

Integrating Trauma-Sensitive Practices in Schools

OSHS Project Director Training - Grantee Session

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Safe Supportive Learning
Engagement | Safety | Environment

Agenda



1 Presentation

2 Panel Discussion

3 Reflection

4 Group Discussion and Initial Action Planning

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1 Why are schools addressing trauma?

2 How are schools addressing trauma?

3 What are trauma-sensitive practices?

Why are schools addressing trauma? What is Trauma?



- Overwhelms ability to cope.
- Results in feelings of terror, helplessness, and powerlessness.
- Interferes with sense of control, connection, and meaning.

Why are schools addressing trauma?

Types of Trauma



Acute Trauma: Event that occurs at a particular time and place and is usually short-lived (e.g., natural disaster, accident, sudden loss, one-time experience of violence).



Chronic Trauma: Experiences that occur repeatedly over long periods of time (e.g., chronic abuse/neglect, on-going community violence, long-term illness, chronic homelessness, forced displacement, chronic exposure to poverty and deprivation, structural oppression, racism).



Historical trauma: The collective and cumulative trauma experienced by a particular group across generations still suffering the effects (e.g., violent colonization, assimilation policies, slavery, segregation, racism, discrimination).

Why are schools addressing trauma?

Types of Trauma? (cont.)



Complex Trauma

Chronic exposure to trauma that begins early in life, often within care-giving relationships and leads to immediate and long-term difficulties in many areas (e.g., ongoing interpersonal violence or neglect, other forms of chronic stress experienced without adult support).

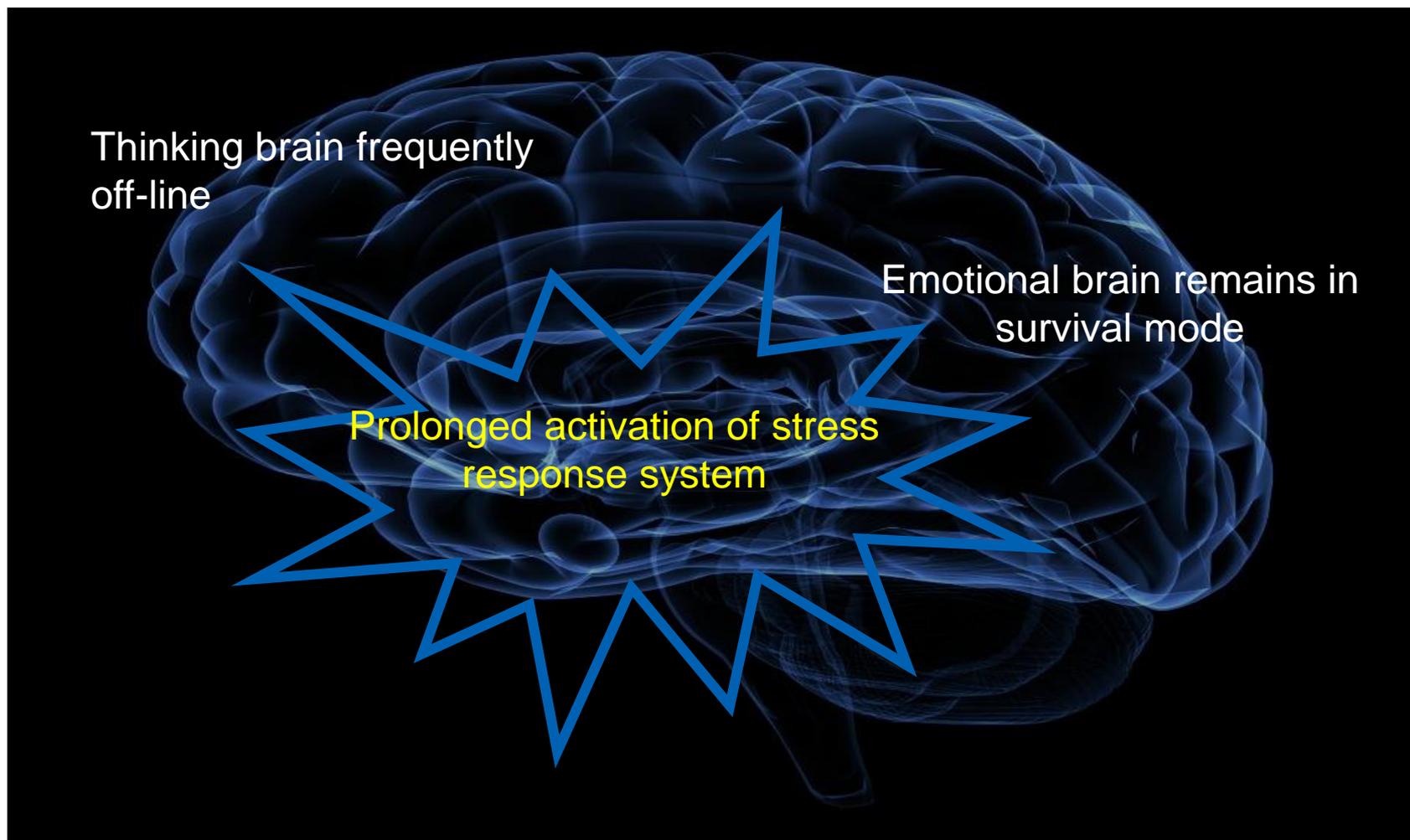
Why are schools addressing trauma?

Data on Trauma



- **In community samples, more than two thirds of children in the U.S. report experiencing a traumatic event by age 16.**
- **One out of every four children in school has been exposed to a traumatic event.**
- **Approximately two out of three children has been exposed to violence.**
- **75% who were victimized reported more than one type of victimization.**
- **1 in 10 report 5 or more exposures to violence.**

Why are schools addressing trauma? Toxic Stress



Why are schools addressing trauma? Impact of Complex Trauma



- Smaller brain size and structures.
- Fewer neural connections.
- Heightened baseline level of arousal.
- Difficulties with learning, memory, and emotional regulation.
- Difficulty trusting others and forming healthy relationships.
- Increased behavioral issues.
- Dissociative responses.
- Increased risk for mental health issues.
- Lower self-esteem.
- Focus on survival vs. future orientation.
- Increased risk for other system involvement.

Why are schools addressing trauma? Impact on School Functioning



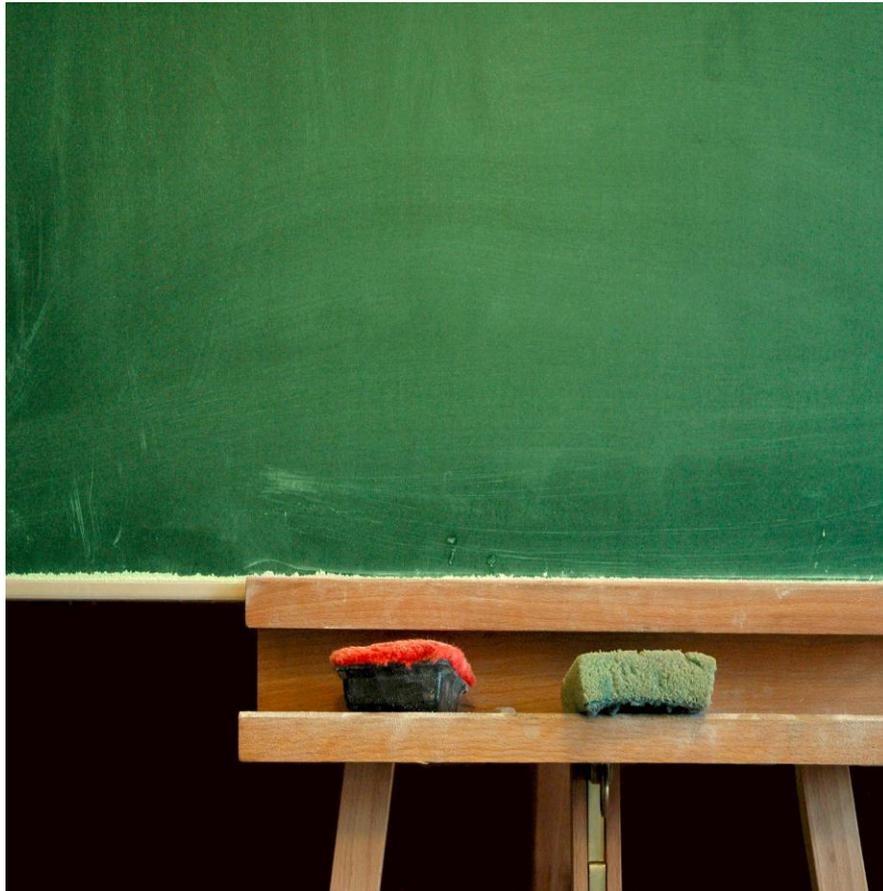
- Difficulty paying attention and learning.
- Trouble building relationships with teachers and peers.
- More time out of class.
- Increased risk of failing, poor test scores.
- More likely to be suspended or expelled.
- Higher rates of referral to special education.

Why are schools addressing trauma? Impact on School Staff



- **Secondary Traumatic Stress / Compassion Fatigue:** The presence of PTSD symptoms caused by at least one indirect exposure to traumatic material.
- **Vicarious Trauma:** Changes in a helper's inner experience over time as a result of responsibility for an empathic engagement with traumatized clients.

Why are schools addressing trauma? Impact on Conditions for Learning



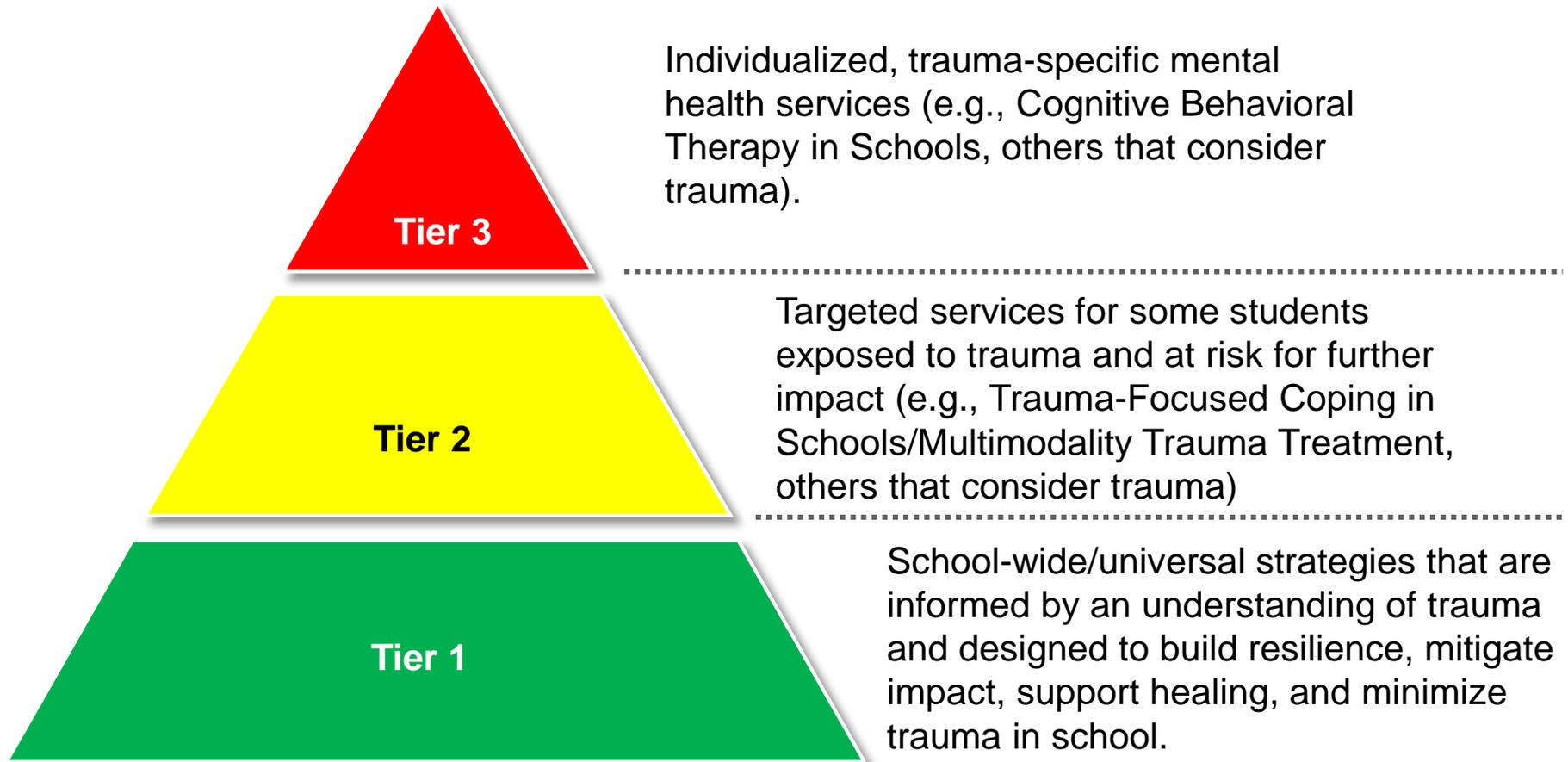
- All are in survival mode.
- Negative impact on school safety and culture.
- Environment less conducive for learning.
- Increased risk for harm.

Why are schools addressing trauma? Resilience



A positive, adaptive response in the face of significant adversity. Rooted in both the physiology of adaptation and the experiences we provide for children that either promote or limit its development.

How are schools addressing trauma? A Multi-tiered Approach



What are trauma-sensitive practices? Guiding Principles



- Understanding trauma and its impact.
- Believing that healing happens in relationship.
- Ensuring physical and emotional safety.
- Supporting choice, control, and empowerment for all.
- Ensuring cultural awareness.
- Viewing students holistically.
- Using a collaborative approach.

What are trauma-sensitive practices?

Core Domains



- 1 Supporting Staff Development
- 2 Creating a Safe and Supportive Environment
- 3 Assessing Needs and Providing Services
- 4 Building Skills
- 5 Collaborating with Students and Families
- 6 Adapting Policies and Procedures

What are trauma-sensitive practices?

1. Supporting Staff Development



Trauma 101

- Trauma and its impact on students and staff.
- Trauma responses and triggers (including variations by age, gender, culture).

Trauma-Sensitive Approach

- Core principles of a trauma-sensitive approach.
- Examples of trauma-sensitive practices.

Skill Building

- Social and emotional learning (e.g., self-regulation).
- Positive behavioral interventions and restorative practices.

Self-care

- Techniques for enhancing self-awareness and mindful practice.
- Self-care strategies.



Classroom Strategies

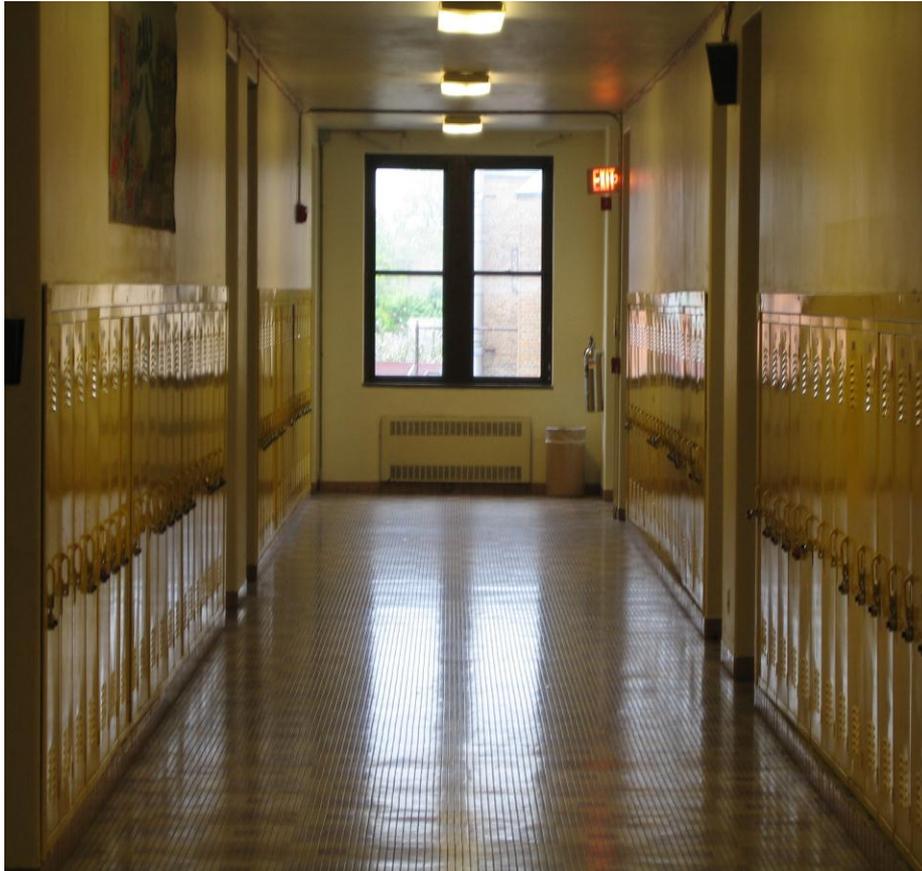
- Establish clear, predictable routines.
- Plan for changes and transitions and anticipate student responses.
- Set clear rules and expectations and enforce them consistently.
- Use respectful language and tone.
- Adopt a positive, strengths-based approach.
- Use praise and reinforce positive behaviors.
- Present material in multiple ways.
- Provide opportunities for student choice and sense of control.
- Provide options and spaces for calming down.
- Be prepared to offer additional support when needed.
- Check your assumptions – observe, consider why a student is responding in a particular before reacting.

What are trauma-sensitive practices?

2. Creating a Safe and Supportive Environment



Recognizing Triggers



- Loud, chaotic environments
- Physical touch
- Authority figures
- Limit setting
- Uncertainty about expectations or transitions
- Emergency responders and police
- Situations that generate feelings of helplessness, vulnerability, or lack of control



Preventing and Managing Crises

Prevent

- **Be aware** of potential triggers in the classroom and throughout the building.
- **Minimize** triggers where possible (e.g., clear transitions, respectful tone, well-monitored spaces).
- **Recognize** early warning signs (e.g., acknowledge, listen, validate, offer choices and positive reinforcement).

Support

- **Shift** to non-verbal support (e.g., calm tone, body language and gestures, space) when student is in escalated state .
- **Use** grounding techniques to help deescalate (e.g., breathing, space, things to hold).
- **Avoid** arguing, directing, punishing in the moment.

Repair

- **Debrief** and learn.
- **Reconnect** and repair.
- **Avoid** isolation and disconnection.
- **Develop** plans (e.g., triggers, warning signs, what helps/hurts, safe people and places).

What are trauma-sensitive practices?

3. Assessing Needs and Providing Support



- Include trauma in all school-based evaluations or assessments.
- Consider the potential impact of trauma on learning, behavior, testing results, and diagnoses.
- Conduct assessments in a trauma-sensitive manner.
- Include a place for trauma-related considerations in all individualized plans (e.g., triggers, trauma responses, trauma-related supports).
- Be aware of age-, gender-, and culture-specific variations to trauma responses.
- Ensure students have access to Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions that address trauma.
- Consider culture-specific practices for healing.
- Educate students and families about trauma and its impact.

4. Building Skills



- Identifying type and intensity of emotional states.
- Expanding vocabulary to describe emotional experiences.
- Identifying physical sensations associated with particular emotions.
- Understanding the context for emotions (environmental and internal factors/triggers).
- Identifying how others are feeling.
- Learning how to modulate emotional and physiological experiences (e.g., breathing, muscle relaxation, journaling, noticing, movement).
- Learning how to express emotional experience in healthy ways.
- Strengthening executive functions (e.g., delaying/inhibiting response, decision making, anticipating consequences, problem-solving).
- Building sense of self and identity that includes positive aspects and future orientation.

What are trauma-sensitive practices?

5. Collaborating with Families



- Encourage caregiver involvement.
- Be flexible when scheduling meetings.
- Establishing a respectful and empathic tone.
- Be aware of potential trauma reactions from caregivers.
- Anticipate potential triggers related to interactions with caregivers.
- Support family choice and control.
- Consider how meeting space is arranged, where people are seated, what language/jargon is used, and how to support caregiver safety and empowerment.
- Consider cultural factors that impact relationship-building (e.g., language, tone, what questions are asked and how, a particular group's experiences with the educational system).

What are trauma-sensitive practices?

6. Adapting Policies and Procedures



- School discipline practices are positive, respectful, and restorative. Retraumatizing practices are avoided (e.g., harsh, punitive approaches, isolation and disconnection from the community).
- Communication procedures include respecting confidentiality, being aware of triggers for students and caregivers, focusing on how issues are addressed and how information is shared.

What are trauma-sensitive practices?

Intersection Trauma Sensitivity and MTSS



Multi-tiered System of Support	Trauma-Sensitivity
Tier 3: Functional Behavioral Assessments and Individualized plans and supports.	Tier 3: Trauma-related factors are considered in individual assessments and plans. School provides or connects to trauma-specific mental health services.
Tier 2: Behavioral and academic skill development groups.	Tier 2: Group-level skill-building considers trauma and key factors for resilience-building.
Tier 1: Creating a positive school culture, teaching social skills, positively reinforcing prosocial behaviors, structuring the environment to prevent undesirable behaviors.	Tier 1: Training all staff on trauma and its impact. Identifying and minimizing trauma-related triggers. Upholding core principles of that support positive school culture. Teaching self-regulation.

What are trauma-sensitive practices? Next Steps for Leaders



Phase One

- **Educate** school leaders and staff.
- **Build** multidisciplinary teams to support.
- **Assess** readiness.

Phase Two

- **Examine** current practice related to trauma-sensitivity.
- **Develop** plans.
- **Align** with other initiatives.
- **Revisit** readiness.

Phase Three

- **Integrate** trauma-sensitive practices.
- **Evaluate** impact.
- **Respond** to changing needs.
- **Sustain** school-wide change.



Individually, reflect on the following questions:

- What are you already doing that aligns with what you learned in this session?
- Identify THREE major points you will take away from this session.
- Identify TWO resources or methods of support that would advance your school-based mental health provision.
- Identify ONE specific step you can take to advance this work in your district.



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