TIPPS
Trauma-Informed Programs
& Practices for Schools

Our 10 Core Pillars
Our model of a trauma-informed
school is based upon 10 core pillars:

1 | Ensure Safe Communities

Safe and nurturing environments establish a secure base for children. When children feel safe and cared for in their classrooms, they perform better on academic tasks and are less likely to become frustrated or angry when they encounter social and intellectual challenges.

2 | Increase Awareness of Trauma

Understanding the signs and symptoms of trauma in children is essential to helping them heal and become resilient to the adversities they encounter. Awareness leads to insights that deepen empathy and compassion.

3 | Increase Awareness of Biases

Implicit bias is a term used to explain how stereotypes and unconscious associations about others influence an individual's interactions and behaviors. Implicit bias and stereotypes can undermine efforts to strengthen relationships and build community.
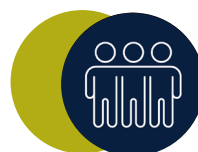
4 | Build Community

Strong communities rest on foundations of safety, trust, compassion, and respect for differences. To build community, school professionals must actively and consistently work to strengthen relationships, support and empower children, and press the system to become increasingly more responsive to the needs of all students.

5 | Develop Positive Relationships

Relationships that serve the goals of trauma-informed schools are those in which individuals (adults and children alike) feel appreciated and valued for who they are and what they bring to the school setting. To model positive relationships, teachers must know how their own actions affect others and must actively resist engaging in practices that undermine students' confidence.

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6 | Reduce Punitive Discipline

Research shows that the use of punitive discipline—such as shaming children or calling them out for underperforming—can undermine their self-confidence and motivation to learn. Extreme measures such as suspending students can actually worsen behavior and increase the likelihood of even more problematic outcomes for some students.

7 | Communicate & Reinforce Expectations

Setting high yet achievable goals for students is shown to motivate performance and build self-efficacy. Research finds that students who are expected to perform well are more likely to do well when they are given encouragement and made to feel like their goals are within reach. If rules and expectations are unclear or poorly and inconsistently enforced, teaching and learning will suffer.

8 | Avoid Deficit Thinking

When teachers and other school professionals use deficit language (e.g., "You're lazy," "You're not applying yourself," "You may not have what it takes"), messages can be internalized and lead to poor self-confidence and motivation to learn. Far better are messages that communicate confidence in students' abilities and a desire to see them succeed. Sending positive, affirming messages and establishing clear lines of communication are fundamental to building and maintaining strong relationships and healthy school communities.

9 | Incorporate Social-Emotional Skills

Trauma-informed schools and classrooms incorporate teaching about social–emotional skills and positive coping to promote resilience. These include critical thinking skills, healthy expression of emotions, and effective communication. School professionals must be competent in their own social–emotional skills, aware of their own identities and biases, and capable of modeling the coping strategies they require of their students.

10 | Create Supports

Although universal practices should be the foundation of trauma-informed schools, tiered supports and selective interventions should be available to the children who need them. The effective use of tiered interventions requires that schools develop protocols for assessing and quickly acting on student issues and concerns. Partnering with community agencies to provide wraparound services can bring needed expertise into schools with high needs.