

# Applying Trauma Informed Strategies to Classrooms and Student Interactions

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A PARTNER IN  
NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

# Goals and Objectives

- Goal: To increase comfort and understanding of strategies to address post traumatic stress symptoms in a school setting.
  - Objectives:
    - Participants will be able to identify strategies to help students experiencing post traumatic stress symptoms.
    - Participants will be implement strategies to help students experiencing post traumatic stress symptoms.

# Core Messages Related to Childhood Trauma

- Self Care
- Resiliency
- Coping and Strength
- Support and Supervision





**All children are impacted by a traumatic event;  
however, not all children are traumatized.  
Children are resilient and they just need the  
opportunity to strengthen that resilience  
through the help of people like you.**

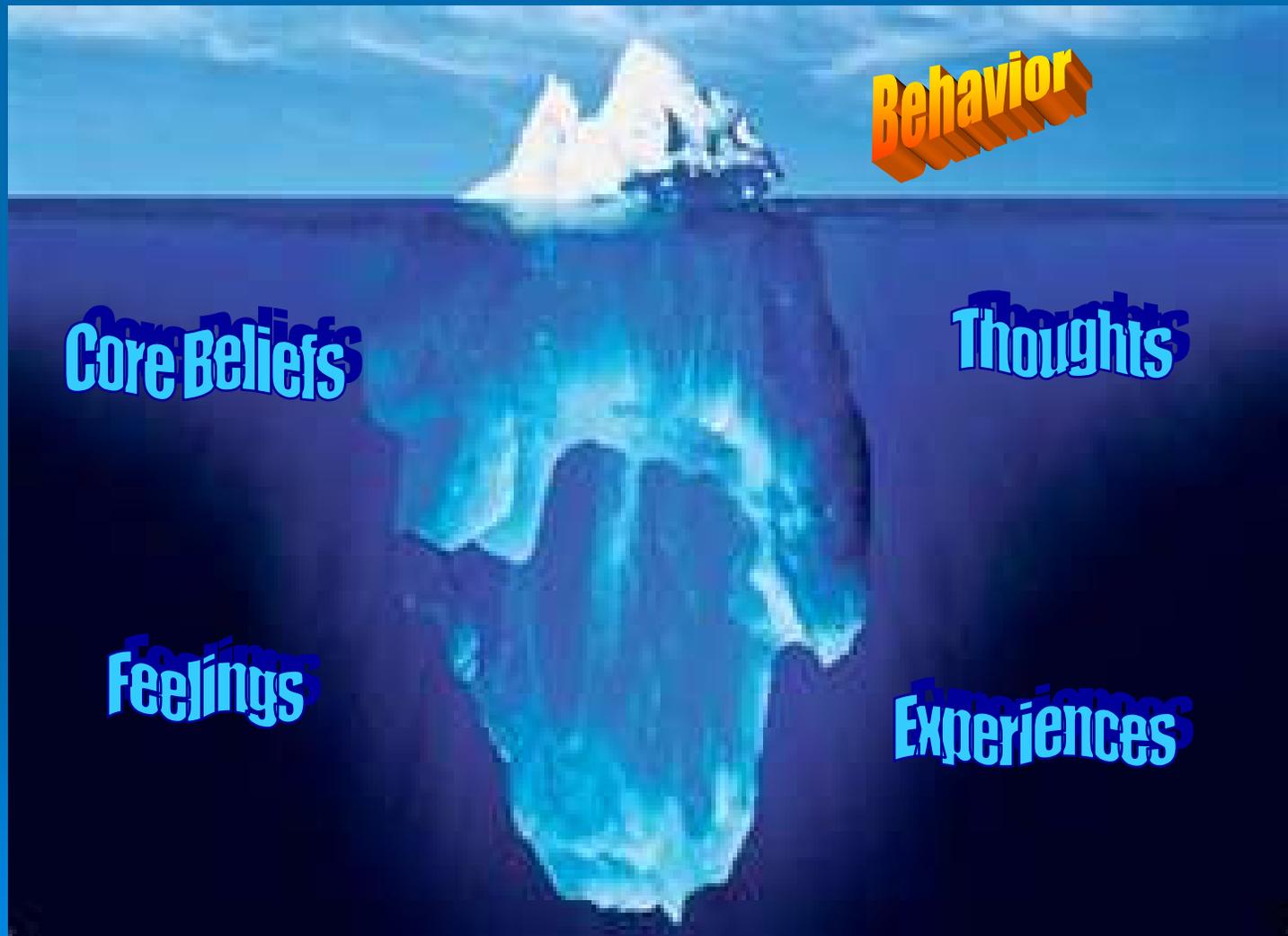
# Why Is This Important?

## Trauma Facts for Educators

- One out of every 4 children attending school has been exposed to a traumatic event that can affect learning and/or behavior.
- Trauma can impact school performance. (Lower GPA, higher absence rate, decreased reading ability, increased behavior problems).
- Trauma can impair learning. (Chronic exposure can adversely affect attention, memory, and cognition, interfere with problem solving, result in overwhelming feelings of frustration and anxiety).
- Traumatized children may experience physical and emotional distress.
- You can help a child who has been traumatized.

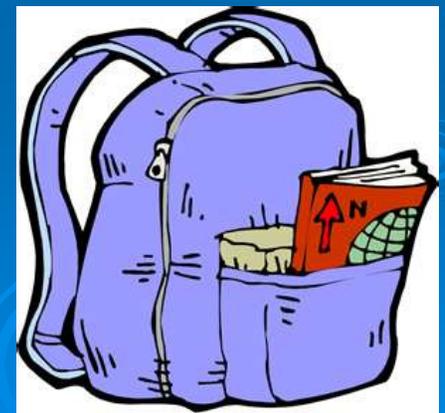
Source: National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008

# Think of an Iceberg...



# Think about an invisible backpack...

- Trauma affects how children feel, behave, and think...
- The Invisible Backpack
  - Beliefs about self
  - Beliefs about adults who care for them
  - Beliefs about the world
- What is in the student's invisible backpack?



SOURCE: Caring for Children Who've Experienced Trauma: Resource Parent Workshop. NCTSN (2010).

# Repacking the Invisible Backpack...

- How can we repack this backpack with positive experiences and beliefs?
- How can we promote resilience in the student by making him or her feel:
  - Safe?
  - Capable?
  - Likeable/Lovable?



SOURCE: Caring for Children Who've Experienced Trauma: Resource Parent Workshop. NCTSN (2010).

# What you may see...

- Anxiety, fear, and worry
- Changes in behavior (anger outbursts, change in academic performance, irritability, absenteeism)
- Heightened difficulty with authority, redirection, or criticism
- Emotional numbing
- Over or under reacting to environmental stimuli (sirens, physical contact, doors slamming, bells)
- Repetitive thoughts and comments about death or dying (including writing and artwork)

# Skill Review 1: Establishing Safety

## ➤ Strategies:

- Clarifying your role with the student.
- Establish yourself as a safe individual. Create an environment of respect.
- Give the student opportunities to make choices.
- Talk about safety and what steps you will take to help the student be safe.
- Connect the student to the appropriate resources/people.
- Message: You are not alone.

# Skill Review 2: Behavior Management

## ➤ Strategies:

- Use of specific praise
  - “You did a great job paying attention in class today.” vs “Good job today.”
  - 10:1 (Ratio of positive to negative statements for traumatized children/adolescents)
- Active ignoring of negative behavior
- Consistent expectations and behavior plans
  - Behavior plans based on rewards systems, not punishment.

# Skill Review 3:

## Stress Management/Relaxation

### ➤ Strategies:

- BREATHE!
- Provide students with a calm or quiet place to sit or talk.
- Remain calm, quiet, and present. Use LOW and SLOW when needed.
- Offer suggestions on self-calming techniques.
  - Breathing
  - Rapid Relaxation
  - Music, exercise, stretching

# LOW and SLOW

## ➤ LOW

- Lower the volume and pitch of your voice.
- Keep a matter of fact tone regardless of the situation.
- Speak in short sentences without a lot of questions.
- Don't preach- this is about talking with the student, not at the student.

## ➤ SLOW

- Slow your self down by slowing down your heart rate. Take slow, deep breaths.
- Slow down your rate of speech and make sure to pause between sentences.
- Slow down your body movements.
- Slow down your agenda and take your time.

Source: Community Counseling Center (2008). TF-CBT Clinician Implementation Guide: 1<sup>st</sup> Edition.

# Skill Review 4:

## Feelings Expression and Coping

### ➤ Strategies:

- Identify and label emotions and feelings.
- Use of scales and “thermometer” to rate emotion intensity.
- Identify coping skills to help decrease emotional intensity. Help youth find positive ways to cope.
  - Connect students to friends, peers, or supportive adults.
  - Participating in creative and positive social activities.
  - Relaxation techniques

# Skill Review 5:

## Connect with Social Supports

### ➤ Strategies:

- Identify and provide opportunities for peer support.
- Be a source of support yourself.
- Identify/Access family and community supports.

# Skill Review 6: Enhancing Future Safety

## ➤ Strategies:

- Help students identify internal and external people and places that are safe.
  - Circle of safety
  - Safety maps/plans
- Teach students how to ask for help until someone responds.
  - Role play accessing additional supports.
  - Best friend role plays: “What would you tell your best friend to do?”

# Skill Review 7: Patience

## ➤ Strategies:

- Recognize that change happens very slowly. You may never see the outcomes of your efforts.
- Trust that our simple compassionate gestures are important elements of healing and surviving.
- Consider the “bigger picture.”

# Skill Review 8:

## Manage Personal and Professional Stress

### ➤ Strategies:

- Exercise and eating healthy
  - Engaging in a hobby or activity
  - Creating a health consistent structure and pattern in your personal life.
  - Knowing your limits.
  - Improving your understanding of trauma and secondary trauma.
  - Taking a time out.
  - Seeking support from co-workers, family, friends
  - Professional counseling
  - Vacations
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# Skill Review

- 1. Establishing Safety
- 2. Behavior Management
- 3. Stress Management/Relaxation
- 4. Feelings Expression and Coping
- 5. Connect with Social Supports
- 6. Enhancing Future Safety
- 7. Patience
- 8. Manage Personal and Professional Stress

# Implementing Strategies: Case Examples

- How could the student's behaviors or "symptoms" be explained from a trauma perspective?
  - For example: What are the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs that may be the source of the behavior?
  - What's under the "tip of the iceberg?"
- What would you do to address the "problem" in each of the scenarios?
- How is your response trauma informed?

# Resources

- [www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org) (Child Trauma Resources)
- [www.musc.edu/tfcbt](http://www.musc.edu/tfcbt) (TF-CBT web training)
- [www.childtrauma.org](http://www.childtrauma.org) (child trauma and brain research)
- [www.hprrt-cambridge.org](http://www.hprrt-cambridge.org) (refugee trauma information)

# Acknowledgements

- Portions of some of these slides were adapted from: Cullerton-Sen, C., Gewirtz, A. (2009). Psychological First Aid for Youth Experiencing Homelessness. *The Ambit Network*.
- TF-CBT was developed by Anthony Mannarino, Judy Cohen, and Esther Deblinger of Allegheny Hospital and The CARES Institute. It has since been widely researched and used around the US and the world.

# Contact Us

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