



BECOMING A TRAUMA INFORMED SCHOOL



Becoming a trauma informed school means making changes from top to bottom. From the physical environment, to school leadership, to individual support for children. This Somerset guidance provides psychologically informed, evidence-based principles and steps to consider at each level.

NETWORKS

Forming and joining networks of schools and other agencies can facilitate sustainable school change in the longer term, through supportive peer relationships and growing a practice sharing environment (Hadley Trust).



Schools can connect and collaborate with:

- Their local authority
- Wellbeing / Mental Health Support Teams who can support staff and CYP wellbeing.
- Their local educational psychology service for planning, problem solving, training, research and evaluation, working groups, consultation, supporting reflective practice and implementation.
- Virtual Schools can help developing change strategies.
- CAMHS
- Independent organisations, charities and NGOs (e.g., Attachment Research Community, Timpson) for guidance, case studies and research.



SCHOOL POLICIES

School policies and systems need to explore the underlying causes of challenging behaviour. They should take into consideration what we have learnt from modern day research on the effect of trauma on the brain and the potential long-term impact of ACEs and trauma. (Birmingham City Council)



Principles of trauma informed policies (Brighton and Hove City Council and Birmingham City Council):

- Equity over equality
- Behaviour is a form of communication.
- Non-judgmental, curious and empathic attitude towards behaviour
- Putting relationships first.
- Maintaining clear boundaries and expectations around behaviour
- Not all behaviours are a matter of 'choice'.
- Behaviour must always be viewed systemically and within the context of important relationships.
- Parental engagement and involvement is key.
- Graduated approach:
- Focus on climate and ethos.
- Building protective factors.
- Joined up approach.



SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Strong and visible commitment from school senior leadership teams with a commitment to the trauma-informed approach ensures a consistent and sustainable implementation of trauma-informed practice (Hadley Trust).

School leaders need to:

- Be **open-minded** and appreciate that long lasting school-wide practice change does not happen quickly.
- **Offer** visible support
- **Support** staff to spend time to emotionally support pupils
- **Keep** the school-wide message of trauma-informed practice on the agenda.
- **Role model** trauma informed approaches.
- **Enable** reflective practice among staff.
- **Have** high aspirations for all children in school.
- **Welcome** other services, like the Educational Psychology Service and Virtual School



PARENTS AND CARERS



Developing a child's positive attachment to school begins from the perspectives at home. Building more positive relationships with parents and carers establishes a strong link between school and home (Kelly et al).

Focus on process rather than practice (Brighton and Hove):

- Home-school communication being **two-way**.
- Communication from school being **proactive and positive** rather than reactionary and punitive.
- Communication that emphasises **similarities** between home and school rather than differences (Gus, 2015).
- Emphasis on **openness, trust and effective communication**, and exploring support for CYP's SEMH in a neutral and holistic manner.

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Address the noise and busyness of school to create a safer more nurturing environment, so there is time to talk, share, and regulate (Kelly et al).



Developing a safer and more nurturing physical environment:

- **Safe, quiet spaces to calm.** In designated rooms and within classrooms.
- Gain **CYP voice** to identify spaces which feel less safe. Also, preferences for colour, lighting, and furnishing when designing safe spaces.
- May need **further resourcing**, but also sometimes repurposing materials, spaces, and timetables to support equal access.

SUPPORTING STAFF

For school staff to be able to effectively build relationships with CYP and parents/carers, they need to first prioritise their own emotional well-being and staff relationships. The school ethos and professional practice needs to foster this, through informal and formal practices (Brighton and Hove).

These can include:

- **Reflective practice** opportunities (including workgroup s and models of supervision).
- **Team building** opportunities.
- **Linking with support partners** including Local Authority and Health colleagues to develop a whole school approach to emotional health and wellbeing.
- **Built in and protected time** for these practices, rather than ad hoc or in performance management.



Specific relevant training topics:

- Emotion coaching
- Attachment theory
- Trauma
- Resilience
- Outcomes for looked after children
- Loss and separation





SUPPORTING CHILDREN

Teachers and support staff can support young people's mental health and wellbeing. Building strong, positive relationships between staff and students is fundamental to protecting mental health and wellbeing (Anna Freud).

Adapt daily interactions to support young people with mental health difficulties (Kelly et al):

- **Clearly communicate your availability** for a conversation and willingness to support: be there (open door policy); explain what you will do if not available right now.
- **Demonstrate empathy through active listening:** Check how they are feeling; mindful of your body language; open Qs rather than opinions; validate; paraphrase and reflect; summarise and check; draw out options; agree next steps and follow up.
- **Help students to develop coping strategies:** Prompt the student to consider and recognise what affects their mental health at school; Support the student to develop effective strategies (plan and reminders to use it, set regulation goals and challenge automatic negative thoughts); Prompt the student to reflect on how effective the implemented strategy or strategies were (normalise and celebrate).
- **Reduce everyday stressors:** Special seating; classroom buddy; breaking down a task; adapting the amount of homework; soothing object or photograph; breaks; copies of notes; alternative forms of assessment; access arrangements.
- **Check in** regularly to review students' progress



Build supportive relationships (Anna Freud):

- Greet at the door
- Brief 1:1 chats (2x10: 2 mins a day for 10 days)
- Notice (e.g., changes in mood)
- Follow through
- Ask who they would like you to share successes with
- Personal notes
- Show you care
- Make children feel seen (e.g., personal profiles);
- Positive language to manage behaviour.



Emotion coaching

How coregulation works:

Step 1: Recognising, empathising, soothing to calm ('I understand how you feel, you're not alone')

Step 2: Validating the feelings and labelling ('This is what is happening, this is what you're feeling')

Step 3: (if needed): Setting limits on behaviour ('We can't always get we want')

Step 4: Problem-solving with the child/young person ('We can sort this out')

SUPPORTING CHILDREN

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