BACK-TO-SCHOOL

BLUEPRINT

PLANNING FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE AFTER COVID-19

HELPING STUDENTS

HEAL FROM TRAUMA

RennieCenter
EDUCATION RESEARCH & POLICY

HELPING STUDENTS HEAL FROM TRAUMA

When schools resume after the COVID-19 pandemic, many children will return still grappling with the emotional toll of the crisis. In addition to a disrupted daily routine and a long period of isolation from classmates, many students will have experienced widespread suffering in their community, including joblessness, housing instability, illness, and economic insecurity. In this disaster, as in others, the collective harm has disproportionately impacted low-income communities and communities of color. This action guide is designed to provide resources for schools and districts looking to address trauma and anxiety through an equity lens, helping students heal from both individual and collective trauma. At times, this module will dive deeper into supports for students at highest risk of trauma, but these strategies ultimately support the strengths and needs of students in all schools and settings.

The guide includes information focused on the causes of trauma, the effects of trauma on child development, the effects of secondary trauma on educators, and the symptoms of trauma that educators may see in the classroom. It provides strategies that educators can use to help students heal from trauma, including building positive relationships and creating a predictable classroom environment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Trauma has a direct impact on a child's **learning**. Schools must **recognize** and **understand** the **impact of trauma** in order to create an environment that enables children who have experienced trauma to **succeed**.

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

By the time they turn 16, roughly two-thirds of children in the United States will experience some form of trauma (Copeland, et. al., 2007). Trauma is defined by an individual's response to a distressing event, rather than by the event itself. When a distressing event or series of events overwhelms a child's ability to cope, the child experiences a trauma response which includes a loss of sense of self and feelings of safety.

WHAT CAUSES TRAUMA?

Events that cause trauma may include abuse, neglect, violence, parental imprisonment, bullying, or parental divorce. Trauma doesn't happen in a vacuum and is often experienced collectively

(Ginwright, 2018). Children of color experience racial trauma from acts of racism and discrimination that occur in their schools and their communities. They are also disproportionately affected by community trauma, which includes disinvestment and lack of economic opportunity, persistent institutional bias, mass incarceration, inequitable healthcare, and lack of access to transportation. This form of trauma robs communities of a sense of collective efficacy, or the sense that the community can work together to produce positive change. It contributes to a loss of trust in community leaders, neighbors, and public officials.

Major events that oppressed a particular racial or cultural group often lead to historical, multigenerational trauma. This includes slavery, the Holocaust, and the colonization of Native Americans. Many immigrants experience a shared trauma from the migratory experience, the stress of adapting to a new culture, and the fear associated with undocumented status.

Communities of color and low-income communities have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Asians and Asian Americans have faced increased discriminaton and prejudice in schools and in the community. In Massachusetts and across the nation, Black and Latino residents have experienced significantly higher rates of COVID-19 infection than white residents.

Low-wage workers, who are disproportionately people of color, have been deeply affected both physically and financially by the economic disruption of the pandemic. When implementing trauma-sensitive practices, educators must recognize the differentiated impact of trauma on communities, families, and students of color. The COVID-19 crisis adds to the deep layers of trauma and oppression felt among marginalized communities and makes it essential for schools to apply an equity lens when addressing trauma.

FROM TRAUMA-SENSITIVE TO HEALING-CENTERED SCHOOLS

Educators have long recognized that students do not leave their pain and trauma at the door when they enter the classroom. Trauma has a direct impact on a child's ability to succeed in school. Driven by a need to support all students, many educators have adopted a **trauma-sensitive** lens. This includes learning about the impact and signs of trauma, working to develop trusting relationships with students, and creating safe classroom environments to support students exposed to trauma. The practices produce positive results, improving the emotional well-being of children.

Educators also recognize that children are more than the trauma they have experienced. Every child has strengths, hopes, and dreams - assets that they bring with them into the classroom each day. The field has begun to recognize the importance of an asset-based, **healing-centered** approach (Ginwright, 2018). Healing-centered practices respond to the fact that trauma is often experienced collectively and is directly related to structural inequality. This approach focuses on fostering individual and community well-being rather than reducing negative emotions and behavior.

In this action guide, you will find references to both trauma-sensitive and healing-centered practices. We expect that emerging research will further the field's understanding of promising healing-centered practices.

WHAT IS A TRAUMA-SENSITIVE SCHOOL?

*"The fundamental shift in providing support using a trauma-informed approach is to move from thinking **'What is wrong with you?'** to considering **'What happened to you?'"***
- Sweeney et. al., 2018

Trauma-sensitive schools create an environment where students are free from physical and social-emotional harm, and where they are supported to build trusting relationships with adults and peers. They do this by recognizing the effects of trauma, responding to trauma through school- and classroom-wide practices, and collaborating with families and community partners to get students higher-level support where needed.

KEY PRACTICES IN TRAUMA-SENSITIVE SCHOOLS

Recognizing Trauma.
Trauma-sensitive schools train educators to recognize the effects of trauma. In the classroom, students who have experienced trauma may struggle to follow behavioral norms, withdraw, or have difficulty with verbal or organizational skills.

Responding to Trauma.
A trauma-sensitive school:
- Provides a welcoming school climate
- Includes predictable structure and routines
- Facilitates authentic, trusting relationships with peers and adults
- Avoids experiences that re-traumatize students, including bullying and punitive discipline
- Provides a positive climate for staff

Providing Higher-Level Support.
Some students may exhibit a higher level of need that goes beyond what teachers can address through universal trauma-sensitive practices. In addition to the school-wide practices described in *Responding to Trauma* above, schools can incorporate tier 2 and tier 3 trauma interventions in a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS). Depending on the level of need, this could include group interventions or trauma-specific individualized treatment. Many trauma-sensitive schools develop community mental health partnerships to ensure that those who need it receive more intensive support.

WHAT IS HEALING-CENTERED PRACTICE?

*"A healing centered approach to addressing trauma requires a different question that moves beyond **'what happened to you'** to **'what's right with you'** and views those exposed to trauma as agents in the creation of their own well-being rather than victims of traumatic events."*
- Dr. Shawn Ginwright

Healing-centered approaches build upon trauma-sensitive practices. They center an asset-based frame, are grounded in culture, and seek to build a positive identity. Key features of healing-centered approaches are described below.

A Healing-Centered Approach
1. Recognizes that collective harm, such as trauma from racism or widespread illness, requires a different response from individual harm.
2. Seeks to address the root causes of trauma including inequitable systems and policies. It empowers those affected by trauma to act in opposition to these systems.
3. Focuses on fostering well-being.
4. Is rooted in culture.
5. Recognizes a need to support educators in their own healing.

RECOGNIZING TRAUMA

The results of trauma are often misunderstood by adults. In order to create a trauma-sensitive learning environment, it is critical that all staff understand the impact and signs of trauma. When trauma is misunderstood, it can cause adults to respond in ways that trigger a child's trauma response. Trauma can look like:

- **Academic Difficulty.** Children who have experienced trauma may experience difficulty with memory, organizational skills, and verbal skills.
- **Behavioral Changes.** Children who have experienced trauma may exhibit internalizing symptoms, such as withdrawal, or externalizing symptoms, such as aggression. Children may be easily triggered and react in a way that adults perceive to be extreme. They may have difficulty processing social cues or conveying the emotions that they are experiencing.
- **Relationship Difficulty.** Children who have experienced trauma have difficulty trusting adults and peers and they often lack appropriate social skills. This makes it difficult for children to form positive relationships.

TRAUMA AND THE BRAIN

Childhood trauma can have lasting impacts on the developing brain. The **amygdala**, which detects threats and activates the body's "fight or flight" response, is often overactive in individuals who have experienced trauma. A child with an overactive amygdala is on high alert and will be easily triggered by any event that reminds them of their trauma.

The **prefrontal cortex** (PFC), which allows humans to solve problems and develop self-awareness, is frequently underactivated in those who have experienced trauma. The **anterior cingulate cortex** (ACC), which helps a person control impulses and regulate emotion, is also underactivated in those exposed to trauma. A child whose PFC and ACC are underactivated will

struggle to control impulses and may act out when exposed to a trigger in the classroom.

EXAMPLES OF TRAUMA IN THE CLASSROOM

Disruptive Behavior

Anthony repeatedly disrupts his classmates in order to gain his teacher's attention. Anthony's teacher doesn't know about his history of neglect. His attention-seeking behavior is a way

to seek reassurance that he is safe. If his teacher ignores his behavior, a common method to address behavior challenges, this will intensify Anthony's concern.

Anthony's teacher can help him by offering her attention before Anthony's negative behavior begins. This can include greeting him by name when he enters the class or scheduling a small group lunch to talk with Anthony and a few of his peers about their interests.

Academic Avoidance

Every day during math class, Maya asks to go to the bathroom. She leaves the classroom for as long as possible because she lacks academic safety and she is afraid of making a mistake. Maya's teacher recognizes her fear. She is working on developing a personal relationship with Maya, which will help Maya to feel comfortable taking risks in her learning. Maya's teacher greets her by name when she enters the classroom each morning and she spends two minutes before lunch connecting individually with Maya to discuss her day.

Supporting Students with Trauma

As evidenced in these examples, trauma-sensitive practices require a holistic understanding of student behavior. Solutions that address the behavior itself, rather than the underlying cause of the behavior, risk triggering the student. When educators recognize trauma, they are in the best position to provide supports that address a particular child's needs.

ACTION STEPS FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Recognizing trauma is the first step in creating a trauma-sensitive learning environment. School administrators should ensure that educators:

1. Understand trauma, including the various types of trauma that children experience
2. Understand the prevalence of childhood trauma
3. Recognize how trauma is influenced by race and culture
4. Understand how a child's brain reacts to traumatic stress
5. Recognize the impact of trauma on academic learning
6. Recognize the effect of trauma on children's behavior

RENNIECENTER
EDUCATION RESEARCH & POLICY

FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIPS

In order to learn, students must feel safe. Children who have been exposed to trauma will react to what they perceive to be a threat to their safety. In order to support students, schools must ensure that children feel safe in the school environment and in their relationships with classmates and teachers.

Positive, authentic relationships with peers and adults allow children to build empathy and resilience. Relationships reduce student anxiety, creating the conditions for children to learn. When children feel known and cared for, they are free to be their authentic selves at school. The following strategies help teachers build relationships with students.

1. BUILD EMPATHY BY SHARING PERSONAL STORIES

When teachers share their personal stories and experiences with students, it provides a powerful opportunity to build trusting, authentic relationships. Students are more comfortable sharing their experiences when a teacher has modeled vulnerability in this way. When students share their experiences, be sure to listen with curiosity and without judgment.

2. MAKE TIME FOR 1:1 RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Take time to form relationships with students 1:1. This may include scheduling occasional lunches with one student or a small group of students to discuss students' hobbies and interests. It may also include asking students to write you a letter about their lives and interests, and providing a personal letter back to each child.

3. USE THE 2X10 STRATEGY

Spend 2 minutes per day for 10 days in a row talking with a student about anything they want to talk about. This ongoing relationship-building helps a child see that you care about their well-being and interests.

RENNIECENTER
EDUCATION RESEARCH & POLICY

4. GET TO KNOW STUDENTS' HOME CULTURE

Educators have a unique opportunity to get to know each student as they grow throughout the year. Educators can better serve students when they continuously work to understand and affirm the diversity of students' home cultures. Meet with past teachers and counselors who have worked with each student to learn about their background. Engage families in culturally responsive ways to build familiarity and trust between home and school.

Home Language. Learn a few words or phrases from students' home language. Use these words in the classroom to show students that you respect where they come from.

Culture in the Classroom. Be curious about where your students come from. Build authentic relationships with students and their families, and learn about the values of their culture. Invite students to share food, music, or customs from their culture with their classmates. Ensure that students see their culture represented in classroom materials, including literature.

Home Visits. Visiting students' homes and meeting family members in their own space provides a powerful opportunity for educators to learn about students' home culture and build relationships with families. When in-person visits are not feasible, teachers can reach out via videoconference or phone call to build relationships with parents. It is important to involve a translator where necessary.

5. HOST A MORNING MEETING

An effective morning meeting includes a greeting and an opportunity for students to share about what is going on in their lives. This allows students to build community with peers and also serves as a predictable routine to welcome students into the school day.

6. SURVEY STUDENTS

Ask students, "what is one thing you want me to know about you?" or "what is your favorite thing to do outside of school?"

7. NEVER USE TEACHER TIME AS A BEHAVIOR INCENTIVE

In order to develop a trusting relationship, a child must view their teacher's care as unconditional. When time with a teacher of choice is used as a behavior incentive, the child may see their relationship with the teacher as conditional. This can trigger a trauma response, especially for children who have experienced neglect.

EMPOWER STUDENTS

In school systems, adults act as the powerful gatekeepers to learning. But, what happens when that power is shared? When "students' ideas, knowledge, opinions and experiences in schools and regarding education are actively sought and substantiated by educators, administrators, and other adults within the educational system," educators can catalyze meaningful student involvement (Soundout.org). Educators can empower students by making space for identity exploration and activism, encouraging youth to share their passions, and facilitating student participation in school decision-making. This section shares strategies that schools and educators can use to empower students.

1. ## PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS EXPLORE AND AFFIRM THEIR IDENTITIES

   Providing the space for students to explore and affirm their identities through literature, classroom projects, and storytelling can instill community and a healthy sense of self. This powerful work helps students recognize that they are more than the trauma they have experienced.

   Literature
   Books create an opportunity to explore various components of identity with students of all ages. For younger grades, sharing the story of *The Bear That Wasn't* can offer an introduction into a discussion of identity. *Social Justice Books* maintains booklists on a range of topics that can prompt discussions of identity including race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion, and economic class.

   Exploring Race, Bias, and Identity
   The New York Times series "26 Mini-Films for Exploring Race, Bias, and Identity With Students" examines race, bias, and identity from different perspectives. They help students understand others' diverse experiences while also affirming experiences that students may share with video subjects. Most videos are appropriate for students in grade 6 and above.

   Identity Project
   The *Identity Project*, a curriculum focused on ethnic-racial identity development, provides an opportunity for adolescents to explore their background and understand how their race and ethnicity impacts their everyday experiences.

Oral Storytelling
Sharing a story of self provides benefits beyond improved public speaking and rhetorical skills. Students can examine shared experiences as they make connections to their own lives.

Digital Storytelling
Digital storytelling allows youth to creatively represent their diverse lived experiences. Utilizing photos, videos, and other media, students can share a piece of themselves and their identity with their peers.

2. PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS TO IMPACT THEIR COMMUNITY

Empowering students to critique and dismantle the inequities they face in their communities, particularly those that result in collective trauma, can cultivate activism, social justice mindsets, and a positive connection with diverse communities.

Youth Caring Capstone
The Youth Caring Capstone from the Harvard Graduate School of Education provides an opportunity for youth to undertake a semester- or year-long project focused on ethical identity development. Via this capstone, students are empowered to strengthen their school community.

Be the Change
The Be the Change activity from Teaching Tolerance asks youth to identify a problem in their community and invent a solution to pursue social justice and community betterment.

Hopes and Dreams
Emboldening students to reach beyond what they know in their own experiences, to bring their imaginations and greatest dreams to fruition, instills in students the power of belief, action, healing, and hope. Asking students to identify their hopes and dreams for their learning is a powerful way to begin the school year for students of all ages.

3. PROVIDE VOICE AND CHOICE IN THE CLASSROOM

Children experience less anxiety when they feel a sense of control. By providing choice in the classroom assignments and engaging in collaborative problem solving with students, educators can foster a sense of safety. Teachers can begin by asking students what they want to learn about and finding opportunities to incorporate student input in the curriculum.

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Students who have experienced trauma are on **high alert**. Knowing what's coming next and having a **predictable structure** to the school day promotes a **feeling of safety**.

The components of a safe classroom differ depending on students' individual needs, backgrounds, and experiences. In order to create a space where each child can thrive, teachers must take the time to build relationships and get to know each child. The following strategies offer a place for educators to begin creating a predictable, positive learning environment.

1. CLASSROOM STRUCTURES

Morning Meeting. A morning meeting helps students connect with peers and teachers at the beginning of the school day. During a morning meeting, students and teachers greet each other, share their experiences, and adjust to school routines (Responsive Classroom).

Visual Agenda. A visual agenda provides a sense of safety and eases anxiety by letting students know what is coming during the school day. If there are any changes to the typical schedule, the teacher should preview these for students so that students are not caught off-guard by any changes.

Predictable Transitions. Transitions can trigger a student who has experienced trauma. By letting students know what to expect, teachers can create a feeling of safety. This includes establishing clear behavioral expectations for transition times, preparing students in advance when a transition is coming, establishing a transition signal (ex. playing music), and letting students know what comes after the transition.

2. PREDICTABLE TEACHER BEHAVIOR

Students often don't know when they will get attention from the teacher. They may resort to disruptive behavior as a means to get attention. To make students feel safe, teachers can let students know when to expect a teacher's attention. For example, a teacher can place a timer on a student's desk during independent work time, and tell the student that they will come check in when the timer goes off (Minahan, 2019). Teacher tone of voice is also instrumental in creating a safe classroom environment.

3. SENSE OF COMPETENCE

Students exposed to trauma are prone to negative thinking and struggle with a poor self-concept. By finding and fostering student strengths, teachers can improve students' self-concept (Jennings, 2018). Strategies to help students develop a sense of competence are included below.

- Ask a child to read to a younger student
- Ask a child to help out in the classroom (passing out assignments, organizing a bookshelf)
- Provide a note at the end of the day telling the child something they did well
- Call the child's family to tell them something the child did well
- Provide a 10:1 ratio of positive to negative feedback
- Provide praise in public and provide negative feedback privately

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

This section provides an overview of **classroom strategies** designed to help students **build resilience** and **deal with difficult emotions**.

1. VALIDATE STUDENTS' EMOTIONS

A student who is upset may yell, throw a book, cry, or use inappropriate language. By responding with empathy, such as saying, "I'm sorry that you are feeling angry," a teacher strengthens their trusting relationship with the student and avoids triggering a trauma response. This is more productive than ignoring the student, which can trigger feelings of abandonment or neglect.

2. TEACH STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH DIFFICULT THOUGHTS

Students who are worried often use breaks in the schedule to fixate on negative thoughts and stressors. Children can learn to use distractions to "change the channel" in their

brains (Minahan & Rappaport, 2012). This could include counting all the red items in the room or solving trivia questions.

3. HELP STUDENTS IDENTIFY AND ARTICULATE EMOTION

Children who have experienced trauma often have difficulty recognizing and verbalizing their emotions. They may also have difficulty identifying others' emotions. By providing children with the language to express what they are feeling, educators can support students who have experienced trauma. This support must be developmentally appropriate and account for students' cultural backgrounds. It is important to recognize that emotional display rules vary across cultures, and students may face a disconnect between the norms in the classroom and the norms in their home community. The Mood Meter, a tool from the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, helps children recognize their emotions and share them with others.

4. HELP STUDENTS LEARN TO MANAGE EMOTION

Adult modeling is a powerful tool to support students in learning to manage emotions. Teachers model self-regulation by describing their feelings and using a calm, neutral tone of voice in the classroom. Mindfulness is another self-calming technique that teachers can bring into the classroom. When using mindfulness with children who have experienced trauma, it is important to provide flexibility, including providing the option for children to focus on an object at the front of the room rather than closing their eyes (UCSF HEARTS).

5. PROVIDE REFERRALS TO HIGHER-LEVEL SUPPORT

Trauma-sensitive schools provide referrals to school- or community-based mental health supports. This may include community-based treatment or school-based trauma services. When students return to school following a mental health crisis, trauma-sensitive schools have comprehensive plans in place to support youth with the transition.

EDUCATOR SELF-REFLECTION AND SELF-CARE

STARTING WITH THE SELF

Trauma-sensitive and healing-centered practices depend on more than an educator's willingness to engage in relationship-building and provide emotional support for students. In order for educators to contribute to a culture of healing, they must first do the important work of self-reflection. Identity work allows educators to be conscientious of their own experiences, the trauma they have personally experienced, the biases they hold, and how caring for their students' traumas can impact their own social-emotional well-being.

1. IDENTITY WORK

Educator's multiple and intersectional identities are sources of strength which contribute to a desire to serve students, families, and communities. These identities also influence

educators' work with students, including the sense of community that each teacher creates in the classroom. Personal identity work is critical to an educator's ability to support healing-centered practices.

WHY THINK ABOUT IDENTITY?

By dedicating time for self-reflective thinking and understanding one's own experiences, educators will be better able to support students who have experienced trauma. When educators understand and share their own identity, they build connection and create space for students to explore their own identity. This work also allows educators to recognize classroom actions that may be influenced by their own past trauma or that may unknowingly trigger a student's trauma response. In essence, educators are only able to help their students heal once they themselves have started the healing process - a process that requires deep self-knowledge.

IDENTITY RESOURCES

The following resources support basic identity work:

Unpacking Identity
Teaching Tolerance provides professional development for educators focused on understanding their personal identity and its impact on teaching practice.

Identity Chart
The Identity Chart from Teaching Tolerance helps individuals identify and articulate various aspects of their identity.

Harvard Implicit Bias Test
The Project Implicit online test helps educators recognize implicit biases that they may not know about.

Student Perspective
"Does Your Teacher's Identity Affect Your Learning?," an article from The New York Times, helps teachers understand students' perspectives as they sort through their teacher's identity.

2. TRAUMA WORK

As educators prepare to return to school after a long disruption, it is critical to recognize the traumatic impact of COVID-19 not just on students and families, but on teachers, staff, and administrators. Supporting staff through grief, fear, anxiety, and uncertainty is of utmost importance as school communities come together to care for students.

DEALING WITH SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS

Educators may experience trauma in both their personal and professional lives. Often exposed to the pain, poverty, racism, and inequities faced by their students, teachers can exhibit the consequences of trauma much like their students. Documented as Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS), the National Child Trauma Stress Network (NCTSN) defines the impact as "the emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another." Symptoms of STS can mirror those of students, and include withdrawal, irritability, anger, numbness, and hopelessness, as well as physical symptoms.

EDUCATOR TRAUMA RESOURCES

With adequate support and self-care, educators can heal from Secondary Traumatic Stress. The following resources include trauma self-assessments and self-care strategies. These resources can be used individually or as a school community.

Educator Strategies

The Edutopia article "Are You at Risk for Secondary Traumatic Stress?" includes information about Secondary Traumatic Stress alongside strategies to help educators dealing with STS.

Educator Self Assessment

The Professional Quality of Life Measure assesses the impact of helping those who have experienced trauma. This site also includes strategies for educator self-care.

School-wide Self-Assessment

The Trauma Responsive Schools implementation Assessment includes a component to assess staff self-care. Administrators can assess educator responses in order to identify needs, which may include training on Secondary Traumatic Stress and self-care strategies.

STAFF COMMUNITY

A sense of community among staff supports educator self-care. Administrators can strengthen the staff community by beginning meetings with exercises such as the Inclusion Team Building Exercises from Stonehill College. Creating a culture of bravery and vulnerability takes work and requires trust among staff and administration; it is not an overnight task. This work carries different weight based upon race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability status, native language, and other factors. Principals should check in individually with staff to learn how they are experiencing the culture-building process.

RENNIE CENTER
EDUCATION RESEARCH & POLICY

ACTION STEPS

This section includes a **checklist** for schools getting started with trauma-sensitive practice.

FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

To do now

- Train staff to **identify the signs of trauma** and **respond to trauma** in a **culturally competent manner**. Teachers can begin by reviewing the *Recognizing Trauma* section of this module.
- Incorporate **identity work** and **self-reflection** in staff meetings and professional development. Begin meetings with team-building exercises that encourage vulnerability, such as the resources from Stonehill College embedded in this module.

- **Support staff to implement trauma-sensitive practice**. Incorporate trauma-sensitive practice into teacher observation and coaching. Consider launching an ongoing professional learning community.
- Encourage **student activism**. Partner with teachers to identify developmentally appropriate activities in which students can identify a problem in their community and contribute to positive change.
- Partner with staff to create a **predictable structure** and **safe transitions** throughout the school day. This includes clear expectations and staff monitoring in the morning, between classes, in the cafeteria, on the playground, in the classroom, and at dismissal.
- Begin a **transition towards supportive discipline**. Analyze school discipline data to understand who is disciplined and for what behavior. Be sure to disaggregate data by race, gender, home language, disability, and grade-level. Begin by adapting the school's discipline policy to remove any elements that are particularly susceptible to adult bias.
- Begin to **integrate student voice** throughout the school day. Through a series of focus groups, engage students to develop school norms. Build time into the school schedule for a morning meeting in every classroom.
- **Support staff wellness**. Offer training on the risk factors and symptoms of secondary trauma. Consider creating a staff support group to share stories, build a sense of community, and encourage self-care.

To do later

The following long-term actions will support the school's transition to becoming a trauma-sensitive learning community.

- Incorporate trauma-sensitive practice into a multi-tiered system of support. **Implement tier 1 practices**, including a common language for behavior expectations that is reinforced throughout the school day. **Identify trauma-sensitive tier 2 and tier 3 interventions**. Develop a policy to refer families for mental health support where needed.
- **Develop partnerships** with community mental health organizations. Identify opportunities to offer support via community partners during the school day.
- Adapt the school discipline policy to focus on **supportive discipline**.
- Provide opportunities for student **voice and choice** throughout the school day.
- Develop a **school-wide plan for social emotional learning**.

FOR TEACHERS

- **Create a predictable structure** for the school day by sharing a visual agenda with students.
- Start the school year with a **focus on relationships**. Ask students to write you a letter to share their interests, hopes, and dreams. Write a personal response to each student's letter.
- Find ways to **connect with students** each day. Greet students by name when they enter the classroom. Talk to them about their interests outside of school.

- Take time to **understand your own identity**. Start with the *Unpacking Identity* resources from Teaching Tolerance.
- Provide opportunities for students to **explore their own identity**. Begin by sharing videos and literature that explore race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and other components of identity. Create opportunities for students to share their identity with peers through digital, oral, and written storytelling.
- Take time during the school day to **reflect on how you're feeling**. Complete the Professional Quality of Life measure to assess and address any secondary trauma that you are experiencing.
- **Teach classroom expectations** and revisit them often. Provide predictable positive attention by offering **frequent praise** when student actions align with classroom expectations.
- Host a morning meeting to **build classroom community**.
- Help students learn to **identify and articulate emotion** by introducing them to the Mood Meter. Use the Mood Meter to check in with students often about how they're feeling.
- Introduce students to mindfulness as a way to **build self-regulation skills**.
- **Provide voice and choice** in the classroom to empower students. Ask students what they want to learn about and incorporate their requests into classroom teaching.
- **Support student activism**. Identify classroom projects in which students have the opportunity to identify a problem in their community and contribute to positive change.
- Identify opportunities for students who are struggling to **build a sense of academic competence**. This may include asking a student to read to a younger peer or providing a note at the end of the day telling the student something they did well.

GOING DEEPER

This section includes resources for schools seeking to **go deeper** with **trauma-sensitive practice**.

1. [TRAUMA-SENSITIVE SCHOOLS TRAINING PACKAGE](#), *NATIONAL CENTER ON SAFE SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS*

2. [HELPING TRAUMATIZED CHILDREN LEARN](#), *TRAUMA AND LEARNING POLICY INITIATIVE*

3. [CREATING AND ADVOCATING FOR TRAUMA SENSITIVE SCHOOLS](#), *TRAUMA AND LEARNING POLICY INSTITUTE*

4. [TRAUMA-INFORMED SEL TOOLKIT](#), *TRANSFORMING EDUCATION*

5. [SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS FRAMEWORK AND SELF-REFLECTION](#), *MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION*

6. [HOW LEARNING HAPPENS VIDEO SERIES](#), *EDUTOPIA*

RENNIE CENTER
EDUCATION RESEARCH & POLICY