

2025



TRAUMA-INFORMED EDUCATION

A Guide for Becoming a Trauma-Informed
Educational Environment

 **Resilient**GEORGIA

How do Positive and Adverse Childhood Experiences Impact the Classroom?

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) before the age of 18 can significantly impact children's academic performance and behavior in school. ACEs are common, with three out of five Georgians having experienced at least one. These experiences can lead to trauma, manifesting as grief, difficulties with attention, and various illnesses. Trauma exposure can also affect brain development, triggering fight-or-flight reactions that hinder emotional regulation and adherence to school rules. Consequently, students who have experienced trauma may struggle to focus, follow directions, and achieve academically. Additionally, youth who have experienced trauma are incredibly resilient, meaning they have developed skills to cope with life's challenges.

Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) are activities that help heal a child's brain from trauma, and help young people develop resilience, a sense of belonging, and connectedness. Schools can provide PCEs by supporting strong-teacher student relationships and creating opportunities for celebration that increase a sense of belonging. Activities that support PCEs will help create a safe and supportive learning environment for all students.



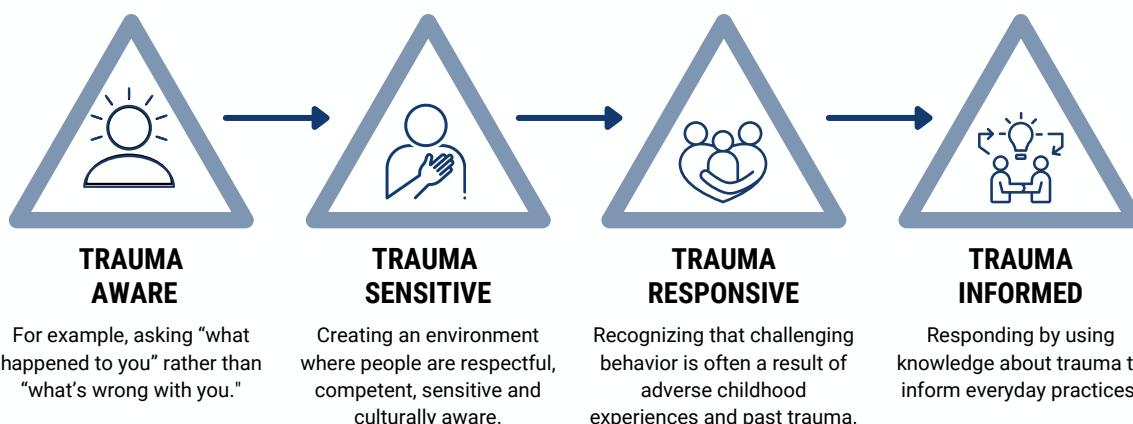
What is Trauma-Informed Teaching?

A **trauma-informed approach in schools** considers the needs of students, staff, administrators, and families that might be at risk for experiencing traumatic stress symptoms. Becoming trauma-informed involves recognizing the impact of both **Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs)** and **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)** on behavior and mental health. It minimizes re-traumatization and shifts to a more empathetic perspective by asking "What happened to you?", rather than, "What's wrong with you?". Integrating trauma-informed practices in schools is essential for effective classroom management and fostering an environment where students feel safe and ready to learn. Poor mental health can interfere with students' ability to learn and can affect classroom behavior, school engagement, and peer relationships. By recognizing the link between mental health and behavioral health in the classroom, schools can achieve their educational mission by prioritizing student mental health and well-being through education, prevention, and early intervention efforts.

A trauma-informed approach also includes encouraging and connecting teachers and staff to resources for their own wellbeing so that they can continue their important roles as teachers and mentors for their students. This can help prevent burnout and teacher turnover and help retain experienced teachers and support the academic needs of students. Trauma-informed skills will better help staff when dealing with student reactivity, de-escalation in the classroom, and parent-teacher communication. From this lens, teachers will become well-versed in handling these situations, which will allow them to focus on what they love...teaching.

Trauma-informed education, implemented as a school-wide system, acknowledges the prevalence of trauma and equips administrators, teachers and staff with the necessary knowledge to recognize trauma and employ effective strategies for supporting students and the whole school community.

The trauma-informed approach is a continuum that progresses through stages. The stages of becoming trauma-informed are:



Examples of Trauma-Informed Policies and Programs

Handle with Care (HWC) is a **trauma-informed collaboration** between local law enforcement and schools to support children who have witnessed traumatic events by notifying their schools about the incidents. Trained school staff and on-site mental health providers respond to the students' needs, offering in-school support and trauma-focused interventions. This effective, low-cost approach helps mitigate the negative impacts of trauma on children's development and school performance, ensuring they receive the necessary interventions to succeed academically. Visit [**Salud America's site**](#) to learn more about how to **implement HWC** in your community.

Georgia recently passed **House Bill 268** which aims to improve **school climate, safety, and student mental health and wellbeing**. Developed in response to the tragic incident at Apalachee High School, HB 268 expands access to mental health services in schools, mandates panic alert systems for rapid emergency response, and enhances student data tracking to better identify and support at-risk youth. Together, these measures strengthen school safety while prioritizing prevention, connection, and care. Learn more about HB 268 from the [**Mindworks Policy Brief**](#) and [**Georgia Appleseed's School Safety Law Guide**](#).

The **Jason Flatt Act** was passed in 2015 and requires that Georgia schools provide all certificated public school personnel with annual training regarding youth suicides, and for every public school district to formulate a policy on suicide prevention, intervention, and “postvention” — outreach and support for family and friends of a person lost to suicide, who may be at increased risk of suicide themselves. Visit [**Georgia Department of Education's Mental Health Awareness Training \(MHAT\) Catalog**](#) to learn more about suicide prevention trainings.

Mindfulness Zones in the classroom allow children to engage in activities like deep breathing, meditation, and reflection, helping them develop self-regulation, reduce stress, and improve focus and emotional well-being. Similarly, **Resiliency Zones** provide a secure environment for young children to practice self-regulation and mindfulness with calming resources, teaching essential skills for managing emotions and solving problems. Both zones contribute to a positive and productive learning environment by equipping students with tools to manage emotions and behavior effectively.

Training Resources for Educators



TRAUMA AWARE

- [**Connections Matter Georgia**](#) provides training designed to engage community members in fostering caring connections, improving resiliency, preventing childhood trauma, and supporting individuals affected by trauma. It is a collaboration between the Georgia Center for Child Advocacy and Prevent Child Abuse Georgia.
- [**GSU Child Welfare Training Collaborative's Online Trauma/Brain 101**](#) emphasizes child trauma, child traumatic stress, and their effects on children and youth and their brain development.



TRAUMA SENSITIVE

- [**Mental Health First Aid \(MHFA\)**](#) covers risk factors, warning signs for mental health and addiction concerns, crisis and non-crisis intervention strategies, and guidance on seeking help.
- The Trauma Resource Institute's [**Community Resiliency Model \(CRM\)**](#) equips school personnel with concrete strategies to address trauma and chronic stress, emphasizing the importance of restoring resilience through a skill-based approach. The model introduces a paradigm shift in understanding our responses to stress and trauma. CRM's six skills offer practical tools to regulate emotions during difficult times, empowering individuals to navigate challenges effectively.
- [**Reaching Teens**](#): The Reaching Teens training curriculum was developed by [**Wellroot Family Services**](#) based on the [**Reaching Teens text**](#) published by the American Academy of Pediatrics. It provides youth-serving professionals with strategies to effectively engage teenagers using a strength-based perspective. Integrating principles from Positive Youth Development, Strength-Based Language, Restorative Practices, and Trauma-Sensitive Practices, the training aims to shift how we view and support young people. It includes sessions on understanding teen trauma, effective communicating with teens, skills for managing classroom behavior, and building resilience to prevent burnout.





TRAUMA RESPONSIVE

- **Mindful Self-Compassion** integrates mindfulness and self-compassion skills, creating a powerful tool for increasing emotional resilience.
- **The Trauma Resource Institute's Trauma Resiliency Training** is designed to teach skills to individuals and clinicians helping children and adults with traumatic stress reactions.
- Explore de-escalation trainings through **Life Space Crisis Intervention, Inc.** or **7 Mindsets** to learn strategies that help educators calmly diffuse situations, foster emotional regulation, and support students in managing their behaviors constructively.



TRAUMA INFORMED

- **Kaiser Permanente's Resilience in School Environments (RISE)** empowers schools to foster a safe and supportive learning environment by cultivating practices that strengthen the social and emotional health of both school staff and students.
- **Social, Emotional, and Ethical (SEE) Learning** provides a general orientation to SEE Learning for educators with the tools and **resources** they need to foster the development of emotional, social, and ethical intelligence for students and themselves.
- **"Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A Systems Framework"** by the **National Child Traumatic Stress Network** provides a framework for integrating trauma awareness into school systems, emphasizing the importance of understanding trauma's impact on students, training staff, implementing supportive practices, and fostering a safe and inclusive environment.



What can I do now? Next Steps

1. Consider taking a training to deepen your understanding of how trauma can affect a child's behavior, such as difficulty with listening and learning. The **Georgia Department of Education's Mental Health Awareness Training (MHAT) program** provides essential guidance on recognizing signs of mental health challenges and connecting students with resources. For more information on training opportunities, explore the **Resilient Georgia Trauma-Informed Training Roadmap**.
2. Check out the **School-Based Behavioral Health Toolkit**. This collaborative effort provides resources for implementing evidence-based behavioral health programs in Georgia schools. It emphasizes the effectiveness of school-based programs in enhancing academic achievement, social skills, and overall well-being.
3. Become a Mental Health **Certified Peer Specialist (CPS)** with the **Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network (GMHCN)**. A CPS is a person who has received special training to be able to use their lived experience to support and assist others.
4. Schedule the **Ending the Silence** mental health presentation for your school! Ending the Silence is a free, evidence-based, 50-minute session designed for middle and high school students.
5. Schedule a **Hope Givers LIVE** presentation for your school! **HOPE GIVERS** and **HOPE GIVERS LIVE!** are two uplifting youth based mental health programs that have received acclaim from Georgia secondary education administration, educators, and students. These programs are directed towards middle and high school students.
6. Start the conversation with school staff, educators, and parents! Share Resilient Georgia's **Learning cards** electronically or print them to leave in shared spaces and let your peers learn more about these key topics. They are available in 13 languages and Resilient Georgia will cover the cost of co-branding them- just send an email to learn more! **info@resilientga.org**.



Additional Support for Educators

- For those in crisis, **calling 988** will connect you with a trained counselor who can offer support and referral to appropriate resources.
- **Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs)** in Georgia offer many types of behavioral health services, with a focus on providing 24-hour crisis care, evidence-based practices, care coordination with local primary care and hospital partners, and integration with physical health care.
- **Community Service Boards (CSB)** also provide a large range of behavioral health services – from crisis stabilization and substance detoxification to counseling and peer support services.
- **Employee Assistance Program (EAP):** The **GaDOE's** EAP program provides confidential support services 24/7 for educators and staff, helping them manage personal and professional challenges. The program offers counseling and resources for mental health and work-life balance.
- **Sources of Strength** helps teachers by providing training and resources to promote resilience, mental wellness, and a positive school culture. It also emphasizes self-care for educators, helping them manage stress and maintain their well-being while creating an engaging and inclusive learning environment.



FOR MORE TRAUMA-INFORMED RESOURCES, VISIT RESILIENTGA.ORG

Questions or feedback?
Contact info@resilientga.org

