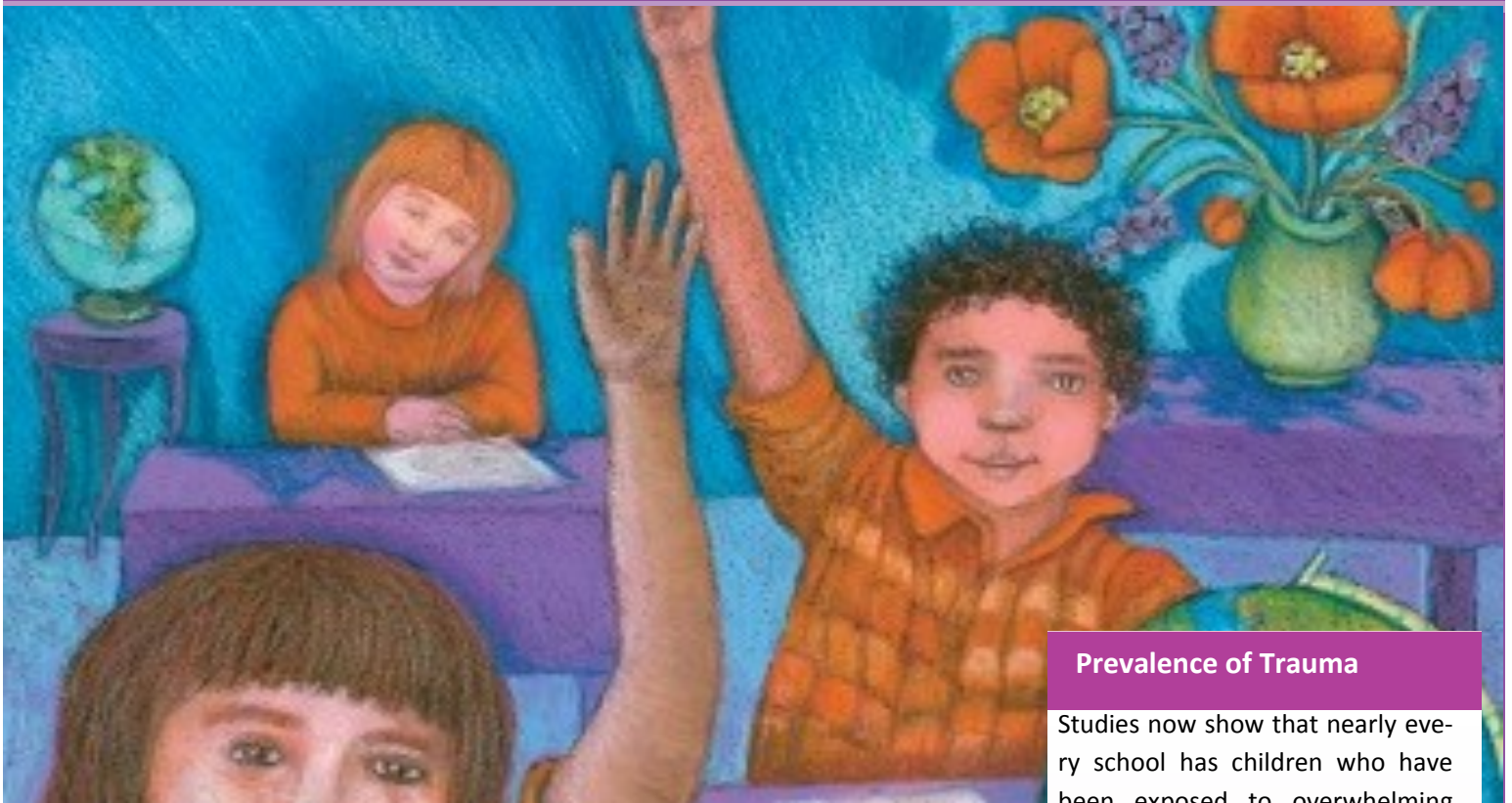


Why We Need Trauma-Sensitive Schools

A Video Discussion Guide

from the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative



Prevalence of Trauma

Studies now show that nearly every school has children who have been exposed to overwhelming experiences, such as witnessing violence between their caretakers, being the direct targets of abuse, community violence and other kinds of adversity. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study found higher levels of traumatic experiences in the general population than previously imagined. Among the approximately 17,000 adults surveyed, just over 50% reported having experienced at least one form of childhood adversity.

What is a Trauma Sensitive School?

A trauma-sensitive school is one where all students feel safe, welcomed, and supported and where addressing trauma's impact on learning on a school-wide basis is at the center of its educational mission.

Introduction

This guide is an invitation to hold a conversation about our video *Why We Need Trauma-Sensitive Schools*. It is designed for educators and others who want to embark on or engage in the process of creating trauma-sensitive schools. A trauma-sensitive school is a place where an ongoing, inquiry-based process allows for teamwork, coordination, creativity and sharing of responsibility for all students, and where continuous learning is for students as well as educators. There are a growing number of schools throughout Massachusetts and the United States engaged in the work of creating trauma-sensitive schools. This video features one such school, the Baker School in Brockton, MA. The Baker is one of several schools in Brockton that are becoming trauma-sensitive through a concerted, well-supported district-wide effort.

Visit www.traumasensitiveschools.org to learn more, join our learning community and download our publications, *Helping Traumatized Children Learn, Volumes 1 and 2*.

Why We Need Trauma-Sensitive Schools

Impact of Trauma on Learning

Recent neurobiological, epigenetics, and psychological studies have shown that traumatic experiences in childhood can diminish concentration, memory, and the organizational and language abilities children need to succeed in school. For some children, this can lead to problems with academic performance, inappropriate behavior in the classroom, and difficulty forming relationships. Learning about the impacts of trauma can help keep educators from misunderstanding the reasons underlying some children's difficulties with learning, behavior and relationships.

Once schools understand the educational impacts of trauma, they can become safe, supportive environments where students make the positive connections with adults and peers they might otherwise push away, calm their emotions so they can focus and behave appropriately, and feel confident enough to advance their learning—in other words, schools can make trauma sensitivity a regular part of how the school is run. Trauma sensitivity will look different at each school.

The Core Attributes of a Trauma-Sensitive School

- ◆ School leadership and staff share an understanding of trauma's impact on learning and the need for a whole-school approach.
- ◆ The school supports all students to feel safe physically, socially, emotionally and academically.
- ◆ The school addresses students' needs in holistic ways, including their relationships, self-regulation, academic competence, and physical and emotional well-being.
- ◆ The school explicitly connects students to the school community and provides multiple opportunities to practice skills.
- ◆ The school embraces teamwork and staff share responsibility for all students
- ◆ Leadership and staff anticipate and adapt to the ever-changing needs of students



Whole-School Effort

Children need to feel safe and connected to adults and peers everywhere in the school...

- ✓...in the classroom
- ✓...in the cafeteria
- ✓...in the hallway
- ✓...in special activities
- ✓...on the bus

...not just in one program or with one teacher.



Addressing trauma's impact at school requires that adults share responsibility for all children.



No one teacher can do it alone, and services, while very important, are most effective when they are coordinated to help students feel safe and supported throughout the school day. This requires the teamwork of everyone in the school.



It is important to remember that we will never know all the children who have been affected by traumatic events. The best approach is to create a school-wide environment where all children, including those who have been traumatized, can be successful.

Video Discussion Guide

- What are your initial thoughts after watching the video? What is your understanding of trauma-sensitive schools?
- This video highlights the importance of leadership—superintendents, assistant superintendents, principals, and educators—in creating the understanding and infrastructure that can support the team work among staff needed for all children to be successful. How is this reflected in the video?
- George Donovan, Assistant Principal of the Baker School, talks about establishing a “culture of awareness” of the many factors that students bring into school that impact learning, self-regulation and relationships with peers and other adults in the school. How is this a trauma-sensitive practice? How might you go about establishing a “culture of awareness” in your school/district?
- For schools to embody trauma-sensitivity, a whole school effort is required. How is this reflected in this video?
- Diane Chase, 4th Grade Teacher, says that “trauma sensitivity has to be at the forefront of any instruction throughout your day.” How do trauma-sensitive /safe and supportive practices help accomplish the goal of academic success?
- June Saba-McGuire, Director of Learning and Teaching, Pre-K-5 says “helping adults understand that they have the most powerful influence on student behavior” is a result of this work. How might this understanding lead to a shift in the way educators think about student behavior? What might be the result(s) of this shift?
- In the video, one administrator comments that “you don’t always know and you don’t need to know” what a student’s history involves and suggests employing best practices for all students. Discuss why this is important in a trauma-sensitive school. How might this be done in a school?
- A trauma-sensitive school is a school where an on-going inquiry-based process allows for teamwork, coordination, creativity, and sharing of responsibility for all students, and where continuous learning is for educators and students. How is this reflected in this video?
- What insights or new knowledge did you gain from this video? How might you use this knowledge in your own work? How might your school use this knowledge?