

A RethinkEd Guide to

What is Trauma-Informed Care?

Trauma-informed care is an organizational structure and pedagogical practice framework that involves understanding, recognizing, and responding to the effects of all types of trauma. This approach to learning environments recognizes the profound neurological, biological, psychological, and social effects that trauma has on individuals and communities—all of which have an impact on the interdependent needs of individuals in relation to safety, human connections, and emotional experiences.

Schools and communities that employ a Trauma-Informed Care approach strive to understand, engage, and support the whole of an individual and community when trauma occurs. When taking the perspective of a trauma-informed approach one assumes that individuals and communities have been exposed to adverse events in their lives which may have disrupted aspects of their psychological, psychical, physiological, and social lives. Traumatization occurs when an individuals' or a communities' internal and external resources for coping with change become inadequate. When trauma occurs, it affects an individual's sense of self, their sense of others, and their beliefs about the world. These beliefs can directly impact an individual's ability or motivation to connect with and utilize support services.

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A school system using a trauma informed approach realizes the direct impact that trauma can have on access to services and responds by changing policies, procedures and practices to minimize potential barriers. A school using this approach works to more fully integrate the knowledge about trauma into all aspects of student services and trains staff to recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma not only in the lives of students but the lives of the greater community

Five Principles of Trauma-Informed Care (SAMHSA, 2012)

- **Safety**- ensure physical and emotional safety
- **Choice**- prioritize student choice and provide students with options
- **Collaboration**- maximize shared decision-making
- **Trust**- developing meaningful and substantive relationships is essential
- **Empowerment**- prioritize conditions for empowered decision-making and skill-building
- **Intersectionality**- sensitivity to the unique role that the intersection of culture, history and gender play in individual and community experiences of trauma



Cognitive

Trauma effects cognition in several ways. Individuals who experience trauma may experience excessive or inappropriate feelings of guilt, intrusive thoughts or memories, cognitive errors, and trauma-induced hallucinations or delusions.



Emotional

Emotional reactions to trauma or stress as trauma vary greatly and are significantly influenced by socio-cultural history. People often experience strong feelings of fear, sadness, guilt, anger, and/or grief in the first few days and weeks after a traumatic event. As individuals and communities begin to make sense of what has happened, these feelings will usually begin to subside. However, for some people these emotional experiences continue to significantly impact daily functioning and social relationships for weeks, months, and even years, and may lead to more chronic mental health conditions like depression, anxiety, increased substance use and dependence, and post-traumatic stress disorder.



Somatization

People who experience trauma may find it difficult to express emotional experiences or may focus on a bodily symptom—this is called somatization. Somatic symptoms vary in frequency, duration, and intensity and are not necessarily a pathogenic reaction to stress, but rather the body's normal way of coping and adapting to stress experiences. However, at times individuals may not recognize the connection between their emotional distress and their physical symptoms, therefore impacting their ability to process the effects of trauma on their life.



Biological

Exposure to trauma leads to a cascade of biological changes and stress responses. Changes in limbic system functioning, hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis changes (variable cortisol levels), and neurotransmitter-related dysregulation of arousal and endogenous opioid systems.



Hypervigilance & Sleep Disturbances

A common symptom of trauma is hyperarousal. Hyperarousal is an evolutionary short term stress response that enables humans to be prepared to stave off immediate threat. However, when this stress response is over activated, it can result in sleep disturbances, muscular tension, and a lower threshold for startle responses. These symptoms can persist for years. Hyperarousal can significantly impact individual's abilities to respond to environmental and social encounters.

Types of Trauma

TYPE I

Acute Trauma

Acute trauma results from exposure to a single overwhelming event.

Examples: Rape, death of a loved one, natural disaster

Characteristics: Detailed memories, omens, hyper-vigilance, exaggerated startle response, mis-perceptions or overreactions

TYPE II

Complex Trauma

Complex Trauma results from extended exposure to traumatizing situations.

Examples: Prolonged exposure to violence or bullying, profound neglect, series of home removals

Characteristics: Denial and psychological numbing, dissociation, rage, social withdrawal, sense of foreshortened future

TYPE III

Crossover Trauma

Crossover Trauma results from a single traumatic event that is devastating enough to have long-lasting effects.

Examples: Mass casualty school shooting, car accident with fatalities involved, refugee dislocation

Characteristics: Perpetual mourning or depression, chronic pain, concentration problems, sleep disturbances, irritability. Traumatization occurs when internal and external resources are inadequate for coping.

Vicarious or Secondary Trauma/Compassion Fatigue

Vicarious or Secondary Trauma/Compassion Fatigue is a process through which one's own experience becomes transformed through engagement with an individual's trauma. That is, trauma may not only impact the individual who experienced it. Cumulative transformation of the inner experience (cognitive schema and belief systems) can result from empathic engagement with clients' traumatic experiences (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995).

Post Traumatic Growth

Trauma experiences don't all necessarily equate to poor coping or adaptation. Individuals and communities will often find healthy ways to cope with, respond to, and heal from trauma experiences. Trauma events often lead people to reevaluate their lives and redefine what is important. Some healthy ways of coping with trauma include increased and intentional family and community bonding; increased sense and desire for purpose and meaning in daily living, adjustments in priorities, and increased altruistic approaches to relationships and communities such as a greater sense of compassion and volunteerism.

Adverse Childhood Events

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019), "Childhood experiences, both positive and negative, have a tremendous impact on future violence victimization and perpetration, and lifelong health and opportunity. As such, early experiences are an important public health issue. Much of the foundational research in this area has been referred to as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). ACEs can be prevented."

Adverse Childhood Experiences have been linked to:

- Risky health behaviors,
- Chronic health conditions,
- Low life potential
- Early death

Trauma, Anxiety and Depression

It is helpful to frame interventions in schools within a protective factor vs. risk factor perspective. This perspective comes from the field of epidemiology. When looking at psychological risk factors associated with depression and anxiety, research has shown that individuals may often exhibit poor self-regulating, interpersonal, and social skills. These factors are often associated with the effects of trauma, as trauma disrupts emotional development, emotional regulation, and relationships. A nurturing environment or protective factors are thought to shield children from these risk factors, or at least lessen the effect of exposure. When school personnel intentionally through policy, community education, and in practice, work to reduce risk factors associated with retraumatization, healing and growth is a likely outcome.

Intersecting SEL and Trauma-Informed Care

Enhancing and fostering the development of the social and emotional aspects in the lives of students and adults can significantly promote healing and reduce the potential for retraumatization. The development of social emotional skills is essential to providing a trauma-sensitive approach.

“ The development of SEL skills is essential to providing a trauma-sensitive approach. ”

The RethinkEd Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) training series and student curriculum help provide the necessary conditions for reducing the effects of trauma and retraumatization in schools by explicitly addressing and promoting the development of safe and ethical decision making/behaviors; the practice of self-care in order to mitigate the effects of stress and compassion fatigue; the cultural competence to understand the unique experiences of trauma and the effects trauma plays in human development and learning; and the intentional development of support systems that are equipped to build resilience and emotion regulation skills that are critical for both students and adults. The integration of these approaches not only promotes healing, but also cultivates the necessary resources to reduce potential retraumatization.

The RethinkEd Social and Emotional Learning Program

- ✓ Uses interventions designed to increase students' sense of self-worth.
- ✓ Targets behavioral supports to enhance students' sense of trust.
- ✓ Helps draw connections between students' behaviors and their natural consequences and teachers with approaches to strengthen relationships.
- ✓ Helps facilitate the development of a growth mindset that can support academic achievement.
- ✓ Promotes maintaining consistent routines through cooperation and intrinsically developed goal planning.
- ✓ Helps model healthy emotion regulation and relationship skills.
- ✓ Cultivates calming strategies for the body and mind that support thinking and engagement.
- ✓ Helps students increase cognitive capacities that are often impacted by trauma.
- ✓ Reinforces cooperation and conflict resolution to reduce the need for control that often comes with the experience following a traumatic event.
- ✓ Improves peer relationships that are often affected by trauma.
- ✓ Supports connection and healthy attachment to school personnel.

How RethinkEd SEL Supports Trauma-Informed Care

The lessons in the Content Areas of RethinkEd Social and Emotional Learning reinforce and complement a trauma-sensitive approach to learning, as aligned with the Principles of Trauma-Informed Care:

RethinkEd Social and Emotional Learning Content Areas

	Awareness of Self & Others	Self-Management	Social Skills	Social Awareness	Self-Care	Mental Health
Principles of Trauma-Informed Care	Safety	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Choice	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Collaboration	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Trust	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Empowerment	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Intersectionality	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

RethinkEd SEL Student Learning Outcomes and Trauma-Informed Care

Awareness of Self and Others

- Reinforces cooperation and conflict resolution
- Supports healthy expression of emotion
- Develops understanding of emotions

Self-Management

- Increase individuals' self-worth
- Reinforces healthy emotional integration routines to facilitate safety
- Supports emotion regulation

Social Skills

- Supports and enhances sense of trust
- Improves peer relationships after trauma
- Supports healthy attachment to school personnel
- Supports health meaningful and substantive relationships
- Demonstrates kindness, empathy, and compassion

Social Awareness

- Demonstrates safe and ethical behavior
- Supports problem solving
- Resolves conflict effectively

Self-Care

- Supports emotion regulation
- Supports psychological resilience
- Promotes post traumatic growth
- Supports self-compassion
- Healthy boundaries

The RethinkEd Social and Emotional Learning Program

RethinkEd Social and Emotional Learning is an evidence-based program developed for every educator and student. Delivered on a digital platform and designed for easy implementation, RethinkEd SEL provides a flexible and scalable solution that empowers educators to successfully integrate and build a culture around SEL in their schools.

CASEL-Aligned Student Lessons and Professional Learning Topics

RethinkEd Exclusive Professional Learning Topics

Mental Health	Self-Management	Social Skills	Social Awareness	Self-Care	Mental Health	Self-Care
Self-Knowledge	Self-Control	Fairness	Cultural Competence	Mindfulness	Bullying Prevention	Culturally Responsive Teaching
Emotions	Stress Management	Respect	Empathy	Self-Efficacy	Suicide Prevention	Addressing Injustice
Values	Focus	Friendship	Safe & Ethical Behavior	Optimism	Anxiety	Promoting Equity with SEL
Wants & Needs	Problem Solving	Relationships	Support Systems	Self-Compassion	Depression	Implicit Biases
Learning Skills	Goal Setting	Cooperation	Social Contributions	Self-Advocacy		
Growth Mindset	Resilience	Conflict Resolution	Actions & Consequences	Healthy Boundaries		

The RethinkEd SEL program is comprised of 38+ Professional Learning modules, 390 Student Lessons for students in general education (Tiers 1 and 2) and 120 Student Lessons for students in special education (Tier 3). Lessons are written by experts in the field and grounded in the five core competencies of the Center for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2017). **For more information, visit www.rethinkSEL.com**

About Us

RethinkEd was founded on a simple, yet powerful idea: To re-think education. To make it better and easier. To unburden school districts and empower educators. To improve outcomes and elevate accountability. To promote collaboration and inspire learning. And most importantly, to make a difference in the school day for everyone – administrators, educators, and students.

The RethinkEd solution is part of RethinkFirst, a global company that is transforming behavioral healthcare. Similar to RethinkFirst's other solutions that are innovating and improving outcomes for clinicians and employers globally, RethinkEd is pioneering EdTech with our relentless pursuit of innovative methods that put evidenced-based, data-informed, digitally delivered instruction and assessments into the hands of educators, clinicians, and parents who share our singularly minded focus: To power the potential of all children and to work together to help them succeed.

Get in touch

info@rethinked.com
(877) 988 - 8871
49 W 27th Street, 8th Floor
New York, NY 10001



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www.rethinked.com