

Whole Child Task Force
Trauma, Trauma-Responsive Schools/Districts & Communities Definitions
Last edited: September 14, 2021

Broad Definition of Trauma: (Last edit 8/12/2021 at WCTF meeting)

Trauma is defined according to the three E's: event, experience, and effects. Individual trauma results from 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 on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, or emotional well-being (SAMHSA, 2014). Collective trauma is a psychological reaction to a traumatic event shared by any group of people. This may include but is not limited to community violence, experiencing racism and discrimination, and the lack of the essential supports for well-being, such as educational or economic opportunities, food, health care, housing, and community cohesion. Trauma can be experienced by anyone, though it is disproportionately experienced by members of marginalized groups. Systemic and historical oppression, such as racism, is often at the root of this inequity. Of note, symptoms may vary at different developmental stages and across different cultural groups and different communities.

Trauma Responsive Communities: (last edit 8/12/2021 at WCTF meeting)

Trauma Responsive Communities recognize the trauma within their communities and leverage individual, family and collective strengths along with local resources, including schools, health and social service providers, and faith and civic organizations, to remove barriers and provide safe, supportive, empowered, trustworthy and collaborative environments that value the history, culture and diversity of all individuals within the community. This approach identifies multi-generational impacts and contributions, dismantles inequities embedded into community systems and policies, leverages peer relationships, and involves cross-agency and cross-sector collaboration in efforts to educate and build resilience with prevention, treatment, supports and social justice.

Trauma Responsive Learning Environments: (Last edit 8/12/2021 at the WCTF meeting)

Aim for Trauma Responsive Learning Environments:

With the growing recognition of the prevalence and impact of trauma among children and adolescents, many educational settings are prioritizing the building of trauma responsive learning environments. Developing trauma responsive learning environments requires a multi-year long process. Learning environments' engagement in this process is ongoing; it typically progresses across three stages: (1) Trauma Awareness, (2) Trauma Responsiveness and (3) Healing Centeredness.

See below for descriptions of these different stages for different educational settings:

Pre-K-12 Schools & Districts:

TRAUMA AWARE Schools/Districts personnel demonstrate a foundational understanding of a broad definition of trauma (as defined by the WCTF) that is developmentally and culturally-based and includes students, personnel and communities and recognizes the potential effect on biological, cognitive, academic and social-emotional functioning. Schools/Districts recognize that traumatic exposure can impact behavior and learning and should be acknowledged in policies, strategies, and systems of support for students, families, and personnel.

TRAUMA RESPONSIVE Schools/Districts are progressing from awareness to action, in the areas of policy, practice, and structural changes within a multi-tiered system of support to promote safety, positive relationships, and self-regulation while underscoring the importance of personnel well-being and cultural responsiveness. Changes should also be aligned to the Illinois Quality Framework (IQF) and integrated into a school's/district's continuous improvement process, as evidence to support allocation of financial resources. A multidisciplinary leadership team assesses and monitors progress on an ongoing basis and promotes engagement and capacity building of personnel at all levels to ensure that adults in the community are prepared to recognize and respond to those impacted by trauma.

HEALING CENTERED Schools/Districts acknowledge their role and responsibility to the community and to fully respond to trauma and promote resilience and healing through genuine, trusting, and creative relationships. Schools/districts should promote holistic and collaborative approaches that are grounded in culture, spirituality, civic engagement, and equity. This approach recognizes the inherent strength and supports agency within individuals, families and communities while engaging people in collective action that moves from transactional to transformational.