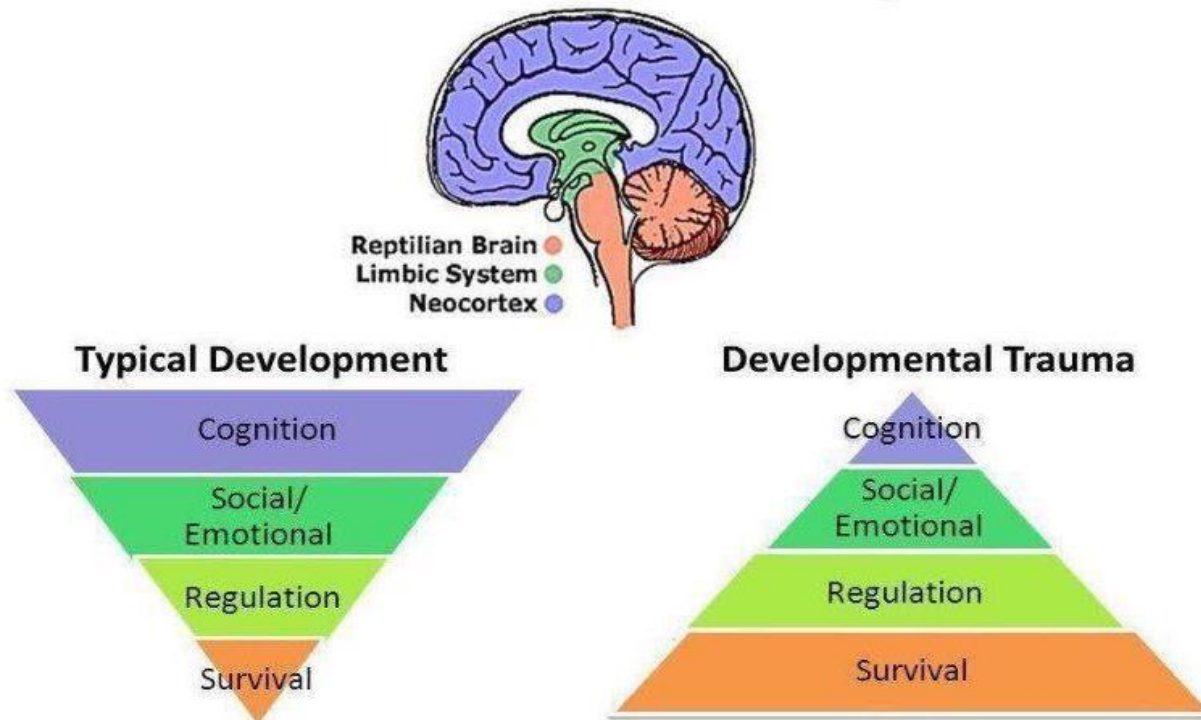
# The Stress Response System

- 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.



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

# Trauma & Brain Development



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)

# 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)



# What Does This Mean for Schools?

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

# ➤ 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.

# 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

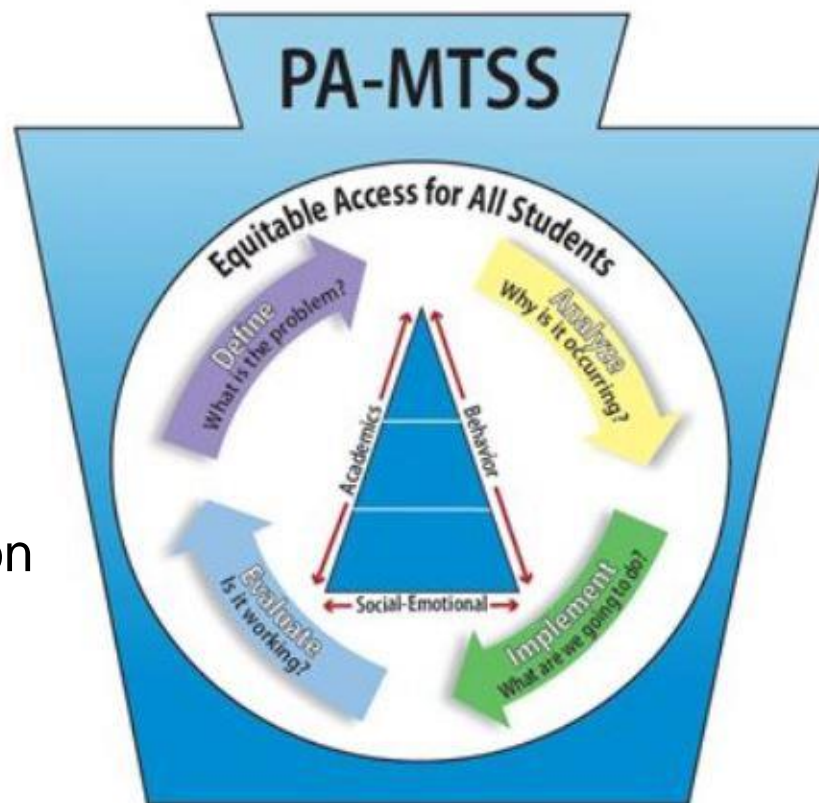
# Impact Of Trauma On Schools

- 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

# ➤ MTSS as a Guiding Framework

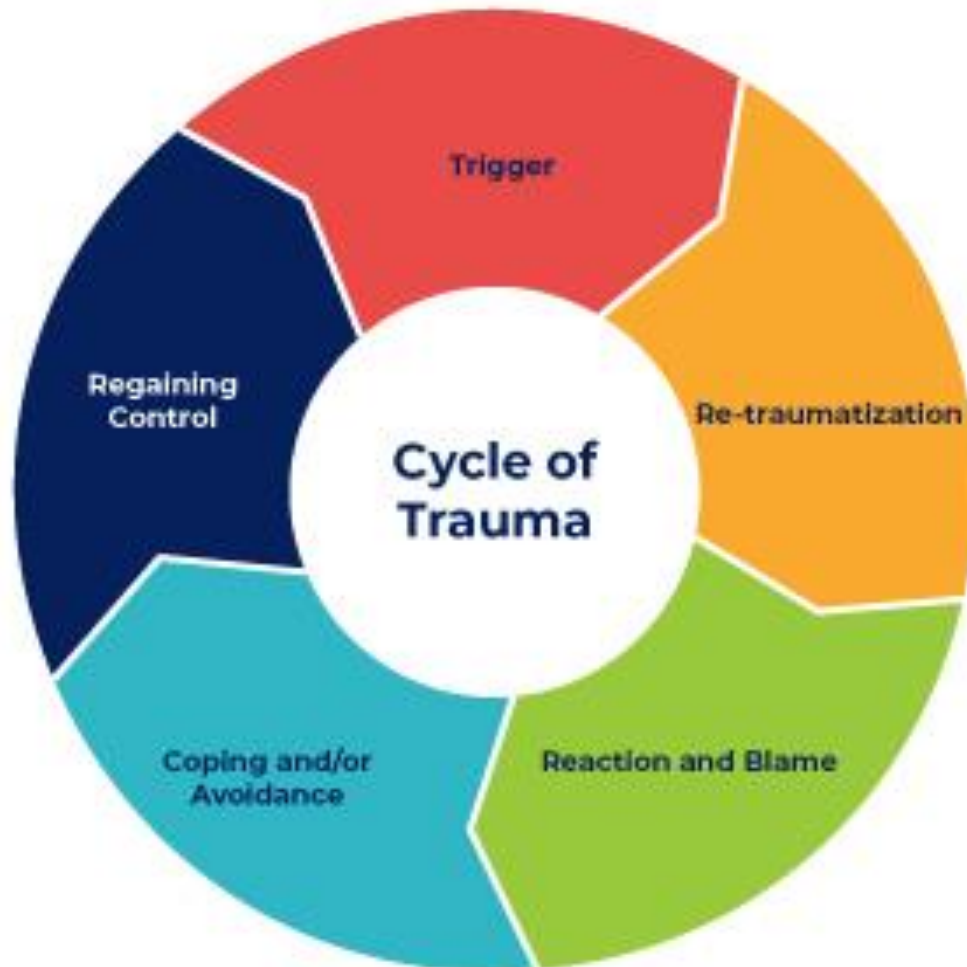
## Key Areas:

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



**pennsylvania**  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

# ➤ Guiding Questions for Policy and Procedures



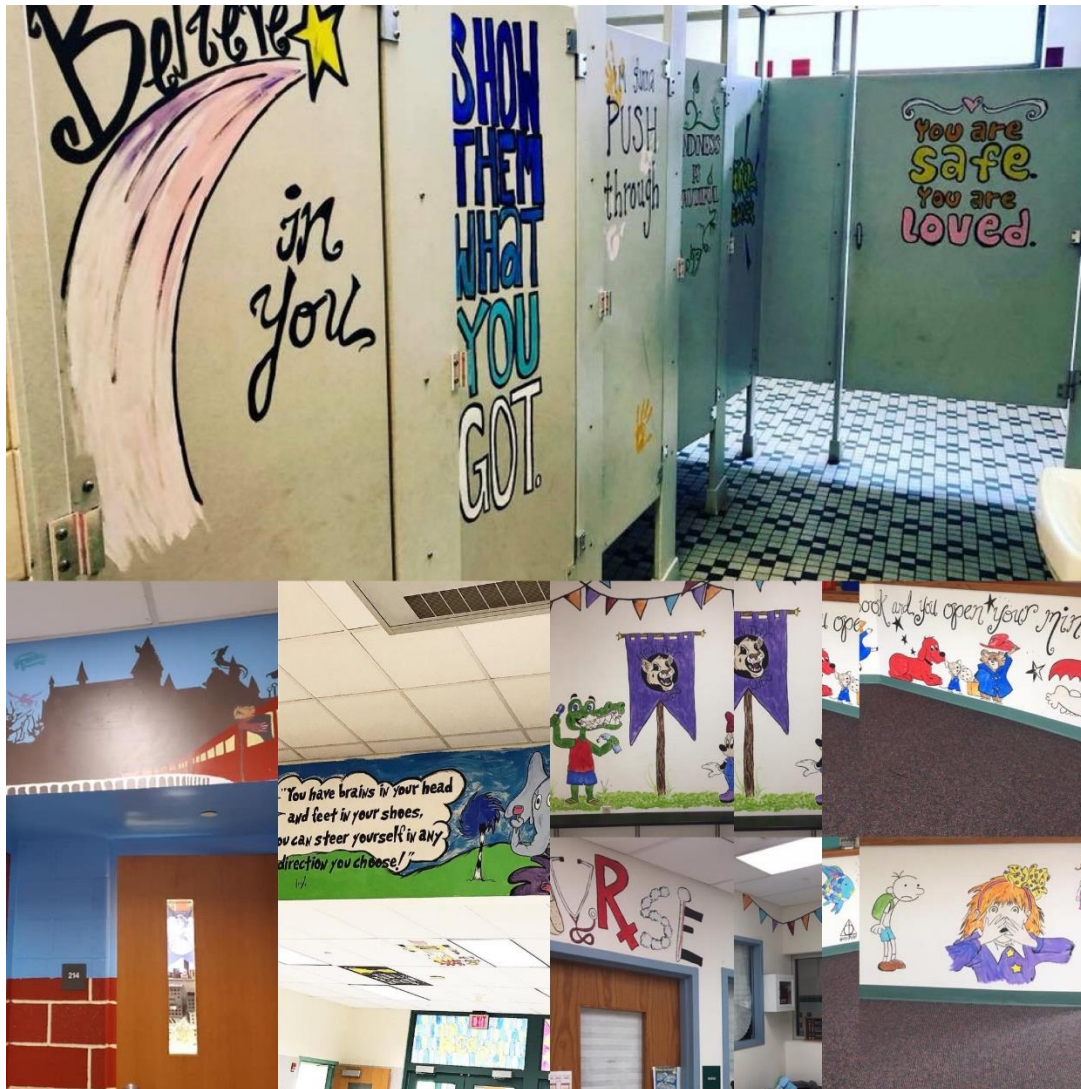
Discipline

Communication

Safety



# Positive Learning Environment



**pennsylvania**  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

# Building Blocks of Positive Learning Environments

## Engagement

- Relationships
- Respect for Diversity
- School Participation

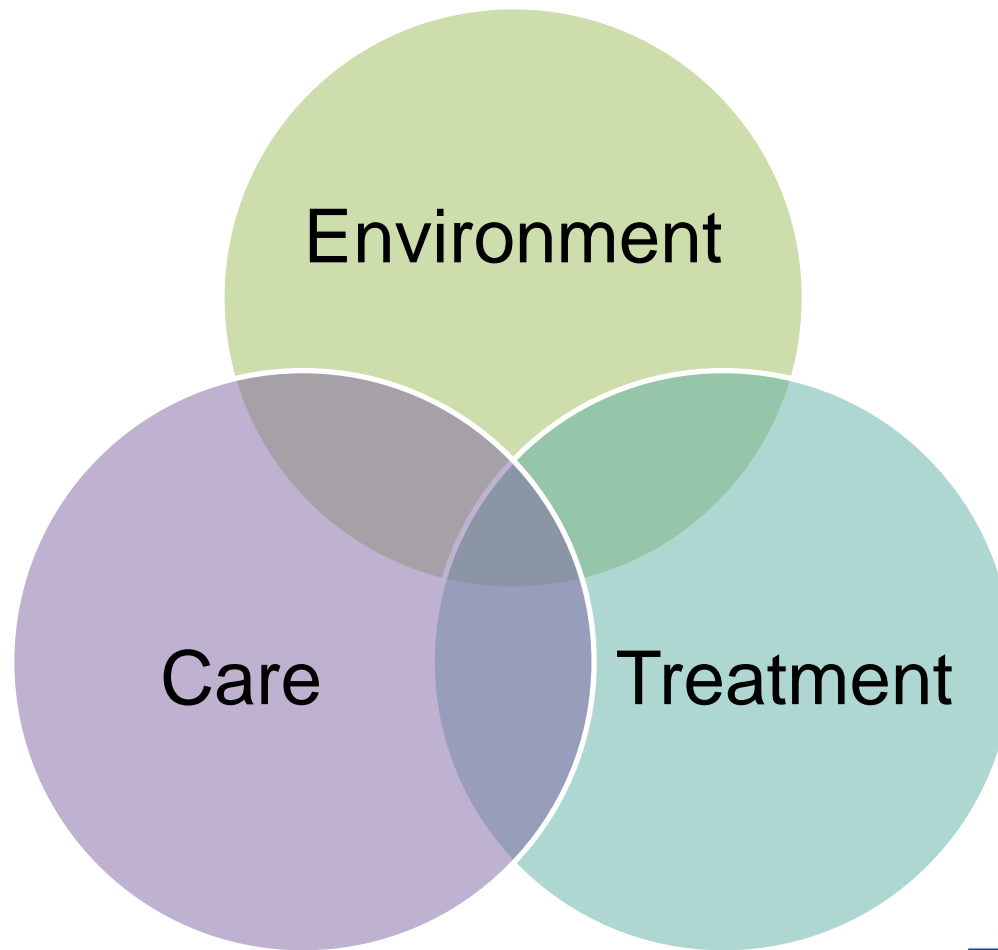
## Safety

- Emotional Safety
- Physical Safety
- Substance Use

## Environment

- Physical Environment
- Academic Environment
- Wellness
- Disciplinary Environment

# 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](#)



# References

- Guarino, K. & Chagnon, E. (2018). *Trauma-sensitive schools training package*. Washington, DC: National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments.
- Kirwan Institute Implicit Bias Training Module Series  
<http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/implicit-bias-training/>
- Lindsey, R.B., Nuri-Robins, K., Terrell, R.D., & Lindsey, D.B. (2019). *Cultural Proficiency: A Manual for School Leaders, 4th Edition*. Corwin.
- Pennsylvania Department of Education (2020). Empowerment Through Common Language in Pennsylvania: A Dictionary of Terms Related to Trauma-Informed Approaches in Schools.
- Pennsylvania Department of Education (2020). Equitable Practices Hub.  
<https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/equityandinclusion/EPH/Pages/default.aspx>

For more information on resources or education related to Trauma-Informed Approaches please visit PDE's website at [www.education.pa.gov](http://www.education.pa.gov).

**Dana Milakovic, PsyD, NCSP**

Mental Health/AOD Specialist

Office for Safe Schools

Department of Education

Cell Phone: (717) 649-1592

Email: [damilakovi@pa.gov](mailto:damilakovi@pa.gov)