

Trauma Informed Schools and Organizations

The culture of the school is critical to success. A trauma informed school is most effectively created and maintained when positive universal supports and strategies are part of daily school programming. School Wide Positive Behavioral Supports (SWPBS) and Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports integrate well with the implementation of the trauma informed principles and culture. To learn more about the MO Model: A Developmental Framework for Trauma Informed and trauma informed schools/organization go to <https://dmh.mo.gov/trauma> or <https://dese.mo.gov/traumainformed>. Schools can also review 161.1050 RSMo which describes the Department of Elementary and Special Education's "Trauma-Informed Schools Initiative".

Research has identified the prevalence of trauma and toxic stress as high with 1 out of 16 adults having experienced four different types of trauma in their childhood. Trauma is defined as an individual's inability to cope with a perceived internal or external threat and can include but is not limited to child abuse/neglect, domestic violence, incarcerated parent, family member with mental illness, natural disasters, car accidents, being a victim of crime, living in a violent neighborhood, experience of prejudice and/or living in severe and chronic poverty. We also know that trauma/toxic stress can impact a person's behavioral and emotional regulation, ability to focus and concentrate, ability to learn, relational, parental and vocational capacities as well as their physical health. Trauma has a systemic impact on education performance and outcomes such as attendance, academic performance, graduation rates, and social interactions as well as the culture and climate of the school. Schools need to develop and sustain partnerships with community providers who also understand the impact of trauma and provide trauma specific services. To achieve positive educational and life outcomes, it is important for schools to not only provide access to trauma specific behavioral health interventions, but must create a trauma informed culture following the guidelines and principles listed below.

Trauma-Informed schools –

1. Realize the prevalence of traumatic occurrences and/or toxic stress in students' and staff's lives and understand potential pathways to recovery;
2. Recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma in students, families and staff;
3. Respond by integrating knowledge in policies, practices and environments;
4. Create a flexible framework that provides universal supports;
5. Are sensitive to unique needs of students, and;
6. Actively resists re-traumatization.

Trauma Informed schools adopt the following guiding principles and actively integrate the principles in the school's policies, programs and services.

- **Safety:** Ensure physical and emotional safety, recognizing and responding to how racial, ethnic, religious or sexual identity may impact safety.
- **Trustworthiness:** Foster genuine relationships and practices that build trust, making tasks clear, maintaining appropriate boundaries and creating norms for interaction that promote reconciliation and healing. Understand and respond to ways in which explicit and implicit power can affect the development of trusting relationships. This includes acknowledging and mitigating internal biases and recognizing the historic power of majority populations.

- **Choice:** Maximize choice, addressing how privilege, power, and historic relationships impact both perceptions about and ability to act upon choice.
- **Collaboration:** Honor transparency and self-determination, and seek to minimize the impact of the inherent power differential while maximizing collaboration and sharing responsibility for making meaningful decisions.
- **Empowerment:** Encouraging self-efficacy by identifying strengths and building skills which leads to individual pathways for healing while to recognize and respond to the impact of historical trauma and oppression.