

Myth: Discipline is “soft” in a trauma-informed school.

Truth: There are consequences for all of our behaviors, both “good and bad”. Students must be held accountable for their behaviors because our schools must be “safe”. The goal of discipline is to teach, so that students will learn from their choices and behaviors. Discipline is different from punishment. If traditional consequences aren’t changing behaviors (detentions and suspensions), and sometimes make things worse, then we have to examine our practices and differentiate the consequences.

TIC schools are physically and emotionally safe, predictable, fair and caring. Traumatized students should be held to the same high academic standards as their peers, although they may need extra supports to be successful. The relationships in TIC schools are respectful and trustworthy. Research on the implementation of trauma-informed care in schools includes programs such as PBIS and Second Step.

Additional TLC Tips for TIC

For children who have experienced trauma, learning can be a big struggle. But once trauma is identified as the root of the behavior, we can adapt our approach to help kids cope when they're at school.

Dr. Caelan Kuban Soma, Director of The National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children, offers five more tips for understanding kids who have been through trauma, plus strategies for helping them.

1. Kids who experience trauma need to feel they're good at something and can influence the world.

Find opportunities that allow kids to set and achieve goals, and they'll feel a sense of mastery and control, suggests Soma. Assign them jobs in the classroom that they can do well or let them be a peer helper to someone else. “It is very empowering,” says Soma. “Set them up to succeed and keep that bar in the zone where you know they are able to accomplish it and move forward.” Rather than saying a student is good at math, find experiences to let him or her feel it. Because trauma is such a sensory experience, kids need more than encouragement—they need to feel their worth through concrete tasks.

2. There's a direct connection between stress and learning.

When kids are stressed, it's tough for them to learn. Create a safe, accepting environment in your

classroom by letting children know you understand their situation and support them. “Kids who have experienced trauma have difficulty learning unless they feel safe and supported,” says Soma. “The more the teacher can do to make the child less anxious and have the child focus on the task at hand, the better the performance you are going to see out of that child. There is a direct connection between lowering stress and academic outcomes.”

3. Self-regulation can be a major challenge for students suffering from trauma.

Some kids with trauma are growing up with emotionally unavailable parents and haven't learned to self-soothe, so they may develop distracting behaviors and have trouble staying focused for long periods. To help them cope, schedule regular brain breaks. Tell the class at the beginning of the day when there will be breaks—for free time, to play a game or to stretch. “If you build it in before the behavior gets out of whack, you set the child up for success,” says Soma. A child may be able to make it through a 20-minute block of work if it's understood there will be a break to recharge before the next task.

4. It's OK to ask kids point-blank what you can do to help them make it through the day.

For all students with trauma, you can ask them directly what you can do to help. They may ask to listen to music with headphones or put their head on their desk for a few minutes. Soma says, “We have to step back and ask them, 'How can I help? Is there something I can do to make you feel even a little bit better?’”

5. You can support kids with trauma even when they're outside your classroom.

Share trauma-informed strategies with all staff, from bus drivers to parent volunteers to crossing guards. Remind everyone: “The child is not his or her behavior,” says Soma. “Typically there is something underneath that driving that to happen, so be sensitive. Ask yourself, 'I wonder what's going on with that kid?' rather than saying, 'What's wrong with the kid?' That's a huge shift in the way we view kids.”

The impact of trauma on student physical (including brain structure and function), social-emotional, behavioral and academic well-being is well documents in research studies.

The researchers at Washington State University concluded that exposure to one or more ACE (adverse childhood experiences = traumas) increased the likelihood of negative outcomes during

childhood, and as the number of ACE increased, so did the odds of having problems across four critical risk factors that impact learning:

	Severe Behavior	Severe Attendance	Academic Failure	Chronic Health
1 ACE	2.4X	2.2X	1.5X	2.3X
3 or more ACEs	6.1X	4.9X	2.9X	3.9X

X = times as likely to have severe behavior, severe attendance, academic failure, chronic health issues

*Events that result in a stress response that is greater than the individual's capacity to cope impacts their ability to function at school.



Refer to the following website for additional information on the long-term impact of adverse childhood experiences (traumas): <https://socialworksynergy.org/2014/02/>