

IMPROVING STUDENT OUTCOMES BY CREATING Healing Environments in Schools

IN ORDER TO THRIVE, CHILDREN NEED:

- Nurturing relationships
- Safe, stable, and equitable environments
- Engagement in the community
- Opportunities to develop social-emotional skills

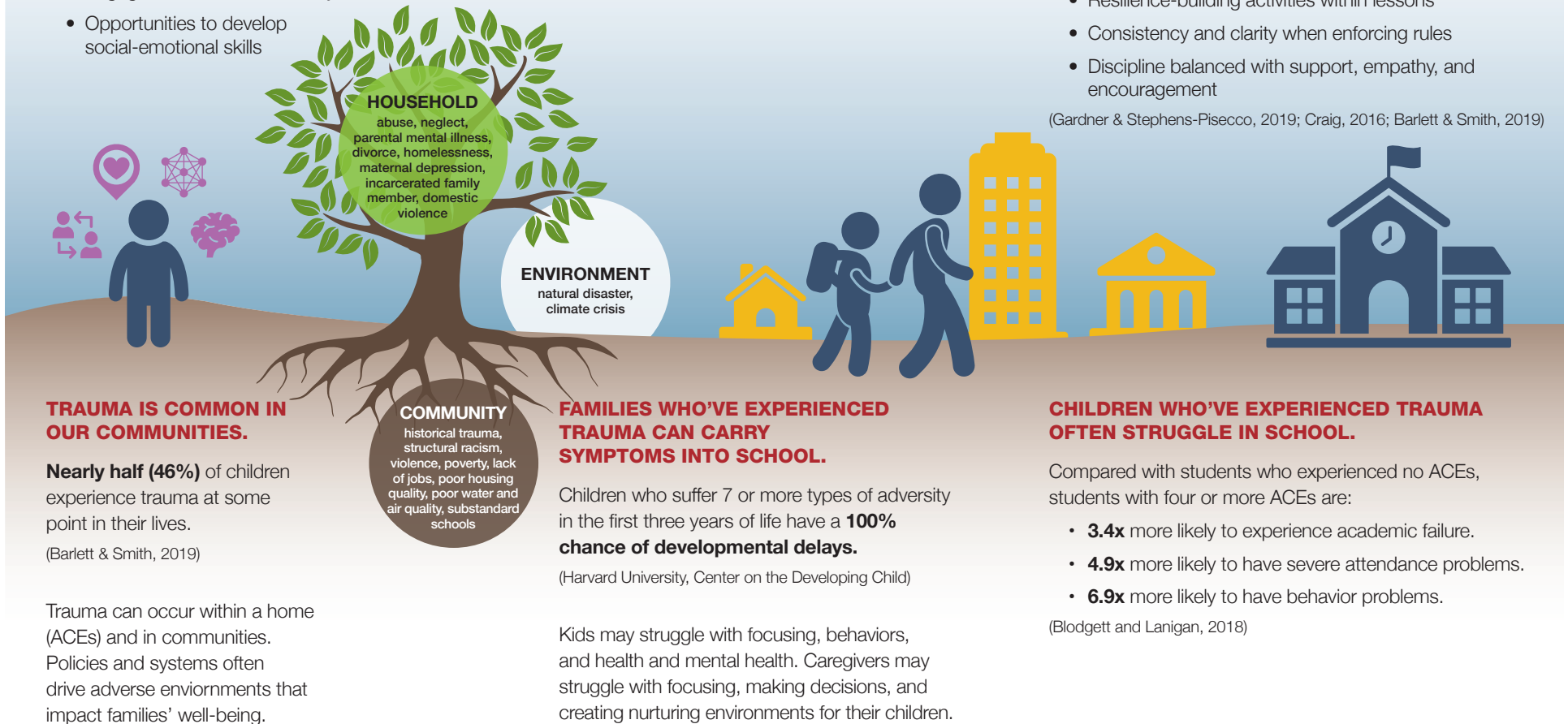
COMMUNITIES CAN FOSTER CHILDREN'S HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT.

Parents' well-being influences the well-being of kids. Just like building a house, a family's well-being is constructed with the right team and resources in the community.

SCHOOLS CAN IMPROVE STUDENT SUCCESS THROUGH:

- Sensitive and responsive relationships
- Focus on child and parent well-being
- Supportive and stable environments
- Resilience-building activities within lessons
- Consistency and clarity when enforcing rules
- Discipline balanced with support, empathy, and encouragement

(Gardner & Stephens-Pisecco, 2019; Craig, 2016; Barlett & Smith, 2019)





KEY STRATEGIES FOR

Responding to Trauma in Schools

Everyone in a community has a responsibility to foster children's healthy development, but schools play an especially vital role. While many children experience trauma that impacts their ability to learn, research shows that trauma-informed schools can create better outcomes for all students and staff. Schools can meet children's needs with approaches, including:



1. RELATIONSHIPS: Provide consistent, sensitive, and responsive care through strategies like using a re-set room instead of taking away recess. Cultivate students' sense of purpose and identity.



2. FAMILY WELL-BEING: Identify and build on parent strengths, recognize and respect their values, and engage them in their child's education. Help connect families with resources in the community that can help with challenges.



3. SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS: Provide safe spaces within a classroom and in other settings, like the hallways and at recess. Set expectations that are suitable for a child's age and development. Offer supports for teachers and encourage self-care.



4. SKILL BUILDING: Help students build skills, including problem solving, emotional recognition, and self-regulation. Teach and practice mindfulness, yoga, meditation, and deep breathing.

EXAMPLES OF TRAUMA-INFORMED INTERVENTIONS

RELATIONSHIPS: Children who have a history of trauma usually need to reenact past traumas, often with a parental or authority figure. This may happen unconsciously but cause an educator to feel angry or victimized. Educators can be trained to recognize these behaviors in students and apply self-monitoring skills that allow them to redirect the child's behavior in a calm, respectful, and often playful way that validates the relationship. When a crisis occurs, educators should not appear frightened or surprised and should act like they know what to do to bring those feelings under control. (Craig, 2016)

CLASSROOM INTERVENTIONS: ALIVE is a public health program offered in K-12 schools that focuses on preventing, assessing, and addressing trauma-related behaviors. ALIVE practitioners lead psychoeducation discussions in the classroom using the story of Miss Kendra. Miss Kendra struggled to cope with the loss of her 10-year-old child but found meaning by supporting students who have faced adverse childhood experiences. The parable establishes a metaphor for survival and strength to demonstrate the coping skills students already have. Students then see Miss Kendra's List of statements against child maltreatment permanently displayed in the classroom. Fostering a conversation about these toxic stressors helps counter feelings of abandonment and loss by creating a culture of connection and empathy. An assessment allows providers to informally monitor student reactions to the discussions. Students who display significant behaviors related to trauma are seen for individualized support. (Scott Frydman & Mayor 2017)

TRAUMA-INFORMED SCHOOLS

While education and interventions are important steps, successful models show that schools need a culture shift to effectively respond. Schools should develop a plan that includes:



1. RESOURCE AND REFERRAL:

Schools can map resource and referral supports for families in the district and partner with AEA and community-based organizations. The School Mental Health Referral Pathways Toolkit, for example, offers a system to refer youth to mental health service providers and related support. The toolkit includes best-practice guidance and practical tools and strategies to improve coordination of care.



2. ONGOING LEARNING:

Training should include onboarding for new staff and regular learning for all staff. Consider learning opportunities that relate to student and community demographics and needs, as well as address educator stress.



3. POLICY AND PRACTICE REVIEW:

Review building or district policies and practices, considering whether they are best for students experiencing trauma, poverty, and inequities and whether they re-traumatize students.

References

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