



# Trauma-Sensitive Schools

## TRAINING PACKAGE

UNDERSTAND • BUILD • LEAD

# Understanding Trauma and Its Impact Activity Packet

National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments



Safe Supportive Learning  
Engagement | Safety | Environment

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# INTRODUCTION

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This activity packet accompanies the *Understanding Trauma and Its Impact* slide presentation and includes activities and discussion questions for use during in-person training sessions. Like the slide presentation, the packet is broken into four sections and includes activities that correspond to the training material covered in each section. Together, the slide presentation and activity packet serve as a companion training package that parallels the *Understanding Trauma and Its Impact* e-resource.

## Intended Use

Materials in the activity packet are appropriate for all school staff wanting to further their learning about trauma and its effects on students, staff, and schools. There are multiple ways that this activity packet can be used for supporting professional development:

1. After all staff view the *Understanding Trauma and Its Impact* e-resource independently, school administrators and trauma-sensitive work groups can use this activity packet in conjunction with the *Understanding Trauma and Its Impact* companion slide deck to conduct in-person trainings to review and reinforce material presented in the e-resource.
2. If school administrators and trauma-sensitive work group members do not wish to conduct a full in-person training after staff has viewed the *Understanding Trauma and Its Impact* e-resource, they can use the materials in this activity packet independently. For example, school leaders may use certain discussion questions and activities during staff meetings or training days to further explore and reinforce particular concepts as needed.
3. School administrators and trauma-sensitive work groups can integrate materials from this activity packet into other trauma trainings that your school or district has already developed.

## Preparing to Use This Activity Packet

Facilitators using this activity packet should be familiar with the entire *Trauma-Sensitive Schools Training Package* and have a clear plan for using these activities with staff. Facilitators should read through the entire activity packet and familiarize themselves with the materials prior to using this packet in a training session. Facilitators should have viewed the *Understanding Trauma and Its Impact* e-resource in preparation for using the slide presentation and this packet for in-person training.

## Facilitation Guide

This activity packet is broken into four sections that mirror the *Understanding Trauma and Its Impact* e-resource and slide presentation. Each activity includes a facilitator version with sample script and answer keys and a participant handout version to be distributed during the training. Before you begin, here are some strategies to consider.

### Address the Difficult Nature of the Material.

The *Understanding Trauma and Its Impact* e-resource and slide presentation contain information about trauma and its effects that may be distressing to some people. When facilitating activities, be sure to acknowledge the potentially difficult nature of the material and encourage people to take breaks and ask for support as needed.

### Set Ground Rules.

Trauma is a sensitive and difficult topic that may remind participants of their own experiences and trigger various responses during the training session. For example, some participants who have experienced trauma may attempt to share personal information, while others may become quieter or more withdrawn. Setting some ground rules can help set the tone for a respectful, thoughtful, and safe discussion that maintains clear boundaries. You can have participants create ground rules or simply set them yourself.

Suggested ground rules include the following:

- Be aware of the potentially upsetting nature of the material and take care yourself.
- Be respectful of others and do not discuss personal comments outside of the training.
- Be aware of the degree of personal information that is appropriate to share.
- Step up, step back: If you haven't spoken or contributed, do so if you feel comfortable. If you have been speaking and sharing a lot, let others take a turn.
- No side conversations or talking over others.

### Consider Different Methods of Facilitation.

Here are some options for facilitating discussions and activities:

- *Individual reflection.* Consider having participants write down their responses before asking people to share with the group. This gives everyone an opportunity to collect their thoughts and may help them feel more comfortable sharing in a group setting.

- *Small group discussion/pairs.* Have people split into smaller groups (3–5 people) to discuss a question or topic. This allows everyone to participate and have their voice heard. You can then ask each small group to share a summary of thoughts within the full group.
- *Large group discussion.* A question or topic is addressed to the whole group and the discussion is facilitated by the presenter.

## Materials

In addition to this packet, other materials that may be needed include the following:

- Flipcharts
- Markers
- Printed handouts of the activities and discussion questions for participants
- Extra pens/pencils and paper for participants to complete activities

## Time Frame

Completing all activities in this packet in conjunction with the *Understanding Trauma and Its Impact* in-person slide presentation is likely to take anywhere from 2 to 3 hours. The training can be broken into shorter segments to accommodate staff schedules. Breaking up the training gives facilitators the flexibility to allow for more or less time on various sections as needed. On their own, activities and discussion questions for each part can be completed in 20–30 minutes, depending on the needs of the group and the length of the facilitated discussions. Activities build on each other and should be introduced and completed in order.

## Training Evaluations

This activity packet includes materials for evaluating staff knowledge pre- and post-training and a training satisfaction survey. If school leaders and trauma work groups choose not to conduct an in-person training after staff members review the *Understanding Trauma and Its Impact* e-resource, you may choose to use the pre- and post-training knowledge surveys before and after staff view the e-resource. School leaders may consider sending a pre-training knowledge survey to all staff via an online survey platform prior to having staff view the e-resource and sending a post-training knowledge survey once all staff have viewed the e-resource to assess for change.

# PART 1: WHAT IS TRAUMA AND WHO IS AFFECTED?

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The facilitator summarizes the key takeaways from Part 1 of *Understanding Trauma and Its Impact*.

In Part 1 of *Understanding Trauma and Its Impact*, we learned the following:

- Experiences become traumatic when they overwhelm our ability to cope.
- Traumatic experiences come in many forms, ranging from one-time events to experiences that are chronic or even generational.
- Exposure to trauma in childhood is common.
- Risk for exposure to more than one type is high.
- Contextual factors increase one's risk for trauma.

## ACTIVITY #1: TYPES OF TRAUMA – FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS

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Activity goal: To learn about different categories and types of trauma and to identify the types of trauma that students may experience.

### Facilitator Instructions:

1. Pass out the participant handout for Activity #1 on p. 7.
2. Read the activity goal.

Read aloud:

The goal of this activity is to review different categories and types of trauma and to identify the types of trauma that our students may experience.

3. Remind participants how trauma is defined and review the main categories and types of traumatic events included in the participant handout.

Read aloud:

Trauma is defined as an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects. Traumatic events range from one-time incidences to experiences that are chronic and even generational.

Let's review the four trauma categories in your handout:

**Acute trauma** refers to a one-time event, such as an earthquake, fire, assault, or car accident.

**Chronic trauma** refers to traumatic experiences that are repeated and prolonged, such as ongoing exposure to family or community violence, chronic bullying, or a long-term medical issue.

**Complex trauma** refers to exposure to multiple traumatic events from an early age, often within the caregiving system or without adequate adult support, which has short- and long-term effects in many areas. Examples include abuse and neglect within families, witnessing domestic violence, or experiencing other forms of violence or adversity without adequate adult support.

**Historical trauma** refers to the collective and cumulative trauma experienced by a group across generations that are still suffering the effects. This includes discrimination, violence, and oppression of particular groups. **Racial or race-based trauma** refers to experiences of racially driven discrimination, harassment, and systemic oppression.

4. Review instructions for Activity #1 with the group. Decide whether you are going to ask participants to complete the activity individually or in a pair or small group and direct the group accordingly, modifying the script below. You should fill out the facilitator version of the activity on p. 6 ahead of time and be prepared to provide some examples for the group.

Read aloud:

Review the chart in your handout and fill in the fourth column with examples of the types of trauma experienced by students in your school.

5. Determine how you want to debrief the activity. For example, you could ask for individual examples from the larger group or request that small groups report out on their examples.
6. Use the discussion questions on p. 8 to engage the group in further conversation about types of trauma. Facilitators should modify to the questions as needed and pose them to the large group or print as a handout for small group discussions.
7. Close the activity after the discussion.

Read aloud:

Learning more about different types of experiences that may be traumatic for students, families, and staff helps us to broaden our understanding of trauma. As we continue to talk about these issues, we will continue to identify specific types of trauma that are most prevalent for our school community. Becoming more aware of the presence of trauma prepares us to better recognize the effects of trauma on everyone in the school community.



## ACTIVITY #1: TYPES OF TRAUMA – FACILITATOR HANDOUT

**Participant Instructions:** The chart below lists various types of trauma by category: acute, chronic, complex, historical, and racial. Fill in the fourth column with examples of different types of trauma experienced by the students at your school.

Category	Definition	Trauma type	Examples from your school community
Acute	Single, isolated incident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Accident</li> <li>■ Natural disaster</li> <li>■ Single act of violence or terrorism</li> <li>■ Sudden unexpected loss</li> </ul>	<i>Facilitator should be prepared with some examples for the group that are common in your school or district.</i>
Chronic	Traumatic experiences that are repeated and prolonged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Prolonged family or community violence</li> <li>■ Long-term illness</li> <li>■ Chronic bullying</li> <li>■ Chronic poverty and related stressors</li> <li>■ Exposure to war, torture, or forced displacement</li> </ul>	
Complex	Exposure to multiple traumatic events from an early age, often within the caregiving system or without adequate adult support that has short- and long-term effects in many areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Physical, emotional, and sexual abuse within caregiving systems</li> <li>■ Ongoing neglect by caregivers</li> <li>■ Witnessing domestic violence</li> <li>■ Other forms of chronic violence without support</li> </ul>	
Historical & Racial	Collective and cumulative trauma experienced by a group across generations that are still suffering the effects and current experiences of race-based trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Systematic oppression of particular groups across generations</li> <li>■ Racism</li> <li>■ Discrimination</li> <li>■ Harassment</li> </ul>	

## ACTIVITY #1: TYPES OF TRAUMA – PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

**Participant Instructions:** The chart below lists various types of trauma by category: acute, chronic, complex, historical, and racial. Fill in the fourth column with examples of different types of trauma experienced by the students at your school.

Category	Definition	Trauma type	Examples from your school community
Acute	Single, isolated incident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Accident</li> <li>■ Natural disaster</li> <li>■ Single act of violence or terrorism</li> <li>■ Sudden unexpected loss</li> </ul>	
Chronic	Traumatic experiences that are repeated and prolonged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Prolonged family or community violence</li> <li>■ Long-term illness</li> <li>■ Chronic bullying</li> <li>■ Chronic poverty and related stressors</li> <li>■ Exposure to war, torture, or forced displacement</li> </ul>	
Complex	Exposure to multiple traumatic events from an early age, often within the caregiving system or without adequate adult support that has short- and long-term effects in many areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Physical, emotional, and sexual abuse within caregiving systems</li> <li>■ Ongoing neglect by caregivers</li> <li>■ Witnessing domestic violence</li> <li>■ Other forms of chronic violence without support</li> </ul>	
Historical & Racial	Collective and cumulative trauma experienced by a group across generations that are still suffering the effects and current experiences of race-based trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Systematic oppression of particular groups across generations</li> <li>■ Racism</li> <li>■ Discrimination</li> <li>■ Harassment</li> </ul>	



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: TYPES OF TRAUMA

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1. What surprised you during this activity?
2. How aware do you think school staff are about the rates and types of trauma in the lives of the students in your school?
3. What groups of students are likely to experience higher rates of potentially traumatic events at your school (e.g., exposure to violence outside of school, bullying, harassment, violence in school)?
4. What more would you like to learn about the prevalence and types of trauma as it relates to your school community?
5. How does information about the prevalence and types of trauma among students inform how your school operates day-to-day?

# PART 2: HOW DOES THE STRESS RESPONSE SYSTEM WORK?

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The facilitator summarizes the key takeaways from Part 2 of *Understanding Trauma and Its Impact*.

Read aloud:

In Part 2 of *Understanding Trauma and Its Impact* we learned the following:

- The brain has a built-in alarm system designed to detect threat and keep us safe.
- When faced with threat, the emotional brain takes over.
- A stress becomes traumatic when it overwhelms our stress response system.
- A range of acute post-trauma responses are common.
- Trauma reminders, or “triggers,” set off the alarm.
- Responses to triggers may seem out of place and can be misunderstood by others.

## ACTIVITY #2: THE STRESS RESPONSE – FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS

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Goal: The goal of this activity is to understand how the brain and body respond to stress.

### Facilitator instructions:

1. Pass out the participant handout for Activity #2 on p. 12.
2. Read the activity goal.

Read aloud:

The goal of this activity is to understand how the brain and body respond to stress. We will talk about how the stress response plays a role in our daily interactions with students.

3. Remind staff what they have learned so far about the stress response.

Read aloud:

We have learned that our brain has a built-in alarm system that is designed to detect potential threat and help the body react in ways that will keep us safe. We respond to threat by fighting, fleeing, or freezing, depending on what is most likely to keep us safe in the moment.

Understanding the process and order of the stress response can help us understand our own reactions and those of our students and colleagues.

4. Refer to the participant handout for Activity #2 and review instructions with the group. Decide whether you are going to ask participants to complete the activity individually or in a pair or small group and direct the group accordingly, modifying the script below. The facilitator version of Activity #2 on p. 11 includes an answer key.

Read aloud:

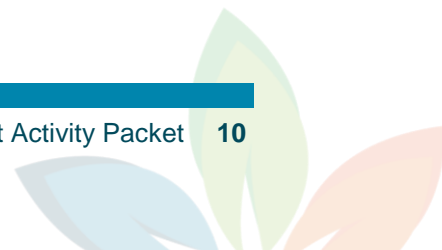
Order the experiences in the right-hand column from beginning to end to reflect how the stress response works.

5. Determine how you want to debrief the activity. For example, you could do a general call and response from the whole group or call on individuals for their answers.
6. Use the discussion questions on p. 13 to engage the group in further conversation about the stress response. Presenters should modify the questions as needed and pose them to the large group or print as a handout for small group discussions.
7. Close the activity after the discussion.

Read aloud:

Knowing how the stress response system works helps us to understand our own stress reactions and those of others. For example, when a student is feeling threatened, even if we are not sure why, it is important to remember that the emotional brain has taken over and attempts to talk at or rationalize with the student in that moment will be ineffective. We also know that if our interaction with a student, parent, or colleague sets off our own stress response, we, too, will have a hard time thinking clearly and managing our emotional responses.

It is important to remember that not every threat that sets off the stress response is traumatic, and some amount of stress helps us to learn and grow. A stress becomes traumatic when it overwhelms this system that is usually effective at keeping us safe. When the system becomes overwhelmed, the emotional brain remains on alert and continues to send the body instructions to fight, flee, or freeze, even after the threat has passed. Students exposed to trauma may remain in survival mode much of the time, which compromises their ability to learn.



## ACTIVITY #2: THE STRESS RESPONSE – FACILITATOR HANDOUT

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**Participant Instructions:** Order the experiences in the right-hand column from beginning (1) to end (7) to reflect how the stress response works.

Order—Leader answer key	Stress response
3	Your thinking brain checks things out and confirms that the threat is real.
7	Your thinking brain comes back on to help your body calm down.
1	You are interacting with a student who becomes agitated and starts to yell at you, accusing you of purposefully not helping them.
5	Your emotional brain initiates the “fight, flight, or freeze” response.
2	Your emotional brain senses a potential threat to your physical or emotional wellbeing and sets off the alarm.
6	You react in the situation by raising your voice and telling them they need to leave the classroom.
4	Your thinking brain goes “off-line” so that the emotional brain can take over.



## ACTIVITY #2: THE STRESS RESPONSE – PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

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**Participant Instructions:** Order the experiences in the right-hand column from beginning (1) to end (7) to reflect how the stress response works.

Order	Stress response
	Your thinking brain checks things out and confirms that the threat is real.
	Your thinking brain comes back on to help your body calm down.
	You are interacting with a student who becomes agitated and starts to yell at you, accusing you of purposefully not helping them.
	Your emotional brain initiates the “fight, flight, or freeze” response.
	Your emotional brain senses a potential threat to your physical or emotional wellbeing and sets off the alarm.
	You react in the situation by raising your voice and telling them they need to leave the classroom.
	Your thinking brain goes “off-line” so that the emotional brain can take over.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: THE STRESS RESPONSE

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1. What situations during the school day have the potential to activate your stress response system?
2. What situations are more likely to set off the stress response in your students?
3. What does the “fight, flight, or freeze” response look like for you in the moment (e.g., sweating, heart racing, yelling, shutting down)?
4. What does the “fight, flight, or freeze” response look like for your students?
5. What does the “fight, flight, or freeze” response look like for parents?
6. How might this information about the stress response inform your daily work?





# PART 3: WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF EXPOSURE TO TRAUMA?

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The facilitator summarizes the key takeaways from Part 3 of *Understanding Trauma and Its Impact*.

Read aloud: In Part 3 of *Understanding Trauma and Its Impact*, we learned the following:

- Key environmental and individual factors impact a child's response to trauma and their risk for negative effects.
- There are a number of possible trajectories for youth following a traumatic event.
- Most youth who experience a traumatic event do not develop significant mental health issues; however, some continue to struggle.
- Chronic interpersonal trauma that begins early changes the way the brain develops and can impact all areas of functioning into adulthood.
- Adults play a critical role in preventing and reducing the negative effects of stress on children.

## ACTIVITY #3: RECOGNIZING TRAUMA – FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS

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Goal: The goal of this activity is to learn to recognize the possible effects of trauma on student behavior.

### Facilitator Instructions:

1. Pass out the participant handout for Activity #3 on p. 17.
2. Read the activity goal.

Read aloud:

The goal of this activity is to learn to recognize the possible effects of trauma on student behavior. Not all challenging behaviors are related to trauma, but it is important to consider whether trauma may be playing a role before drawing conclusions about what we are experiencing with a student.

3. Remind staff what they have learned so far related to the impact of trauma on student behavior.

Read aloud:

We have learned that trauma can have both short- and long-term effects on health and well-being for children and youth; the more prolonged and intense the trauma, the greater the impact on all areas of functioning. Youth may have trouble paying attention and maintaining safe and positive relationships. Youth exposed to trauma often have difficulties regulating their emotions. They may be aggressive and defensive or appear withdrawn and disconnected. These survival responses can become so much a part of how a child operates in the world that it is difficult for adults to identify behaviors as trauma-related responses. Without considering trauma, we run the risk of misunderstanding and mislabeling the core issues our students may be facing.

4. Refer to the participant handout for Activity #3 and review instructions with the group. Decide whether you are going to ask participants to complete the activity individually or in a pair or small group and direct the group accordingly, modifying the script below. The facilitator version of Activity #3 on p. 16 includes sample answers to help guide the group.

Read aloud:

Students exposed to trauma—particularly ongoing trauma from a young age—develop survival strategies to manage traumatic experiences. Their brains and bodies adapt based on these experiences in ways that may be misinterpreted by others. Trauma-related behaviors can be frustrating for adults, especially when they jeopardize a student's success. However, these behaviors often make sense in the context of a youth's experiences. When we put on our "trauma glasses" and consider the role trauma may be playing in how a student is behaving, we start to think and talk about students and their behaviors differently.

Take a few minutes to fill in the right column of your handout with alternative descriptions or adjectives you might use to describe a student when you have your "trauma glasses" on.

5. Determine how you want to debrief the activity. For example, you may ask pairs or small groups to report out on their answers or go through each behavior and ask for answers from the larger group.
6. Use the discussion questions on p. 18 to engage the group in further conversation about the stress response. Presenters should modify the questions as needed and pose them to the large group or print as a handout for small group discussions.
7. Close the activity after the discussion.



## ACTIVITY #3: RECOGNIZING TRAUMA – FACILITATOR HANDOUT

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Students exposed to trauma—particularly chronic trauma from an early age—develop survival strategies to manage traumatic experiences. Their brains and bodies adapt based on these experiences in ways that may be misinterpreted by others. Trauma-related behaviors can be frustrating for adults, especially when they jeopardize a student’s success. However, these behaviors often make sense in the context of a youth’s experiences. When we put on our “trauma glasses” and consider the role trauma may be playing in how a student is behaving, we start to think and talk about students and their behaviors differently.

**Participant Instructions:** Fill in the right column of your handout with alternative explanations or adjectives you might use to describe a particular student behavior when you have your “trauma glasses” on. **[Note: Facilitator examples are provided as prompts if needed.]**

Trauma glasses off	Trauma glasses on
<b>Manipulative</b>	<i>Getting needs met in ways that have worked in the past. Doing whatever is necessary to survive.</i>
<b>Lazy</b>	<i>Overwhelmed. Lacking the skills to make decisions about what to do first or to organize.</i>
<b>Resistant</b>	<i>Mistrustful of others due to history of being hurt by others. Scared to make progress and then lose everything.</i>
<b>Unmotivated</b>	<i>Depressed. Fearful. Overwhelmed. “Frozen.”</i>
<b>Disrespectful</b>	<i>Feeling threatened, unsafe, out of control.</i>
<b>Attention-Seeking</b>	<i>Feeling disconnected, alone, or unheard by others. Looking for connection.</i>

## ACTIVITY #3: RECOGNIZING TRAUMA – PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

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Students exposed to trauma—particularly chronic trauma from an early age—develop survival strategies to manage traumatic experiences. Their brains and bodies adapt based on these experiences in ways that may be misinterpreted by others. Trauma-related behaviors can be frustrating for adults, especially when they jeopardize a student’s success. However, these behaviors often make sense in the context of a youth’s experiences. When we put on our “trauma glasses” and consider the role trauma may be playing in how a student is behaving, we start to think and talk about students and their behaviors differently.

**Participant Instructions:** Fill in the right column of your handout with alternative explanations or adjectives you would use to describe a particular student behavior when you have your “trauma glasses” on.

Trauma glasses off	Trauma glasses on
Manipulative	
Lazy	
Resistant	
Unmotivated	
Disrespectful	
Attention-Seeking	

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: RECOGNIZING TRAUMA

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1. What are your thoughts after completing this activity?
2. Were there particular students that came to mind as you completed this activity? (Be sure to protect student confidentiality when considering your response to the group.)
3. How does operating with your trauma glasses on change how you view students?
4. How does operating with your trauma glasses on change how you talk about students?
5. Do you see adults in the school currently operating more with their trauma glasses off or with their trauma glasses on?
6. What is easier and more challenging about operating with your trauma glasses on? What are the implications for your work?



# PART 4: WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR SCHOOLS?

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Facilitator summarizes the key takeaways from Part 4 of *Understanding Trauma and Its Impact*.

In Part 4 of *Understanding Trauma and Its Impact*, we learned the following:

- Exposure to trauma can negatively affect student behavior, relationships, and academic performance.
- School staff working with students exposed to trauma are at greater risk of being traumatized themselves.
- High rates of trauma among students and staff can have significant negative effects on school climate, culture, and conditions for learning.
- In a trauma-sensitive school, all school staff recognize and understand student responses to trauma and practices that support healing and resilience are embedded schoolwide.

## ACTIVITY #4: APPLYING TRAUMA CONCEPTS – FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS

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Goal: The goal of this activity is to apply trauma-related concepts to common student scenarios.

### Facilitator Instructions:

1. Pass out the participant handout for Activity #4 on p. 23.
2. Read the activity goal.

Read aloud:

The goal of this activity is to practice applying the trauma-related concepts that we have learned to common scenarios we may find ourselves in with some of our students.

3. Remind staff what they have learned so far from Parts 1, 2, and 3.

Read aloud:

As we have moved through Parts 1–3 of *Understanding Trauma and Its Impact*, we have learned about the types of experiences that can be traumatic for students, how the brain and body respond to stress and trauma, the effects of trauma on students, and the ways that trauma-related responses can be misunderstood in school settings.

4. Refer to the participant handout for Activity #4 and review instructions with the group. Decide whether you are going to ask participants to complete the activity individually or in a pair or small group and whether you want them to do one scenario and stop or do both before you debrief with the group. Direct the group accordingly, modifying the script below. The facilitator version of Activity #4 on p. 21 includes sample answers to help guide the group.

Read aloud:

Let's apply what we have learned together to the scenarios in your handout.

Take a few minutes to complete the chart and answer the questions for each scenario.

5. Determine how you want to debrief the activity. For example, you may review the charts and guiding questions for each scenario with the large group or ask pairs or small groups to offer their reflections on each scenario.
6. Use the discussion questions on p. 25 to engage the group in further conversation about the impact of trauma on the school community. Presenters should modify the questions as needed and pose them to the large group or print as a handout for small group discussions.
7. Close the activity after the discussion.

Read aloud:

Learning how to apply what we are learning about trauma to our interactions with students is a necessary first step toward becoming a trauma-sensitive school. This learning doesn't stop with one training but continues as we work together to determine how to create a whole school environment that is grounded in an understanding of trauma and its impact on students and staff and fosters healing and resilience for all.



# ACTIVITY #4: APPLYING TRAUMA CONCEPTS – FACILITATOR HANDOUT

**Participant Instructions:** Complete the chart below for scenario #1.

**Scenario #1:** Maria is a 13-year-old eighth grader. She most often appears disconnected and disinterested. She fidgets, avoids eye contact, mumbles when adults ask her questions, and mostly doesn't appear to care about anything. She seems to understand the material and sometimes does well on assignments but refuses to engage with others during the school day. Teachers complain that she often puts her head down and attempts to sleep during class. This gets increasingly frustrating for adults who keep prompting Maria to sit up and engage. These power struggles frequently end with Maria either leaving the classroom or putting her head down for the remainder of the period.

[Background that staff may not be aware of: Maria has an extensive history of trauma. She was removed from her home in second grade and placed with her aunt due to experiences of severe abuse and neglect. Over the years, there have been several failed attempts to reunite Maria with her mother, who struggles with addiction.]

Staff perspective (without considering trauma)	Student perspective	Staff perspective (with trauma glasses on)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <i>Maria is lazy and unmotivated.</i></li> <li>■ <i>She doesn't want to apply herself.</i></li> <li>■ <i>She is wasting her potential.</i></li> <li>■ <i>It's not okay for her to get away with acting like this in class, even if she does well on an assignment or test.</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <i>No one really cares what happens to me.</i></li> <li>■ <i>I can't deal with more expectations from adults.</i></li> <li>■ <i>What is the point in trying?</i></li> <li>■ <i>Adults don't understand how hard my life is.</i></li> <li>■ <i>I cannot trust anyone even if they say they are trying to help.</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <i>Maria is focused on survival and cannot expend a lot of energy on learning and being curious about new things.</i></li> <li>■ <i>She may be in "freeze" mode most of the time as a way to manage overwhelming feelings.</i></li> </ul>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What else might be important to know about Maria in your role? <i>Cultural background, strengths, staff she connects with, peer interactions</i></li> <li>2. What are some potential triggers for Maria that staff may want to be aware of? <i>Loss, change, disappointment, negative or shaming interactions with adults</i></li> <li>3. What are some strategies that you might consider trying with Maria? <i>Tracking moments when she is more engaged and energized, giving her a role, avoiding public criticism and confrontation</i></li> </ol>		





**Scenario #2:** Jamie is a sophomore in high school and is constantly in trouble at school. He has a very short fuse and will quickly become aggressive when adults call him out on his behaviors and set limits. Jamie is particularly confrontational toward male staff. His pattern is often to begin by challenging a teacher during class—either questioning what they are doing or refusing to participate. From there, things often escalate, as Jamie becomes loud, paces around his desk, and is eventually ordered to leave the classroom. Once in the hallway, he becomes disruptive to other classrooms and has a lot of difficulty calming down.

[Background that staff may not be aware of: Jamie has witnessed domestic violence and gun violence in his neighborhood, and he was bullied when he was younger. Jamie’s grandmother cares for him at home but often says that she is not sure if she can continue to have him stay with her.]

Staff perspective (without considering trauma)	Student perspective	Staff perspective (with trauma glasses on)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <i>Jamie is trying to get out of anything he doesn't want to do.</i></li> <li>■ <i>He is disrespectful and purposefully tries to make me look foolish.</i></li> <li>■ <i>He needs to learn that he cannot act like this without severe consequences.</i></li> <li>■ <i>He has to learn that I am the authority figure and he needs to respect me.</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <i>Adults are frightening, unreliable, and untrustworthy.</i></li> <li>■ <i>Adults are out to get me.</i></li> <li>■ <i>I need to get them before they get me.</i></li> <li>■ <i>I feel scared and out of control most of the time.</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <i>Jamie is feeling threatened and unsafe right now.</i></li> <li>■ <i>Jamie does not know how to connect with me in a positive way, even though he may want to.</i></li> <li>■ <i>Creating a confrontational scene is not helpful and confirms his belief that adults are unsafe and not to be trusted.</i></li> </ul>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What else might be important to know about Jamie in your role? <i>Cultural context, relationships with school staff that are positive, patterns related to Jamie's good days and bad days at school</i></li> <li>2. What are some potential triggers for Jamie that staff may want to be aware of? <i>Feeling unsafe, feeling out of control, changes in staff, feeling caught off guard or disrespected, lack of clarity about what is happening next</i></li> <li>3. What are some strategies that you might consider trying with Jamie? <i>Identifying where and with whom he feels most safe at school, offering him opportunities to be in control in positive ways, avoiding negative and shaming confrontations, offering ways for him to calm himself down before he escalates too far</i></li> </ol>		



## ACTIVITY #4: APPLYING TRAUMA CONCEPTS – PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

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**Participant Instructions:** Complete the chart below for scenario #1.

**Scenario #1:** Maria is a 13-year-old eighth grader. She most often appears disconnected and disinterested. She fidgets, avoids eye contact, mumbles when adults ask her questions, and mostly doesn't appear to care about anything. She seems to understand the material and sometimes does well on assignments but refuses to engage with others during the school day. Teachers complain that she often puts her head down and attempts to sleep during class. This gets increasingly frustrating for adults who keep prompting Maria to sit up and engage. These power struggles frequently end with Maria either leaving the classroom or putting her head down for the remainder of the period.

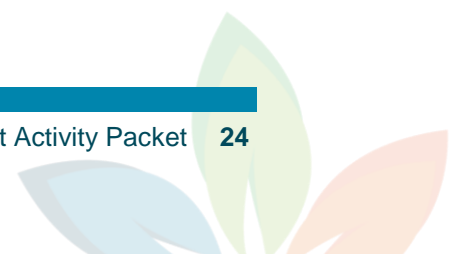
[Background that staff may not be aware of: Maria has an extensive history of trauma. She was removed from her home in second grade and placed with her aunt due to experiences of severe abuse and neglect. Over the years, there have been several failed attempts to reunite Maria with her mother, who struggles with addiction.]

Staff perspective (without considering trauma)	Student perspective	Staff perspective (with trauma glasses on)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What else might be important to know about Maria in your role?</li> <li>2. What are some potential triggers for Maria that staff may want to be aware of?</li> <li>3. What are some strategies that you might consider trying with Maria?</li> </ol>		

**Scenario #2:** Jamie is a sophomore in high school and is constantly in trouble at school. He has a very short fuse and will quickly become aggressive when adults call him out on his behaviors and set limits. Jamie is particularly confrontational toward male staff. His pattern is often to begin by challenging a teacher during class—either questioning what they are doing or refusing to participate. From there, things often escalate, as Jamie becomes loud, paces around his desk, and is eventually ordered to leave the classroom. Once in the hallway, he becomes disruptive to other classrooms and has a lot of difficulty calming down.

[Background that staff may not be aware of: Jamie has witnessed domestic violence and gun violence in his neighborhood, and he was bullied when he was younger. Jamie’s grandmother cares for him at home but often says that she is not sure if she can continue to have him stay with her.]

Staff perspective (without considering trauma)	Student perspective	Staff perspective (with trauma glasses on)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What else might be important to know about Jamie in your role?</li> <li>2. What are some potential triggers for Jamie that staff may want to be aware of?</li> <li>3. What are some strategies that you might consider trying with Jamie?</li> </ol>		



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: APPLYING TRAUMA CONCEPTS

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1. What are your thoughts about this activity?
2. How do you see students at your school being affected by trauma?
3. How do you see parents being affected by trauma?
4. How might you apply the activity we just did to your interactions with parents?
5. How can you continue to apply trauma-related concepts to your daily work? What would stay the same? What might you do differently?



## ACTIVITY #5: SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS – FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS

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Goal: The goal of this activity is to recognize the potential impact of trauma on school staff.

### Facilitator Instructions:

1. Pass out the participant handout for Activity #5 on p. 29.
2. Read the activity goal.

Read aloud:

The goal of this activity is to recognize the potential impact of secondary trauma in our own lives as a result of working with students and families exposed to trauma.

3. Remind staff what they have learned about secondary traumatic stress.

Read aloud:

Educators, counselors, and other support staff who work with highly traumatized students are at risk of being indirectly traumatized as a result of hearing about their students' trauma and witnessing its negative effects.

The term *secondary traumatic stress (STS)* refers to the presence of PTSD symptoms caused by indirect exposure to other people's traumatic experiences. Another term used to describe STS is *compassion fatigue*. Symptoms of STS for staff may include increased anxiety and concern about safety; intrusive, negative thoughts and images related to their students' traumatic stories; fatigue and physical complaints; feeling numb or detached from students; feeling powerless or hopeless about students and the work; diminished concentration and difficulty with decision making; and a desire to physically or emotionally withdraw from people or situations that trigger difficult thoughts and emotions.

Over time, this type of stress can have negative effects on staff members' views of themselves, others, and their work. We refer to this phenomenon as *vicarious trauma*.

4. Refer to the participant handout for Activity #5 and review instructions with the group. Decide whether you are going to ask participants to complete the activity individually or in a pair or small group and direct the group accordingly, modifying the script below.  
**[Note for facilitators: This activity requires more personal reflection than previous activities. The facilitator should make it clear that no one has to share anything beyond what is comfortable and appropriate for this setting. You may want to be prepared with information on how school employees can access additional support if needed.]**

Read aloud:

This exercise helps us understand the warning signs of secondary traumatic stress or "compassion fatigue" that we may experience on the job. Take some time to complete the checklist here. You do not have to share your answers with anyone.

5. Determine how you want to debrief the activity. Because this is a more personal activity, you may consider asking less specific questions. For example, you might ask how many people have at least 1 or 2 warning signs that they experience often or very often, instead of asking for the specific examples of the experiences themselves. Facilitators want to avoid participants revealing personal information that compromises their privacy or the safety of the training space.
6. Use the discussion questions on p. 30 to engage the group in further conversation about the impact of trauma on staff. Facilitators should modify the questions as needed and pose them to the large group or print as a handout for small group discussions.
7. Close the activity after the discussion.

Read aloud:

We cannot do our best work with students, families, and each other if we are not aware of how our work affects us. It's important to recognize warning signs when we are being affected by trauma—either our own or our students' traumatic experiences—before the stress starts affecting individual performance and the overall school environment. Taking care of ourselves is something we need to do as individuals but also as a school community.



## ACTIVITY #5: SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS – FACILITATOR HANDOUT

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This exercise helps us to recognize our warning signs of secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma.

**Participant Instructions:** Take some time to complete the checklist below. Using the scale provided (5 = often to 1= never), rate the extent to which you find yourself experiencing the warning signs listed. You do not need to share your answers with anyone.

How often do you find yourself . . .	
_____	5 = Very Often 4 = Often 3 = Sometimes 2 = Rarely 1 = Never
_____	Having dreams/nightmares about work
_____	Thinking about clients' traumatic experiences
_____	Looking for danger and threats more often even when not at work
_____	Feeling detached or disconnected
_____	Having trouble managing emotions associated with work
_____	Having difficulty leaving work at work
_____	Taking the work personally
_____	No longer able to empathize with others
_____	Not feeling like yourself
_____	Feeling emotionally drained
_____	Being unable to tolerate emotions
_____	Experiencing a loss of energy and pleasure
_____	Second-guessing yourself
_____	Feeling continually overwhelmed
_____	Questioning your ability to help and why you are in this job
_____	Having more trouble communicating well with others
_____	Experiencing more interpersonal conflicts at work or at home
_____	Feeling that your work is of poorer quality
_____	Feeling negative and contributing to a negative atmosphere
_____	Not having the motivation to "go the extra mile"

## ACTIVITY #5: SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS – PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

---

This exercise helps us to recognize our warning signs of secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma.

**Participant Instructions:** Take some time to complete the checklist below. Using the scale provided (5 = often to 1 = never), rate the extent to which you find yourself experiencing the warning signs listed. You do not need to share your answers with anyone.

How often do you find yourself . . .	
_____	5 = Very Often 4 = Often 3 = Sometimes 2 = Rarely 1 = Never
_____	Having dreams/nightmares about work
_____	Thinking about clients' traumatic experiences
_____	Looking for danger and threats more often even when not at work
_____	Feeling detached or disconnected
_____	Having trouble managing emotions associated with work
_____	Having difficulty leaving work at work
_____	Taking the work personally
_____	No longer able to empathize with others
_____	Not feeling like yourself
_____	Feeling emotionally drained
_____	Being unable to tolerate emotions
_____	Experiencing a loss of energy and pleasure
_____	Second-guessing yourself
_____	Feeling continually overwhelmed
_____	Questioning your ability to help and why you are in this job
_____	Having more trouble communicating well with others
_____	Experiencing more interpersonal conflicts at work or at home
_____	Feeling that your work is of poorer quality
_____	Feeling negative and contributing to a negative atmosphere
_____	Not having the motivation to "go the extra mile"



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS

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1. How was it for you to complete the warning signs checklist?
2. What made an impression on you about this activity?
3. How do you protect and care for yourself in your work?
4. How does your school support staff wellness and resilience?
5. What else do you think you need to remain healthy and resilient on the job?



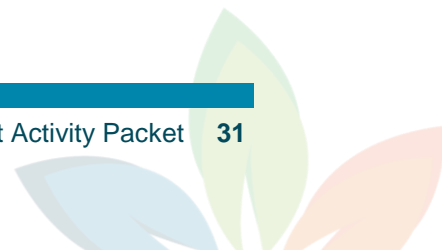
# TRAINING EVALUATION MATERIALS

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Training materials in this section include the following:

- Pre- and post-training knowledge surveys
- Training satisfaction survey

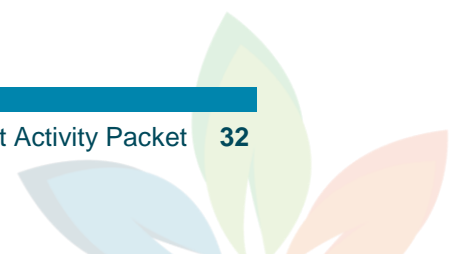
Surveys can be printed out and completed or entered into an online survey platform such as Survey Monkey to assess staff knowledge and satisfaction with the *Understanding Trauma and Its Impact* in-person training. If no in-person trainings are being conducted, pre- and post-training knowledge surveys can be used before and after staff view the e-resource to assess for change in staff understanding of core trauma concepts.



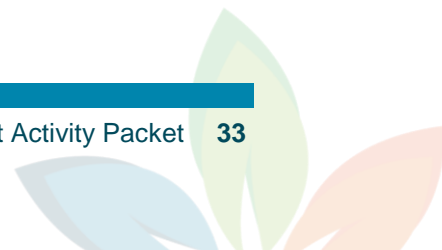
# PRE-TRAINING KNOWLEDGE SURVEY

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1. An experience becomes “traumatic” when it
  - a. Involves a specific type of abuse
  - b. Overwhelms our ability to cope with the situation
  - c. Activates the stress response
  - d. Both A and B
2. Research indicates that the percentage of children and youth exposed to violence in the past year is
  - a. 20–30%
  - b. 40–50%
  - c. 60–70%
  - d. 80–90%
3. Complex trauma refers to
  - a. Multiple experiences of trauma starting early in life and the long-term effects of these experiences
  - b. Traumatic events that are complicated and difficult to understand or address
  - c. The cumulative impact of trauma across generations
  - d. Both A and C
  - e. All of the above
4. A traumatic experience
  - a. Is not something most children or youth bounce back from
  - b. Often leads to long-term emotional issues
  - c. All of the above
  - d. None of the above
5. Once the stress response system is activated, a person is less capable of
  - a. Reacting
  - b. Planning and reasoning
  - c. Both A and B
  - d. Neither A nor B
6. Factors that impact a child’s response to a potentially traumatic event include
  - a. Parent history of trauma
  - b. Level of social support
  - c. Culture
  - d. Biological factors
  - e. Both A and B
  - f. All of the above



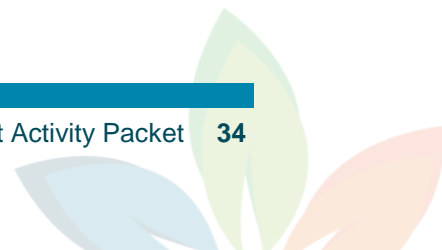
7. To “re-traumatize” someone means to
  - a. Ask them about their experiences
  - b. Recreate situations that leave people feeling helpless, unsafe, and out of control
  - c. Both A and B
  - d. Neither A nor B
8. Secondary traumatic stress refers to
  - a. Distress related to feelings about your own traumatic experiences
  - b. Distress related to hearing about someone else’s trauma
  - c. All of the above
9. Working with students and families exposed to trauma
  - a. Can be traumatic for educators
  - b. Always affects providers’ work performance
  - c. Is not something schools should address directly
  - d. Both A and B
10. Creating a trauma-sensitive school means
  - a. Supporting individual students exposed to trauma
  - b. Training student services staff on trauma-related interventions
  - c. Ensuring that all school staff is educated about trauma and is able to respond accordingly
  - d. All of the above
  - e. Both A and B



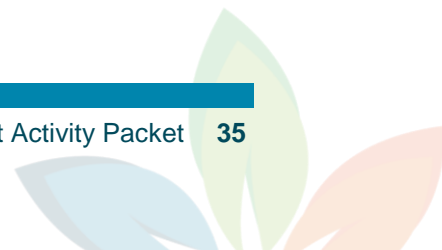
# POST-TRAINING KNOWLEDGE SURVEY

---

1. An experience becomes “traumatic” when it
  - a. Involves a specific type of abuse
  - b. Overwhelms our ability to cope with the situation
  - c. Activates the stress response
  - d. Both A and B
2. Research indicates that the percentage of children and youth exposed to violence in the past year is
  - a. 20–30%
  - b. 40–50%
  - c. 60–70%
  - d. 80–90%
3. Complex trauma refers to
  - a. Multiple experiences of trauma starting early in life and the long-term effects of these experiences
  - b. Traumatic events that are complicated and difficult to understand or address
  - c. The cumulative impact of trauma across generations
  - d. Both A and C
  - e. All of the above
4. A traumatic experience
  - a. Is not something most children or youth bounce back from
  - b. Often leads to long-term emotional issues
  - c. All of the above
  - d. None of the above
5. Once the stress response system is activated, a person is less capable of
  - a. Reacting
  - b. Planning and reasoning
  - c. Both A and B
  - d. Neither A or B
6. Factors that impact a child’s response to a potentially traumatic event include
  - a. Parent history of trauma
  - b. Level of social support
  - c. Culture
  - d. Biological factors
  - e. Both A and B
  - f. All of the above



7. To “re-traumatize” someone means to
  - a. Ask them about their experiences
  - b. Recreate situations that leave people feeling helpless, unsafe, and out of control
  - c. Both A and B
  - d. Neither A or B
8. Secondary traumatic stress refers to
  - a. Distress related to feelings about your own traumatic experiences
  - b. Distress related to hearing about someone else’s trauma
  - c. All of the above
9. Working with students and families exposed to trauma
  - a. Can be traumatic for educators
  - b. Always affects providers’ work performance
  - c. Is not something schools should address directly
  - d. Both A and B
10. Creating a trauma-sensitive school means
  - a. Supporting individual students exposed to trauma
  - b. Training student services staff on trauma-related interventions
  - c. Ensuring that all school staff is educated about trauma and is able to respond accordingly
  - d. All of the above
  - e. Both A and B



# TRAINING SATISFACTION SURVEY

Please **circle** the number indicating the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

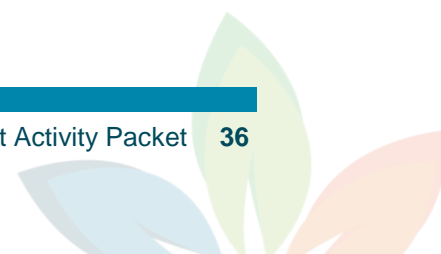
Please rate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements, which comprise the learning objectives for this training.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. This training enhanced my understanding of the prevalence and types of trauma my students may experience.	5	4	3	2	1
2. I learned how the brain and body respond to stress and trauma.	5	4	3	2	1
3. I am better equipped to recognize the effects of trauma on students, staff, and parents.	5	4	3	2	1
4. The content of the training was relevant and can be easily applied to my work.	5	4	3	2	1
Please rate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about the training experience.					
5. The material was presented in a clear and logical manner.	5	4	3	2	1
6. The workshop kept my interest overall.	5	4	3	2	1
7. The presenter was well prepared and knowledgeable.	5	4	3	2	1
8. There was ample time for interaction and questions.	5	4	3	2	1
9. I would recommend this training to others.	5	4	3	2	1

Please respond as specifically as possible to the following:

1. I learned . . .
2. I most appreciated . . .
3. I was surprised . . .
4. The first thing I want to try is . . .
5. I would like additional education on . . .
6. We can improve this training by . . .

*Please use other side for additional comments.*

**Thank You!**



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## Disclaimer

The contents of the *Trauma-Sensitive Schools Training Package* were designed and written under the U.S. Department of Education (Department) Contract Numbers ED-ESE-12-O-0035 and ED-ESE-16-A-0002 by the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE) operated by American Institutes for Research®. The content and views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the policies of the Department and should not assume endorsement by the federal government. No official endorsement by the Department of any product, commodity, service, or enterprise mentioned in this publication is intended or should be inferred. For the reader's convenience, this publication contains information about and from outside organizations, including material obtained by way of hyperlinks and URLs. Inclusion of such information does not constitute the Department's endorsement.

July 2018

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Guarino, K. & Chagnon, E. (2018). *Trauma-sensitive schools training package*. Washington, DC: National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments.