Trauma-Informed School Strategies during COVID-19

The uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic have challenged school systems, especially educators, staff, and administrators, to transform the ways that they connect with, teach, and support students and families. These changes also offer school systems the opportunity to build on the relationships they have formed with each other and with their students and families. It is possible within this move to largely virtual learning for schools to build resilience and coping skills, provide a much needed sense of safety and routine, and connect with families who might otherwise be isolated and overwhelmed. This document uses the National Child Traumatic Stress Network's (NCTSN) "Creating, Supporting and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A System Framework," to consider how, in the time of COVID-19, schools can adapt or transform their practices by using a trauma-informed approach to help children feel safe, supported, and ready to learn.

Why a Trauma-Informed Approach during the COVID-19 Crisis?
For most students, educators, staff, and school administrators, COVID-19 raises concerns related to danger, safety, and the need for protection. For some, this danger is added to preexisting trauma, adversity, and disparities. For others, the pandemic brings new grief, loss, and trauma, which may include increased risk for violence and abuse in the home. Many families will experience secondary adversities related to their isolation, economic hardship, and unmet basic needs. A trauma-informed approach is essential to help school communities feel safe and supported during times of danger and adversity. This approach is needed so that students can learn, educators can teach, and staff and administrators can connect and provide needed structure. Using this approach will assure parents and caregivers that the school community is strengthening their child's well-being, thereby allowing families to reinforce the importance of learning.

What Does It Mean to Be "Trauma-Informed?"
The NCTSN defines a trauma-informed system, such as a school, as one where all parties involved recognize and respond to the impact of traumatic stress on those who have contact with the system including children, caregivers, staff and service providers. Educators, staff and administrators infuse and sustain trauma awareness, knowledge, and skills into their school climate, programs and classrooms. They collaborate with all those who are involved with the child, using the best available scientific evidence, to maximize physical and psychological safety, facilitate the recovery or adjustment of the child and family, and support their ability to learn and to thrive.

What is the NCTSN System Framework for Trauma-Informed Schools?
The NCTSN System Framework for Trauma-Informed Schools identifies and describes the essential elements of a trauma-informed school that can help support school personnel in working with children who have experienced trauma. The framework includes core areas of focus for educational system improvements and organizational changes. These core elements can be applied throughout a school system to create a trauma-informed environment. In addition, applying these elements also helps to identify students and school personnel within the school system who are at risk or who might need more intensive support to address their traumatic stress reactions.

Trauma-Informed Strategies for Educators, Staff, and Administrators during COVID-19
Here we use the framework to outline specific guidance for how schools can use a trauma-informed approach while responding to the needs of their students, families and staff during this COVID-19 crisis. The framework presents 10 Core Areas of a trauma-informed school system:

The COVID-19 crisis has taken a toll on everyone. Teachers and school staff in particular are facing additional professional stress. Many of their methods of practice have changed, and they have had to learn new skills and technology platforms while also assuring that they have the necessary means (including internet access) to shift to working from their homes. Additionally, they likely have their own personal stressors such as having their children and other family members at home, facing economic insecurity, or having concerns for their own health and the health of loved ones. As educators and staff began to connect with their students, they may also have felt concerns about their students. For example, some students may attend sporadically or not at all, may be living in less than conducive conditions, or be unable to connect one-on-one. All of these layered issues have the potential to contribute to anxiety, depression, or symptoms of secondary traumatic stress.

Educators and school staff can consider the following strategies during this time, to help reduce the impact of these stressors:

- Practice self-compassion: remember that it is best to take care of yourself before you try to take care of others.

- Take time to check in with yourself to gain insight into any areas where you may be struggling. Once you identify the issues, create a plan to address the issues you can control and work on letting go of the ones you cannot.

- Utilize social supports as needed. Consider planning a virtual coffee break or lunch hour with colleagues or other educators. During these sessions, you might share strategies that are or are not working, talk about what you're cooking or watching on Netflix, and experience a much-needed sense of community.

- Create a routine that includes getting up at a regular time, then getting ready and dressed for the day, and following a work schedule. Incorporate into your day some physical movement, as well as some breaks to connect with others.

- Remember that, as adults, we can be the best guides for how our students and children will do. They are watching and listening to us, so when we take care of ourselves, we're modeling how they can take care of themselves, too.

- Be safe and follow the latest public health recommendations related to hygiene and protective equipment if you must go to the school or into the community for teaching supplies.

Administrators can consider the following strategies to support the well-being of their staff:

- Prioritize the physical safety of the entire school community when making decisions related to re-opening the school or holding any in-person events.

- Ensure the physical safety of all of your staff by following the latest public health recommendations related to hygiene and protective equipment, minimizing exposure as much as possible. Make sure that any staff on the school grounds or conducting school business are provided with the equipment, policies, and enforcement tools they need to maximize their physical safety.

- Check in with your staff both collectively and individually. Encourage them to take time during the school day to manage their stress and take care of themselves and their families.

- Identify and distribute resources for staff who may need additional screening, assessment, and/or treatment for stress, mental health issues, or secondary traumatic stress symptoms. Many mental health resources are now available via tele-health platforms. Identify a range of resources that you can provide for your staff.

- Consider virtual professional development sessions that promote positive ways to cope with stress, and that help staff to understand the signs of secondary traumatic stress and the ways to prevent and address it. Offer wellness activities and promote routine health care and safety.

- Validate your staff members' concerns about their students. Communicate your district's plan for identifying students who need to be located, for helping families who need internet access or hotspots, and for reaching students who may need additional services during this time. It's important for staff to understand the expectations around their roles in reaching students as well as the limits of their responsibilities, and what other supportive methods and resources are available.

- Create opportunities for staff to connect to one another, through peer check-ins or using professional development time to reflect and process.

Creating a Trauma-Informed Learning Environment

Schools create trauma-informed learning environments by promoting the wellness of all students, ensuring they feel safe and supported physically, socially, emotionally, and academically. They do this by promoting healthy interactions among students and staff, and teaching social, emotional and self-regulation skills. These skills and interactions are even more essential during this time.

The relationships with educators and staff are often a substantial asset when motivating students to reengage with learning. Educators, staff, and administrators may consider supporting a trauma-informed learning environment by enhancing previously existing relationships with students and families. It is important to acknowledge that families are all in different places with respect to safety, support, and resources to assist with learning, and incorporating activities that strengthen social, emotional and self-regulation skills.

Educators and school staff can consider the following strategies during this time to help create and strengthen a trauma-informed learning environment:

- Establish a routine and maintain clear communication. These are crucial first steps. Then, empathize with the difficulties resulting from routines that have already changed due to current events. Explain that there will likely be future changes to routines, and that you will communicate ahead of time when it is possible to do so.

- Provide information in digestible amounts. Moving to remote learning can make assignments feel more overwhelming and daunting. Present directions in smaller bites when necessary and encourage students to ask clarifying questions.

- Encourage students to lead the way in sharing what they do and do not understand about their current situation. You can do this by asking open-ended questions, such as, "How are you feeling about not being in school?" Such questions can lead to insight without letting assumptions guide the conversation. Approach students' experiences with curiosity. Aim to clarify misinformation and connect students with other important adults (such as family members) who help them feel safe.

- Show appreciation for students' efforts to complete assignments. Remember that students may be dealing with many different home life situations while trying to maintain their academics. Students may feel embarrassed to share that their personal situation impacts their ability to complete assignments. They may also be feeling vulnerable sharing their home with their classmates online.

- Actively focus on inclusive attitudes during the shift to distance learning. Now, more than ever, students should feel valued and welcomed regardless of their backgrounds or identities.

- Create, and utilize, relational rituals before checking on distance learning assignments with students. For example, students and educators can share one tough moment, one hopeful moment, or one new lesson they learned about themselves during the day. Participating in these rituals can help educators build and maintain connection despite their physical distance from their students.

- Provide opportunities for students to complete social emotional learning practices and wellness activities that affirm their competence, sense of self-worth, and feelings of safety. These activities can promote self-regulation when students are feeling stressed and provide a healthy sense of control over controllable aspects of an overwhelming situation. Some possible social emotional and wellness practices can include the following:

  - Promote self-awareness by having students review a feelings chart and share how they are feeling. To help them communicate their feelings, encourage the use of a scale, such as, "On a scale of 1 to 10, how bored are you feeling?" or "Are you feeling a little lonely, somewhat lonely, or very lonely?"

  - Hold a Virtual Community Reflective Circle to Build Connection During COVID-19

  - Recommend quick mindfulness or self-soothing exercises such as smelling a flower (to practice taking big, deep breaths) or completing four-corner breathing prior to completing the lesson. Four-corner breathing simply involves inhaling deeply and exhaling deeply four times. Students can complete this breathing exercise by standing up and taking one inhalation and one exhalation while facing each of the four corners in a room.

  - Model and normalize a range of emotions by giving students opportunities to express themselves in nonverbal ways. This may include drawing a picture about how their lesson or day is going or showing the most important thing that happened to them that day.

  - Have students complete a virtual or long-distance appreciation or gratitude circle. Encourage students to write one thing they appreciate about classmates. Add your own, and then give each student the appreciations written about them.

Administrators can consider the following strategies during this time to help create and strengthen a trauma-informed learning environment:

- Encourage teachers and staff to focus on socio emotional learning practices in addition to setting academic expectations.

- Share community resources with teachers that support family well-being (e.g., food and housing) and encourage them to share concerns about families with administration.

- Develop and share pandemic plans (now and future) with teachers; create a plan to share with the entire school community upon return to face-to-face learning.

- Allow space for reflecting on what teachers/staff have learned about their students from seeing their home lives during virtual learning sessions.

Identifying and Assessing Traumatic Stress

Children with identified histories of trauma may be especially vulnerable to the significant changes in schedule, routine and expectations resulting from social distancing, canceled classes, remote learning, and reliance on caregivers for academics. The stressors and conditions of this crisis can place all children at additional risk for trauma and loss.
Other students may also be at additional risk during this time, including those students:

- With a history of anxiety;

- Who have had episodes of depression or suicidal ideation;

- With learning and attention disorders;

- With a history of child abuse or domestic violence;

- Whose families may have lost jobs or income;

- With loved ones particularly vulnerable to the COVID-19 virus;

- Whose caregivers are healthcare workers, or who work in occupations with potential exposure to the virus;

- Whose parents are divorced, separated, or live in different locations;

- Experiencing less supervision because of caregivers' work schedules.

Educators and school staff can consider the following strategies during this time, to help identify which students might be experiencing traumatic stress and need further intervention during this crisis.

- Use existing knowledge of your students to be aware of who may be at greater risk, and find opportunities for short, individual check-ins to see how they are doing.

- Consider doing an activity such as a reflective circle, to provide an opportunity for students to share their feelings about the crisis.

- Note any changes in students' behavior. For example, is a student acting more tired or listless than normal, or having more difficulty concentrating? Is a child who is usually relatively focused now unable to stay with one train of thought? Does a normally social child seem more withdrawn? These may be normal reactions to the change in environment and the current circumstances, or they may warrant further assessment by a mental health professional.

Administrators can consider the following strategies during this time, to help identify which students might be experiencing traumatic stress and need further intervention during this crisis.

- Consider working with school mental health and/or community partners with expertise in trauma to explore ways to identify students who may be experiencing mental health and trauma symptoms associated with the COVID-19.

- In your regular communication with families, it may be useful to normalize the stress and mention ways that mental health professionals can help children or caregivers to cope with that stress. List symptoms that children and families could be experiencing and provide mental health resources.

- Ensure that all staff have been trained to identify reactions of trauma and mental health, and know the procedures for linking a student to additional supports. You may partner with an NCTSN site or local community mental health center with expertise in trauma.

Addressing and Treating Traumatic Stress

Educators are in the unique position of being one of the few, or perhaps only, adults outside of a household to "see" children during this crisis. Of course, teachers cannot be expected to be mental health professionals. But they can use their relationships with their students and their access to them during this time to connect, listen, and help link families to additional services if they suspect that a student is experiencing serious depression, anxiety, or trauma symptoms. Even with remote interactions, educators can provide extra support to these students, and school administrators can support this.

Educators and school staff can consider the following strategies during this time, to help students and families address trauma and mental health symptoms:

- Set up individual conferences via computer or phone to check in with students and ask about their safety and worries.

- If you have developed successful classroom strategies to help a student cope with symptoms at school, consider sharing those strategies with caregivers to help the student have more success while learning at home.

- Talk with the school mental health professionals to better understand how to connect students and families with them when necessary. Ask for consultation about any worries you may have about any particular student.

Administrators can consider the following strategies during this time, to support students and families who may be experiencing trauma and mental health symptoms:

- Work with your school mental health staff to develop a list of mental health resources that families can access from their homes. This list should include a suicide hotline, disaster distress hotline, domestic violence hotline, school mental health staff available by phone or video, and community mental health resources. This list can be distributed to families as well as to educators and school staff.

- Consider offering a virtual professional development in-service that includes some strategies that educators and school staff can use to identify and connect to students and families who appear to be struggling during this time. Ensure that staff understand how a family can access the available resources.

- Develop a partnership with a local mental health agency with some expertise in trauma. People from this agency could offer professional development related to trauma and mental health, be available to students, families, and staff who may need additional support, and help navigate difficult decisions related to issues such as child abuse reporting or suicide assessments.

- Establish routine virtual "hallway check-ins" where staff can check-in with other staff related to student concerns.

Trauma Education and Awareness

The stress, uncertainty, and difficult circumstances created by the threat of COVID-19 are difficult for families. When people are facing stress and difficult life circumstances, it can particularly affect three areas: a sense of safety, feelings of connectedness, and feelings of hope. A sense of safety is the belief that an individual's needs—and the needs of those they care about—will be met. It is a belief that one will be protected from harm. For the many families that are experiencing or will experience significant income loss, this crisis may also mean food insecurity or an inability to pay rent and bills. And all of these are losses can severely damage a child's sense of safety. Connectedness refers to having relationships with others who make one feel understood and supported. Since social distancing has been instituted and most public places have been closed, educators have become primary contacts and have been quite creative in helping students feel connected. Finally, hope is the expectation that everything will work out and the feeling that things will be all right. Right now, many people may be feeling discouraged, hopeless, or angry. Schools can play a key role in educating students and families about the impact of safety, connectedness, and hope during these times and offering skills and resources to help.

Educators and school staff can consider the following strategies during this time, to help students and families strengthen their sense of safety, connectedness, and hope:

- Reach out, provide space, and encourage students to connect with educators or other trusted adults or counselors to talk about their safety concerns. Offer students a way to connect privately if there is something that they need help with or are worried about.

- Encourage students to talk to friends or family members on the phone or via video chat.

- Suggest that families maintain as much of a regular routine as possible, and plan family activities such as going for walks or hikes or playing board or video games together. Make time to ask students about something fun they are doing right now.

- Greet students by name and create a touch-free or virtual routine (similar to a handshake, a hug or a high five) to invite connection, either online or at meal pick-up.

- Consider putting students together in small groups to work on projects or activities online or by phone. Solving virtual puzzles or doing online scavenger hunts are good examples.

- Have students contact a person in their family or community that they respect and ask that person how they stayed hopeful in troubled times, then ask the student to share what they learned.

- Teach about other historical times of crisis, including how these ended and how communities rebounded.

- Encourage students to get fresh air and to move when possible.

- Share some of the many stories of hope and helping that have come out of this current crisis.

- Share a positive affirmation or a student's strength—it can go a long way right now.

- Let students know that people find help in different ways, including through spiritual beliefs and practices, and encourage students to discuss things that bring them hope.

- Engage students and families in creating rituals and celebrations for the end of the school year.

Administrators can consider the following strategies during this time, to help students and families strengthen their sense of safety, connectedness, and hope:

- Utilize community partnerships and enlist the services of telecommunication companies to help ensure that all students have access to the internet and to a device where they can connect to their classroom.

- Communicate the importance of safety, connectedness, and hope to the district's educators, staff, and families, and share strategies they can employ to strengthen these areas.

- Consider these three areas for school staff, and allow opportunities for them to suggest ways that the school and district can help to increase their own sense of safety, connectedness, and hope during this crisis.

- Consider hosting staff meet-ups or coffee breaks, and supporting ways for different groups of staff and educators to meet in small groups.

- Provide opportunities for staff to share gratitude about others, their experiences at home, or any other relevant experiences that may spark hope in others.

- Engage teachers, staff, and community members in planning for the future, including returning to school in the fall and commemorating milestones, such as graduation or changing schools.

Partnerships with Students and Families

Validated data have already shown that when parents partner with schools, students have better health and academic outcomes. (https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/parent_engagement.htm) During these uncertain times partnering with students and families is even more essential. Each student's physical environment, access to technology and other learning tools, and availability of essential needs such as food is unique. So, in order for any learning and enhanced well-being to occur, caregivers and schools must partner in order to determine and meet the needs of each. Families can also provide support for schools. Parents are taking on tasks formerly performed by school staff, and may have access to resources or skills that could benefit the school. For partnership to thrive in these times, there must be: frequent and clear communication, mutual assistance, and an understanding that the school, its staff, its families, and its students, are all in this together and doing their best. This spirit of partnership can be reinforced through communication of clear, shared goals related to the well-being of the entire community during this time.

Educators and school staff can consider the following strategies for partnering with families to enhance the learning and overall well-being of students and their families:

- Share information with caregivers about how kids might respond to stress, including how stress might play out by age group.

- Emphasize that families need to give themselves some space when emotions run high, and model how to regulate emotions to help children cope.

- Remind families that children become regulated through connection with a calm and regulated person. As a child's anxiety increases, their thinking, learning brain becomes less engaged and their behavior and emotions are difficult to control and manage.

- Encourage families to counter expressions of loss ("I miss soccer," etc.) with feelings of hope ("Let's look for the helpers"; "Would you like to help your classmates collect money for the food bank?").

- Reach out to families and students to determine what methods of communication are most helpful for them and at what time. When checking in, discuss what kinds of supports are typically offered to support their student's academic learning as well as regulation when at school. Consider offering virtual office hours for students and caregivers.

- Remember that it may have been a long time since caregivers were in school. Consider creating clear daily lists of work for students, with easy-to-follow instructions. Caregivers are not familiar with the jargon and acronyms that normally used with students and colleagues, so try to keep instructions jargon-free.

- Ask caregivers to partner with you. Encourage them to contact you with their needs and special circumstances so that you can develop any work-around that might accommodate their work schedules or home situations.

- Caregivers can also be tremendous resources as we all are adjusting to this pandemic. Share your needs with them and ask for suggestions, resources for yourself or for less-resourced families, or ideas for learning activities or websites that could be shared with the class. Those who are able to contribute ideas or resources will feel valued by the exchange.

- Suggest that families develop life skills such as cooking or gardening, as alternate learning options to promote feelings of control over themselves and their environment as well as feelings of competence and self worth. Perhaps give students opportunities to share these life skills they are learning at home with others in their class too.

- Express gratitude and humility to families for inviting educators to "enter their home.

Administrators can consider the following strategies for partnering with families to enhance the learning and overall well-being of students and their families:

- Send and reinforce the message that schools and families "are in this together." This can be reinforced by a school's efforts to continue to feed students and families in need, make learning materials available, and increase access to technology.

- Make the most of this unique opportunity to forge new bonds with families who may not have partnered with schools in the past. This is an opportunity for caregivers to see that the school cares about the well-being of their child, and for the school to appreciate the efforts of caregivers to reinforce academic goals. Schools will have greater insight into their students' home lives, and caregivers will better understand the daily work that schools do to educate their child.

- Be flexible and understanding if families have difficulties meeting the requests of schools related to their child's education. Consider holding a virtual town hall and provide other opportunities for families to provide input into what is working and what is challenging for them at this time.

- Consider surveying families to better determine how they are doing, what their needs are, and how schools can support them as they support their child achieve their educational goals.

- Seek and utilize input from a wide range of families on important COVID-19-related decisions such as when and how to re-open a school and with what precautions, how to honor important milestones usually celebrated in school, and to help meet the needs of families in the school community. This might be done through virtual town halls or in smaller (virtual) focus-groups.

Cultural Responsiveness

A whole-child approach is important during normal times, but it's imperative during a crisis. A whole child approach reflects a school's willingness to take into account the culture and context that shapes the child and how that context impacts the child's response to the academic environment. This becomes particularly important during times of crisis. We know that students' and their families' stress responses are influenced by past life experiences, prior interactions with systems that are intended to support and protect such as schools and healthcare settings, and their expectations based on their cultural backgrounds. When schools are able to be responsive to this context during crises, it enables students and families to respond to stress with trust for the school system and more control that leads to better decisions. However, when schools fail to recognize the role of culture in shaping student and family responses, unintended consequences can result from well-intentioned actions and become blind spots leading to distrust between students and the schools.

A key to effectively engaging culturally-responsive approaches is to approach student and family interactions with compassion and curiosity instead of judgment. Even when cultural misunderstandings and mistakes occur during interactions, students and families who feel teachers and the school system are acting with compassion are more likely to trust the intentions of educators and work collaboratively to create the best academic experience during a crisis.

Educators and school staff can consider the following best practice strategies during crisis and actively avoid blind spots that can undermine these best practices:

- **Best Practice:** Learn what your students feel is most stressful and most helpful during the crisis by inviting them to share how their families and communities are dealing with the crisis.

  - **Blind Spot:** Don't assume student behavior during the crisis reflects how they feel about the class materials or themselves. This may miss how their behaviors are affected by stress and sources of help that are connected to their family or community.

- **Best Practice:** Believe students' stories about family members and others in their community who did not receive hospital services or who have minimal access to technology to engage in school. Communicate empathy and concern when these stories are shared.

  - **Blind Spot:** Avoid minimizing students' experience by trying to convince them that they are misreading the situation. Also, avoid encouraging them to focus only on the positive; instead, acknowledge inequities or biases that may exist for their families or communities.

- **Best Practice:** Actively seek out resilient behavior from students and reframe cultural responses to stress in an attempt to understand how it serves a purpose for managing crises or thriving after crises.

  - **Blind Spot:** Avoid assumptions that responses to stress can only happen one way. Do not assume, when the student and family are not responding in the way that you feel is best, that their response is wrong.

Administrators can consider the following best practices to support staff, students, and families, while avoiding these common blind spots.

- **Best Practice:** Provide support and guidance for staff to engage conversations about how race, gender, socio-economic status and other important identities are sources of both stress and strength for the student during the crisis. Similarly, remain aware of how these social identities impact levels of stress and hopefulness among staff.

  - **Blind Spot:** Avoid dissuading staff from receiving consultation about topics related to social identity because of fears that this might lead to staff or administration discomfort. Actively share with staff how these experiences may impact students and their families.

- **Best Practice:** Encourage staff to ask colleagues, students, and their families how to make the virtual classroom more welcoming to students and their families during the crisis.

  - **Blind Spot:** Avoid creating a virtual workplace environment for staff that promotes assumptions about students and their families' experiences without checking in to see whether the classroom environment is helping students feel safer and more trusting of the school.

- **Best Practice:** Actively seek to address inequities experienced by students of color within the school and healthcare system by encouraging staff to act as advocates for students' needs and to become particularly attuned to the most vulnerable student needs.

  - **Blind Spot:** Resist the desire to "treat all students the same." Different students have different needs and when we don't acknowledge these unique needs, we risk more significant harm to our most vulnerable students.

We know that when staff and students return to school they will have been through an unprecedented mental health challenge and will have ongoing concerns about their physical and psychological safety. It is important for school administrators, teachers, and support staff to create and communicate the school's plan for dealing with the COVID-19 crisis now and in the future. Schools should partner with staff, families, and older students to create this plan, and should hold ongoing meetings and discussions around what the new normal will look like when students return to school. While it is difficult to know for sure how students will respond to the many stressors they are experiencing, we can anticipate and prepare for a myriad of potential losses including: (1) grief and loss related to death of a loved one as a result of COVID-19; (2) grief and loss related to staff and/or students changing schools for a variety of reasons; and (3) grief and loss over the suspension of many smaller yet important rituals, routines, markers and milestones in their daily lives. We can create a much-needed sense of security and safety for everyone in the school community by: following a well-constructed and clearly communicated plan for returning to school; dealing with ongoing challenges; ensuring that all students have opportunities to learn; and communicating how future crises and needs for closure will be handled.

Educators and school staff can consider the following strategies during this time, to help prepare students and families to return to school in the fall:

- Know what healthy grief looks like and find ways to support your students' feelings.

- Give your students permission to feel their feelings and provide safe opportunities for them to share their feelings and loss experiences related to their COVID-19 experience.

- Create and enhance ways to foster community among students and between you and your students.

- Plan for ways to celebrate accomplishments both while you are meeting virtually and when you come together again in the future.

- Communicate the school's emergency response plan to students and families in developmentally appropriate language. Ensure that they understand the plan for reopening, how students' physical and psychological health will be maintained, and how any future needs for closures and remote learning will be handled.

Administrators can consider the following strategies during this time, to help prepare students and families to return to school in the fall:

- Reinforce confidence in your staff by reminding them that they are valued, and that they have the strength, knowledge and skills to get through this.

- Create a plan for reopening schools that incorporates necessary adjustments to accommodate both physical and psychological safety of the school community.

- Ensure that the school's response plan:

  - Includes educational opportunities for all students during this time, by considering accommodations for students with Individualized Education Plans and/or 504 plans. Those plans may include providing services over the summer.

  - Considers ways to celebrate the end of one academic year before starting the next, especially if the transition to remote learning was sudden.

  - Allows for students to spend at least a day in their former classrooms, so that they may celebrate accomplishments, honor the work they have done in this new way, and more smoothly transition to their next grade level.

  - Addresses how to maintain alternate educational programming if returning in the fall isn't possible or if some students have to remain at home due to compromised immune systems or other risk factors.

  - Adjusts leave policies to allow staff to stay at home due to sick family members, and supports staff who may have been exposed at work and now have to stay at home.

- Provide clear, concise, accurate and timely communication to the entire school community; this increases predictability, a sense of control and feelings of safety for others.

- Give staff timely updates on reopening campuses, and alternatively, what policies are being put into place if it is necessary to continue working from home.

A trauma-informed approach when administering discipline requires that the impact of traumatic life experiences on students' behavior and home life be considered. For all students, the COVID-19 crisis has created a sense of danger and uncertainty that can influence their behavior in different ways. During this time, connection and relationship should take priority over discipline.

Students who have trauma histories, as well as those who are experiencing high levels of stress caused by the COVID-19 crisis, might be less likely to engage in opportunities for remote learning. Approaching these opportunities from a frame of punishment—prioritizing rules and consequences for prohibited behavior—might discourage them even further. Educators can create a safe and welcoming experience for all students by providing consistency and structure, praising students for participation, and modeling a calm and nonjudgmental approach.

During this time, it is also important to reach out to those students who were having disciplinary issues prior to the pandemic. Students who have ongoing difficulties regulating their emotions and behavior might require more support to engage in remote learning during this time and to make the transition back to school in the fall.

Educators and school staff can consider the following strategies to promote a safe and respectful remote learning environment for all students:

- Spend time talking with students about what is needed to create a safe learning environment. Let students take the lead, and consider issues such as comfort using video, ground rules for interacting online, etc.

- Allow relationships and well-being to take priority right now. While it is important to hold high expectations for academic work and appropriate behavior, students will fare best if they know their teachers care about their overall well-being. Address academic and behavioral issues with empathy and support.

- Address disciplinary issues outside of group and class meetings whenever possible, through one-on-one contacts with students.

- Reach out to students who typically have behavioral issues at school, to ensure they are connecting with remote opportunities.

- Adapt restorative justice practices that have been used in the classroom to repair situations and relationships harmed by students' behavior. It is more important than ever for every student to be able to trust and seek appropriate social support from one another during this time, and this might require intervention and mediation by school staff when students lack needed communication and problem solving skills.

Administrators can consider the following strategies during this time, as they balance discipline and accountability with a trauma-informed approach during this crisis:

- Consider how decisions about remote learning requirements will affect students who have experienced trauma, as well as those whose families are hard hit by COVID-19.

- Establish consequences that are non-punitive and aim to support students in learning new behavioral skills, or at least provide clear pathways for appeal. Consider students' life experiences and the potential for re-traumatization when applying consequences.

- Offer supportive services to students who require frequent disciplinary actions, to address underlying causes of their behavior. Ensure that COVID-19-specific challenges are considered, including the family's economic and healthcare situation.

- Provide opportunities for teachers to come together virtually and talk openly, in a confidential space, about their most challenging students—to brainstorm strategies that will work during this time and lay the groundwork for a successful return to school.

Cross-System Collaboration and Community Partnerships

One of the most important ways for school staff and administrators to provide a trauma-informed response to COVID-19 is through active community collaboration. In order to better address the needs of students and families, it will be important for each community to consider the level of collaboration between schools and other child and family serving systems or agencies (e.g., health, mental health, child welfare, shelters, food banks, other supportive non-profits) to determine what creative and relevant supports can be put into place. This is especially important, since it may be difficult for families to ac-

cess needed services that were traditionally brokered through the school, and school staff may be fielding a flood of requests without the availability of usual solutions to assist families.

Educators and school staff can consider the following strategies during this time to enhance collaboration with community partners:

- Identify needed services and supports that could benefit your students and learn how to access them during this time.

- Work with your teams to compile a comprehensive list of needs to share with other staff and administrators.

- Communicate with families as appropriate about resources and supports needed to help their child.

Administrators can consider the following strategies to enhance collaboration with community partners:

- Connect with local child welfare agencies to determine if there are any special procedures for schools to use for reporting during this time, and review these with staff.

- Reach out to trauma-informed mental health agencies, including NCTSN members, to learn about services available to families, such as both telehealth services and in-clinic services to be accessed later.

- Help educators and staff clarify their roles in relation to providing support to families with specialized needs students to minimize the likelihood of caregivers developing secondary traumatic stress.

- Provide procedures for staff to connect families with food banks, shelters, financial assistance agencies, unemployment offices, etc. to help reduce burden and confusion among staff.

- Develop relationships with faith-based communities, recognizing that they may also be tremendous areas of physical and emotional support for families.

- Promote a culture across educators and staff to support families as best they can while also making sure to care for themselves.

Additional Resources

For more information about child trauma and child traumatic stress, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network has many resources to help educators and caretakers better understand the impact, consequences and resilience of children and families exposed to trauma. This page is a good place to start.

This resource was inspired by and adapted from an interview of NCTSN members by the Southern Poverty Law Center, A Trauma-Informed Approach to Teaching Through Coronavirus.

Some of the answers above were adapted from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) publications, including:
- Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A System Framework
- Coping in Hard Times: Fact Sheet for School Staff, Teachers, Counselors, Administration, Support Staff
- Coping in Hard Times: Fact Sheet for Parents
- Coping Hard Times: Fact Sheet for Youth High School and College Age
- Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators
- Secondary Traumatic Stress for Educators
- Helping Children with Traumatic Separation or Traumatic Grief Related to COVID-19
- PDFL Recommendations for Holding a Virtual Community Circle to Build Connection During COVID-19

These resources from the NCTSN expand on some of the recommendations above:
- Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope With COVID-19 (available in English, Spanish and Mandarin)
- Simple Activities for Children and Adolescents Amidst COVID-19 Outbreak
- Taking Care of Yourself