Addressing Trauma in Community Schools

Webinar

- November 29, 2016
- 2:00-3:00EST
Agenda

• Why Build Trauma Informed Systems, Tracey Scheer, MSW, PCC
• Connecting Trauma and Health, Andrea Blanch, PhD
• Trauma-informed Schools, Lara Kain
• Q/A, tools and resources
• 60 minutes
Objectives

• To create discussion in the community school network about addressing trauma in schools.
• To target an audience that may foster collaboration about addressing trauma in schools.
• To understand how schools and the community can work together to address trauma
Why Build Trauma-Informed Systems

Tracey Scheer, LCSW, PCC
Director, Center for Healthy Schools and Communities
Alameda County Health Care Services Agency, CA
Opening Reflection

• How does trauma impact the school communities that you are a part of?

• How do your school communities address this?
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Tracey Schear, Alameda County, CA
What is Your Collective Leadership Challenge?

- Many Alameda County children, youth, and families still live, attend schools, and work in low opportunity neighborhoods that have profound and long-term impacts on their health, education, and economic well-being.

- In our county, we have the #1 cause of death for young people birth to 24 is homicide.

- 31% of OUSD students and 50% of African American students know a family member or friend who has been killed by violence.

- Students living in Oakland’s low income communities of color experience trauma at rates as high as 70-100%.

- Life expectancy difference between white, affluent student in Oakland Hills and a low-income, African-American student in the flatlands is… 15 years.

Tracey Schear, Alameda County, CA
To Change Outcomes for Students We Must Address Trauma

- Trauma is a health and learning issue

- As we have implemented community schools we have had to address trauma more explicitly to build resilience in our students and school communities

- Our practices must continue to evolve as we refine our shared approaches to fostering social emotional learning and development and wellness

- The need to address trauma is increasingly emerging as an important component of effective behavioral health service delivery and successful community schools
1. School Health Centers – full adolescent health
2. Coordination of Services Team (COST) – access and triage
3. 3-Tier Behavioral health framework for supporting students
4. Community Schools Initiative
5. Shared outcomes to address trauma by educators, primary care and behavioral health providers and youth workers

Tracey Schear, Alameda County, CA
Why Trauma-Informed Schools?

Children experiencing early adversity have increased barriers to accessing education even when they are present in the classroom.

Given the high incidence of trauma in Alameda County and its devastating impact on our children, it is vital that we support schools to create learning environments that are safe, nurturing, consistent and that work for all students.

Community schools are already poised to create trauma-sensitive learning environments: whole child approach, partnerships, and supporting the entire school community.
1. Traumatic experiences in childhood are not the exception but commonplace: 67% of people have at least one Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE Study 1998)

2. The effect of trauma exposure is cumulative – the more types of traumas experienced, the greater the risk to a child’s healthy development

3. Low-income communities of color are the most impacted: 70-100% experience trauma (Kiser 2007)

4. Toxic Stress: strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity—such as physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, caregiver substance abuse or mental illness, exposure to violence, and/or the accumulated burdens of family economic hardship—without adequate adult support
Trauma-Informed Schools – A Paradigm Shift

Educators and health providers are shifting how we view children’s academic and social problems due to:

1. Growing evidence that supports the relationship between early trauma and academic failure

2. Failure of zero tolerance policies aimed at controlling disruptive behaviors and school violence leading to blurred boundaries between school and police authority and the “school to prison pipeline

3. New understanding of children’s disruptive behavior and how to address it effectively
Trauma Impacts Learning and Social Emotional Development

- Early childhood trauma is correlated to future learning problems and increased risk of mental and physical illness

- Children who have experienced trauma have difficulty meeting academic and social challenges of school
  - Interference with cognitive processes including concentration, memory, and language ability
  - Deficits in executive skills making organizing materials and meeting deadlines difficult
  - Disrupted attachments can impair children’s ability to form healthy attachments, and to read and respond to social cues
  - Problematic peer relationships limits capacity for collaboration and small group work
  - Frequent absences due to disruptive behavior
  - Lower test scores
  - High referrals to special education

Tracey Schear, Alameda County, CA
What has happened to Carlos?
New Understanding of “Behavior Management”

Fight, Flight, Freeze

Safe environment, caring adults, academic, social-emotional, & behavioral supports

Engaged Learning

Executive function
Insights from Neuroscience on the Brain

• Insights from neuroscience have led us to understand that the brain is a social organ that develops within the context of attachment relationships, which ensure its health or threatens its survival

• So…relationships influence the brain’s capacity to change and learn

• And…we can mitigate the impacts of trauma through relationships, consistency, and supports. Community schools are perfect strategy.

Tracey Schear, Alameda County, CA
What has happened to this teacher?
Student Trauma Impacts Educators

- Teaching is one of the top jobs associated with stress-related health problems

- Recognize the emotional work of teachers and compassion fatigue or secondary trauma

- Traditional behavior management strategies are ineffective in addressing trauma and teachers may stop trying when they feel they can’t effect change in behavior

- Contributes to high teacher turnover, which impacts school climate, disrupts continuity, and destabilizes learning environments -- all counter indicated for community schools!
Systems Under Chronic Stress & Trauma Become Disorganized & Chaotic

We must address stress and secondary trauma on an organizational level.
Create Healing Systems

TRAUMA ORGANIZED
- Reactive
- Reliving/Retelling
- Avoiding/Numbing
- Fragmentation

TRAUMA INFORMED
- Shared Language
- Foundational Understanding of Trauma
- Understanding of the nature and impact of trauma

HEALING ORGANIZATION
- Reflective
- Collaborative
- Culture of learning
- Making meaning out of the past
- Growth and Prevention Oriented

TRAUMA INDUCING TO TRAUMA REDUCING
School system practices, policies and structures that support traumatized students in achieving academic and social competence.

These include areas such as school climate, discipline practices, teaching and learning design, social-emotional support systems

A School System that:
- Recognizes the impact of trauma
- Recognizes the signs & symptoms of trauma
- Responds by employing trauma-informed policies, procedures and practices
- Resists re-traumatization

What is a Trauma-Informed School?

Tracey Schear, Alameda County, CA
A trauma-informed school recognizes that all adults in a school community, regardless of role, need to be aware of the prevalence and impacts of trauma, and provides professional development to build their understanding.

The goals are to support school staff and partners to:

1. Build awareness of pervasiveness of trauma in the school community
2. Understand the effects of that trauma
3. Develop a common language and shared understanding of the academic and social-emotional strategies

Tracey Schear, Alameda County, CA
Safe, Caring, and Consistent Schools

• Safe, caring, and consistent schools generate an environment in which all students feel valued and maladaptive behaviors are dealt with in a just and predictable way – creating the consistency and safety critical to students who have experienced trauma

• Emphasizes the development of positive relationships that can be a protective factor for students

• ALL adults in the school have a clear understanding of their role in supporting students, and how those different roles combine into an integrated system

• Promotes a 3-Tiered behavioral health system at both the school and district level that strengthens the relationships and structures needed and has clear access points for support such as Coordination of Services Teams (COST)
Policies, Procedures, and Protocols

- Clearly articulated boundaries and expectations are a key part of trauma-informed practice in schools, and equally important in the larger system.

- District-wide adoption of social-emotional learning standards, restorative practices, and positive behavioral response protocols is a powerful lever for supporting all students to succeed, and takes dedicated resources, including training, ongoing coaching, infrastructure building, and partnership from the behavioral health field.
Trauma and Health

Andrea Blanch, PhD
Acting Director, Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice
Sarasota, Florida
The ACE Study: Health Risks for Adults of 4 or More ACES

- Alcoholism: 7.4x
- Drug Abuse: 10.3x
- Depression: 4.6x
- Suicide Attempts: 12.2x
- Heart Disease: 2.2x
- Cancer: 1.9x
- Lung Disease: 3.9x
- Skeletal Fractures: 1.6x
- Liver Disease: 2.4x
Post-ACE Study Research

• New types of traumatic events and adversity
• New measured outcomes
• Impact on children’s health as well as adults
• Biological impact
• Neurobiological impact
• Intergenerational transmission
• Epigenetic transmission
Impact of Trauma on Children’s Health

Mental Health
• Increased risk for mood and anxiety disorders
• 6x more likely to show psychotic symptoms
• 2x more likely to be diagnosed with psychosis
• Start using substances at an earlier age
• Increased risk for suicide

Health
• Increased risk for teen pregnancy, STDs, HIV/AIDS
• Increased risk for asthma, obesity and heart disease
• Increased risk for relationship violence
• Elevated rates of chronic health conditions overall
Cascade of Intergenerational Risk

Childhood adversity and trauma

- Difficulty regulating emotions, paying attention
- Behavioral difficulties
  - Low self esteem, health problems
  - Poor school performance
- Lower SES, poorer health as adult
  - Increased risk of violence as adult
  - Increased risk for next generation
Epigenetics and Historical Trauma

- May explain intergenerational impact of trauma
- First established with Holocaust survivors
- Animal studies: enriched environment can reverse effect
How Trauma Affects Health

- Directly affects biological systems, including neuroendocrine and inflammatory response
- Increases likelihood of high-risk behaviors
- Affects health care utilization
- Alters life trajectory in ways that can affect health
Intergenerational Public Health Approach

• Use evidence- and culturally-based prevention programs to reduce high-risk behaviors

• Use trauma-informed healthcare to improve medical engagement [https://www.healthcaretoolbox.org/](https://www.healthcaretoolbox.org/)


• Use neurobiology-based approaches to heal traumatic impacts
Healing and Resilience
The brain develops from bottom to top, from “survival brain” to “thinking brain”

Early trauma and adversity lays down pre-conscious memories

Stress shuts down first the thinking brain, then the emotional brain, leaving the survival brain in charge

Must REGULATE before you can persuade

“The only way to move from super-high anxiety states to calmer, more cognitive states is through RHYTHM.” Bruce Perry
“Any neural network that is activated in a repetitive way will change.”

Dr. Bruce Perry, Child Trauma Academy

“I am asked how hip hop and skateboarding can help a child with depression or ADHD. Yet 70% of the children showed improvement in symptoms of depression, anxiety and PTSD.”

Dr. Sarah MacArthur, San Diego Center for Children
Regulate Emotions with Repetitive Motion

- Rocking chairs, gliders, swings
- Repetitive games
- Eating popcorn or licking an ice cream cone
- Petting a dog or a cat
- Bouncing, tapping, jumping rope, playing basketball
- Walking, dancing, drumming, yoga, T’ai Chi
- Equine therapy
- Trampoline work
Mindfulness/Mind-Body Approaches

- Involve nonjudgmental, moment-to-moment awareness of breathing, body sensations, emotions and/or thoughts
- Can reduce trauma-related symptoms
- Can decrease physical pain, promote positive health behaviors, increase school engagement

Thank you
What does this all mean in terms of trauma-informed care, teaching and learning?

5 fundamental truths

1. Trauma is real.
2. Trauma is prevalent.
3. Trauma is toxic to the brain and can affect development and learning in a multitude of ways.
4. In our schools, we need to be prepared to support students who have experienced trauma, even if we don’t know who they are.
5. Children are resilient, and with positive learning environments they can grow, learn & succeed.

(Hall & Souers, 2016)
Children who experience trauma are:

- 2.5x more likely to fail a grade in school
- Score lower on standardized achievement tests
- More likely to have struggles in receptive & expressive language
- Suspended & expelled more often
- More frequently placed in special education

The National Traumatic Stress Network, 2008
Impact on Learning

- Organizing narrative material, e.g. Cause & Effect
- Taking another's perspective
- Attentiveness
- Regulating emotions
- Executive functioning
Trauma can interfere with **executive functioning**: the ability to set and follow through on goals, develop plans, anticipate outcomes, generate alternatives and maintain attention.

*Supporting and Educating Traumatized Students, Rossen and Hull (2013)*
Impact on Classroom Behavior

• Reactivity & impulsivity
• Aggression
• Defiance
• Withdrawal
• Perfectionism
• Inability to work well with others
• Engaging in learning process
Trauma Informed Schools

Trauma sensitive schools acknowledge the prevalence of traumatic occurrence in students’ lives & create a flexible framework that provides universal supports, is sensitive to unique needs of students, & is mindful of avoiding re-traumatization.
Trauma Informed Community Schools: What does this look like in an ‘ecosystem’?

A “Whole-School” approach is most effective, supports **ALL learners**

A comprehensive and multifaceted systemic approach to unifying student and learning supports (trauma informed, whole child, restorative justice, positive behavior supports, family engagement, community partners)
synthesis
[sin-thuh-sis]
2.a complex whole formed by combining

Community Schools

- Engaged leadership
- Quality professional development
- Authentic parent and community engagement
- Access to services and community resources
- Supportive policies and practices
- Academics and classroom instruction viewed from holistic lens

Trauma Informed Schools
Trauma-Informed Practice: Beneficial For All Students

• Always empower/never disempower
• Provide Unconditional Positive Regard
• Maintain High Expectations
• Check assumptions, observe, and question- sometimes behavior is the only way they know how to communicate
• Be a relationship coach (explicitly teach how to have healthy relationships)
• Provide opportunities for meaningful participation

Supporting and Educating Traumatized Students, Rossen and Hull (2013)
What might be core competencies that would reflect a trauma-informed and resilience oriented teacher skill set?

Based on Hodas (2006) & Washington State’s Six Principles of a Compassionate School

1. Understand Trauma
2. Understand the Student
3. Understand the Services
4. Focus on empowerment, not power and control
5. Hold & maintain high, consistent expectations
6. Teacher = coach
How Teachers Can Help

• Greet the student warmly
• Maintain regular, consistent routines
• Give child choices
• Allow child opportunities to control parts of their day
• Praise publicly
• Discuss concerns privately
• Set clear firm limits
• Provide a safe place to talk
• Be sensitive to loud noises, turning lights off
• Warn children of changes in normal routine
• Have plans for transition times
• Reassure child that they are not a bad kid
• Incorporate large muscle activities

National Child Traumatic Stress Network www.nctsn.org
School Leadership

• Leadership and staff anticipate and adapt to the ever-changing needs of students. In a trauma sensitive school, educators and administrators take the time to learn about changes in the local community so that they can anticipate new challenges before they arise.

• They do their best to plan ahead for changes in staffing and policies that are all too common in schools.

• Trauma sensitive schools also try to adapt to all of these challenges flexibly and proactively so that the equilibrium of the school is not disrupted by inevitable shifts and changes.

Helping traumatized children learn
https://traumasensitiveschools.org/
Educator self and collective care

*How might we create cultures of care not only for youth, but also for us?*

*Students are at the center of our work. At the same time, school employees in our school communities need support in order to show up for the young people they serve.*
Self & Collective Care for School Employee Wellness

Adapted from “Self-Care Assessment Worksheet” from Transforming the Pain: A workbook on Vicarious Traumatization by Saakvitne, Pearlman & Staff of TSI/CAAP (Norton, 1996). Created by Olga Phoenix Project: Healing or Social Change (2013)
Burning Out to Sourcing the Flame

Boundaries: emotional, physical, spiritual

Identify your Practitioner Joy

Colleagues & Students as the Influencers & Primary Teachers

Realignment: Self as Hero to Client as Hero

“If we want students to arrive to school ready to learn,

Then we need to want teachers to arrive to school ready to teach,

And school leaders to arrive to school ready to lead.”

Leora Wolf-Prusan, WestEd School Climate Specialist
Adopting an Approach: A Few Lessons Learned

1. Adopt an approach that can be embedded in and woven throughout the system.
2. Build from what you already have in place to support the social emotional wellness of students.
3. Focus on professional development and approach alignment with educators and key community school partners.
4. Take a hard look at policies and practices related to classroom management, teaching and learning, discipline and conflict resolution.
Contact Information

• Tracey Schear, tracey.schear@acgov.org
• Andrea Blanch, akblanch@aol.com
• Lara Kain, lkain@laep.org
Resources

Changing Minds
https://changingmindsnow.org/

Huffington Post Blog by Lara Kain on Trauma Informed Community Schools:
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lara-kain/trauma-informed-schools-p_b_8479572.html

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN):
http://www.nctsn.org/resources/audiences/school-personnel/the-3r-school-crises-and-disasters

The Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI):
https://traumasensitiveschools.org/

Washington State University's Collaborative Learning for Educational Achievement and Resilience (CLEAR):
http://ext100.wsu.edu/clear/

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction:
http://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/mental-health/trauma/

Community Schools: Transforming Struggling Schools into Thriving Schools
https://populardemocracy.org/sites/default/files/Community-Schools-Layout_e.pdf

Books:

Six Pillars of Community Schools

https://populardemocracy.org/sites/default/files/Community-Schools-Layout_e.pdf

Community Schools that have achieved the most dramatic results usually do so by utilizing a six-part strategic approach.

1. **Curricula that are engaging, culturally relevant, and challenging.** Schools offer a robust selection of classes and after-school programs in the arts, languages, and ethnic studies, as well as AP and honors courses. Also offered are services for English Language Learner and special education students, GED preparation programs, and job training. Pedagogy is student-centered.

2. **Emphasis on high-quality teaching,** not on high-stakes testing. Assessments are used to help teachers meet the needs of students. Educators have a real voice in professional development. Professional development is high quality and ongoing, and includes strengthening understanding of, and professional alignment with, the Community School model.

3. **Wrap-around supports** such as health care, eye care, and social and emotional services that support academics. These services are available before, during and after school, and are provided year-round to the full community. Providers are accountable and culturally competent. The supports are aligned to the classroom using thorough and continuous data collection, analysis, and reflection. Space for these services is allocated within the building or within walking distance. Community Schools 8

4. **Positive discipline practices,** such as restorative justice and social and emotional learning supports, are stressed so that students can grow and contribute to the school community and beyond. School safety and positive school climate are achieved through these mechanisms. Suspensions and harsh punishments are eliminated or greatly reduced.

5. **Authentic parent and community engagement** is promoted so the full community actively participates in planning and decision-making. This process recognizes the link between the success of the school and the development of the community as a whole.

6. **Inclusive school leadership** who are committed to making the Community School strategy integral to the school’s mandate and functioning. They ensure that the Community School Coordinator is a part of the leadership team and that a Community School Committee (Committee)—which includes parents, community partners, school staff, youth, and other stakeholders that are representatives of the school’s various constituencies—has a voice in the planning and implementation of the strategy.
1. **Leadership**: Building leaders engage their staff in strategic planning and encourage the integration of trauma sensitive approaches into existing school operations.

2. **Professional Development**: This is critical for all school staff, including leaders. Educators should be provided the opportunity to build skills that enhance their capacity to create trauma sensitive learning environments.

3. **Access to Resources and Services**: Identifying and effectively coordinating with mental health and other services outside the school is critical. These resources should be used to help students participate fully in the school community.

4. **Academic and Non Academic Strategies**: All children should be viewed holistically—their relationships with adults and peers; their self regulation of emotion, attention and behavior; and their physical and psychological well being are all related to their academic learning.

5. **Policies and Protocols**: In order to ensure a whole school trauma sensitive environment, educators must review the policies and protocols that are responsible for the day to day activities and logistics of the school.

6. **Collaboration with Families**: That actively engages them in all aspects of their children’s education helps them feel welcome at school and understand the important role they play.