APPLYING THE LENS

Seeing and understanding trauma at the individual level and in social systems and structures prepares you to identify and address it in your work with students. Knowledge about the impact of trauma on students with disabilities, including English learners with disabilities, can help you think critically about what a nurturing space will look like for these students. An environment that is safe and supportive for students with disabilities is an environment that is safe and supportive for all students.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), "A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to actively resist re-traumatization."

What does it look like to apply a trauma lens to your work with students? A trauma-informed approach requires naming and addressing inequities and biases that perpetuate trauma. Safety, collaboration, and trust between students, families, and educators/youth service providers are not possible when there is continued prejudice and differential treatment, rooted in systemic oppression.

Work with students must be developmentally appropriate and responsive to students' needs. How are you considering the communications barriers students face? How are you identifying students' feelings, e.g., feelings of safety? A trauma-informed approach focuses on students' strengths, not weaknesses, and maintains high expectations for all students. Any decisions made in the learning environment must be guided by the voices and experiences of students and families. A trauma-informed approach realizes the frequent history of lapses in trust between families and educators when students do not receive the services they need to succeed. It is critical to give students and families choices, especially in contexts where choices are so often not given.

Serving students with disabilities, including English learners with disabilities, through a trauma lens requires deep partnership. History shows collaboration can be rare. Working together as a team means that all those who interact with these students are in ongoing conversation and learning from each other's areas of expertise to best serve the students they work with. Watch this video to learn more about why the team approach matters.

A trauma-informed approach requires identifying and addressing gaps between policy and practice. Words on paper are empty if they are not matched by action in the learning environment. For a trauma-informed approach to work most effectively, it must be backed by a commitment of time and resources.

Becoming trauma-informed is a 360-degree process. The Missouri Model for Trauma-Informed Schools provides a helpful framework for change in a school or youth-serving program. The guidance includes core principles, stages, and indicators that can help you to reflect on areas for growth in your school community and map out an action plan.

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Social-Emotional Learning and Trauma-Informed Schools Initiative offers additional resources to guide your process.

Core principles

In the Missouri Model, there are five core principles that guide becoming trauma-informed: safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment. The core principles fit together like pieces of a puzzle. Only when all of the pieces are concurrently in place can a school, organization, or system become truly trauma-informed. The core principles help to achieve equity, and the individual pieces fail to fit together without centering equity. Equity is the glue that authentically holds the pieces together in a trauma-informed school, organization, or system.

Safety

Safety stems from being exposed to the potential for physical harm, whether through abuse, natural disasters, car accidents, etc. Safety extends beyond physical safety to include emotional and relational safety. Many people function day to day believing they are generally safe from harm and/or can predict risk for harm. However, if a child experiences harm from a caregiver, it affects how the child view others as safe or unsafe.

Trustworthiness

As with safety, trustworthiness impacts how individuals may perceive relationships. Whenever there is a power imbalance, a trauma survivor may feel unsafe and not be able to start with a framework of trust. Trust can be earned over time when educators and youth service providers facilitate safety, maintain consistency, and avoid making promises that they cannot keep despite good intentions.

Choice

Individuals who experience trauma often report feeling hopeless and helpless – choice is taken away when experiencing trauma. An individual may believe that it does not matter what they do because the outcome is out of their control. By providing developmentally appropriate choices, educators and youth service providers can help students learn mastery and feel empowered to influence their environments and relationships.

Collaboration

Educators and youth service providers should always work with students and families and avoid making decisions about any individuals without their active participation. Collaboration ensures that practices are equitable and rooted in the lived experience of students and families. Without collaboration, perceived or real power imbalances within relationships continue.

Empowerment

When youth feel invested in their learning and growth – and when they are supported by the adults and systems around them – their life possibilities are endless. An environment where youth feel valued and cared for is an environment that fosters empowerment. Trauma-informed systems and individuals help those who have experienced trauma in becoming empowered and counter their feelings of hopelessness and helplessness.

For each of these principles, it is essential to consider the impact of inequity, community and historical trauma, and systemic oppression. All students have unique challenges and needs – and all students deserve to be and feel safe and empowered. Equity means distributing resources based on need, with historical and current injustices in mind, so that opportunities and outcomes are just and fair for all, regardless of identity. These core principles should be used to guide every aspect of a school's trauma-informed journey. When fully realized, these principles lead to more equitable outcomes.

The Missouri Model for Trauma-Informed Schools includes reflective questions about each of these principles that serve as meaningful starting points for change:

- Safety: How is the physical and emotional safety of staff and students assessed and addressed? How are members of the school community supported when safety is compromised? How does the school address how historic relationships impact perceptions of safety in staff, students, and families? What does the school do to actively cultivate a sense of safety?

- Trustworthiness: How does school leadership demonstrate trustworthiness to staff and students? How are breaks in trust addressed? What is done to proactively cultivate trust between members of the school community and between schools and families?
- Choice: What amount of choice does staff have regarding instruction, classroom management, or school decision-making? What amount of choice do students have in their education? Are meaningful choices given whenever possible? Are choices presented in a way that people feel safe to act upon them?

- Collaboration: How are staff, students, and families involved in decision-making that directly affects them? Are staff involved in settings agendas for meetings, professional development, and school priorities?
- Empowerment: How does school leadership proactively empower staff and students? How is power shared and how are power imbalances addressed within the school?

A trauma-informed school empowers ALL students, works collaboratively with ALL students, provides choices to ALL students, and builds safe and trusting relationships and environments for ALL students.

Through these applied principles, students with disabilities, including students who are English learners, should have an enhanced and engaged role within the school with their peers and staff.

Moving through the stages

The Missouri Model for Trauma-Informed Schools also provides stages of trauma awareness to help schools, programs, and systems evaluate their starting points on the trauma-informed journey, set goals, and measure progress.

STAGE 0	STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4
Pre-Trauma Aware	Trauma Aware	Trauma Sensitive	Trauma Responsive	Trauma Informed

The Missouri Model provides the following explanations for each stage:

TRAUMA AWARENESS: School staff have been informed about trauma, including historical and community trauma, are able to comfortably speak to its impacts, and have begun to consider how to translate that information into changes within the school.

TRAUMA SENSITIVE: Schools have started to explore the principles of trauma informed care (safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment) and how they apply to existing practices. Schools designate core leaders to guide the change process. Leadership shows a high level of buy-in. Schools have shared with their community and stakeholders that they have begun this journey and worked with them to develop a shared vision of accountability.

TRAUMA RESPONSIVE: Schools have begun to change existing practices and policies and implement new ones to better support staff and students. Schools are starting to integrate a trauma-informed approach throughout all existing programs in a school (i.e. Character Education, Restorative Practices, RTI, PBIS, MTSS, etc.). Individual staff members are beginning to clearly demonstrate changes in their action and behaviors. Community and stakeholders become increasingly involved and integrated into the process.

TRAUMA INFORMED: Schools begin to see results from the changes they have implemented. A core team continues to look for new opportunities to improve. All staff within the building are bought in and demonstrating practices that reflect the needs of students. Data, including data intentionally disaggregated by race and other demographic factors, is used to drive decision making. Schools are working closely and responsively with parents and community members to meet the ongoing needs of a school. This stage is not one that is meant to ever be "completed." Because school environments, resources, and needs are always changing, there must always be a focused effort on addressing these changes through a trauma-informed lens. Trauma informed is a process, not a destination.

Indicators

The Missouri Model for Trauma-Informed Schools establishes 12 indicators to help schools develop a strong foundation along their trauma-informed journey. The indicators are not comprehensive or meant to be followed in a certain order; they build on each other to provide schools with ideas for changes in policy and practice.

The following are the trauma-informed school indicators:
1) School leadership and staff demonstrate an understanding of the impact and prevalence of trauma in daily practice.
2) An equity lens is applied to all programs and policies to address bias and the impact of historical trauma and systemic oppression.
3) Students are given age-appropriate information about stress, trauma, and emotional/behavioral regulation and opportunities to develop new coping tools.

4) Staff have access to needed supports, including coaching, consultation, and meaningful professional development; benefits that support their health and well-being; necessary materials and resources; and administrative support in prioritizing self-care.
5) Schools actively, appropriately, and meaningfully engage parents and caregivers in relevant educational opportunities and decision making at all levels.

6) Discipline practices and policies support restoring and repairing community, addressing the unmet, underlying needs driving behavior, exercising compassion, and supporting a culture of accountability.
7) Students are given meaningful and developmentally appropriate leadership and decision-making opportunities, particularly around issues that directly impact their experiences and education.
8) Staff have access to meaningful leadership opportunities and are supported in trying new and innovative techniques to support students.

9) Schools actively, appropriately, and meaningfully partner with community organizations to meet the needs of students and staff.
10) Curriculum design across grade levels and subject areas supports the trauma-informed process.
11) Human resources and supervision practices, including hiring, performance management, and employee transitions reflect the principles of trauma-informed care.
12) Schools have a system in place to continually evaluate and improve practices and policies.