



To download the Toolkit and to learn more about learning opportunities offered by the Cross-Systems Training Institute and COACT Colorado, please visit <https://coloradocstl.org>.

The Trauma-Responsive Schools Theory of Change Toolkit offers an action plan for implementing trauma-responsive practices to help address each school's unique priorities using this Theory of Change. It contains guidance and recommendations based on the current research and the real-world experiences of teachers, administrators, staff, families, and communities. The Toolkit is intended to integrate trauma-responsive approaches with other initiatives, procedures, and daily activities in the education setting. To best support all students, trauma-responsive care must become integrated into all the activities of the school. Trauma-responsive care is a comprehensive approach to being responsive to the strengths and needs all children and achieving the goal of all Colorado students being resilient and equipped to reach their full potential.

Trauma-Responsive Schools Theory of Change Toolkit

Executive Summary

Trauma-Responsive Schools Theory of Change

ULTIMATE OUTCOME

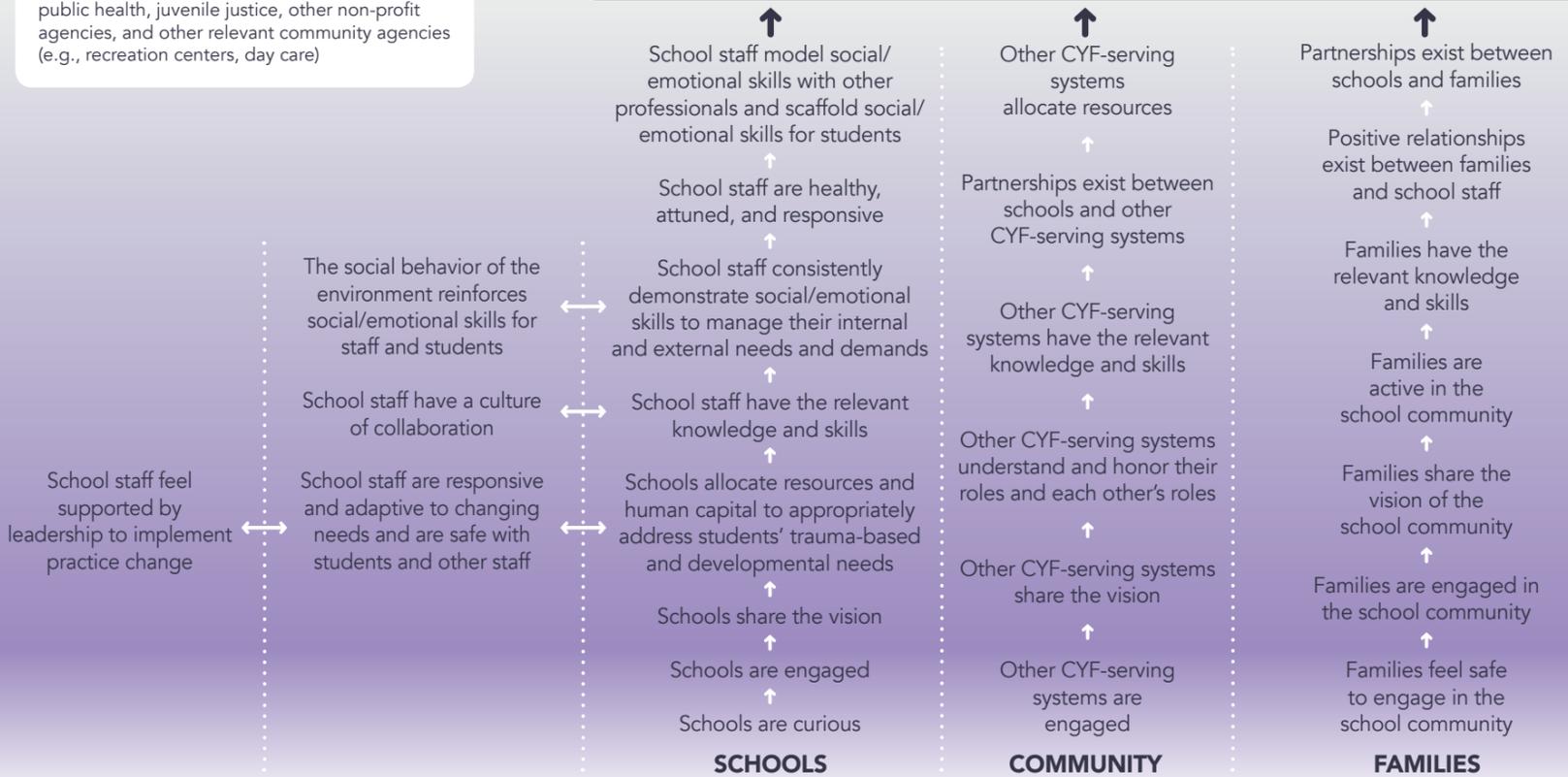
All Colorado Students Are Resilient and Equipped to Reach Their Full Potential

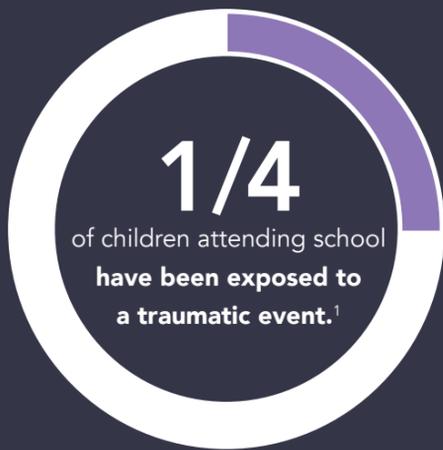
Students have social and emotional skills to manage their developmental and environmental needs

An integrated school system exists that fosters healthy, safe, and responsive environments

DEFINITIONS

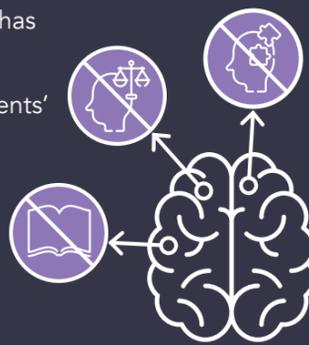
Children, Youth, and Families (CYF) partnerships include: child welfare, mental/behavioral health, public health, juvenile justice, other non-profit agencies, and other relevant community agencies (e.g., recreation centers, day care)





Exposure to trauma can lead to **toxic stress**, which **inhibits brain development**,² which in turn impacts children's **learning, behavior, or both**.

A large body of research has demonstrated negative effects of trauma on students' **cognitive, academic, behavioral, and social-emotional functioning** in schools.³



Long-term, Colorado data show that adults who have experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences, such as maltreatment and exposure to violence, are **less likely to finish high school**, in addition to having a wide range of **serious behavioral and physical health problems**.⁴



Theory of Change Principles: The Essential Elements of Trauma-Informed Care

- 1 Maximize physical and psychological safety for children and families.
- 2 Identify and respond to the individualized needs and strengths of children and families who have experienced trauma.
- 3 Enhance child well-being and resilience.
- 4 Enhance family well-being and resilience.
- 5 Enhance the well-being and resilience of those living in the community and those working in the system, including supporting self-care for providers and addressing secondary traumatic stress.
- 6 Partner with youth and families, including utilizing peer/family voice at all levels from policy to practice.
- 7 Support and promote positive and stable relationships in the life of the child and the family.
- 8 Recognize and respond to gender, cultural, and historical issues.
- 9 Promote equity by ensuring all families have equal access to resources and equal opportunities for respectful, meaningful engagement in services and supports in the community.
- 10 Integrate emergency management and crisis response.
- 11 Collaborate across systems and establish community partnerships.

Based on the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) Seven Essential Elements in Child Welfare Toolkit and Essential Elements of a Trauma-Informed School System

Using a trauma-responsive approach in schools can help staff address learning and behavior

problems, and it can also help educators address the well-being of the whole child.⁵ Just as important, a trauma-responsive approach can help educators have better interactions with their students and colleagues and even improve their own well-being.⁶ Furthermore, a trauma-responsive approach has benefits not only for the students who have been exposed to traumatic events, but also for the students who have not; these approaches are best practice for all students and should be incorporated as universal supports.

¹ National Child Traumatic Stress Network Schools Committee (2008). Child trauma toolkit for educators. Los Angeles, CA & Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.

² Shonkoff, J. P., Garner, A. S., Siegel, B. S., Dobbins, M. I., Earls, M. F., McGuinn, L., ... & Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption, and Dependent Care. (2012). The lifelong effects of early childhood adversity and toxic stress. *Pediatrics*, 129(1), e232-e246.

³ Perfect, M. M., Turley, M. R., Carlson, J. S., Yohanna, J., & Saint Gilles, M. P. (2016). School-related outcomes of traumatic event exposure and traumatic stress symptoms in students: A systematic review of research from 1990 to 2015. *School Mental Health*, 8(1), 7-43.

⁴ Watamura, S.E., & Brown, S.M. (2017). Parental history of adversity and child well-being: Insights from Colorado. Colorado Office of Early Childhood.

⁵ National Association of School Psychologists (2016).

⁶ Perry, D. L., & Daniels, M. L. (2016). Implementing trauma-informed practices in the school setting: A pilot study. *School Mental Health*, 8(1), 177-188.

COACT Colorado, Colorado's Trauma-Informed System of Care, is an initiative of the Office of Behavioral Health in the Colorado Department of Human Services and is federally sponsored by a grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Under the leadership of COACT Colorado, the Trauma-Responsive Schools Theory of Change (TRSTC) was developed by a large team of stakeholders including school leaders and staff, community practitioners, and state agencies. It was co-sponsored by the Colorado Office of Children, Youth, and Families.

The TRSTC Toolkit is a partnership of Dr. Ashley Brock-Baca of the Office of Behavioral Health and Dr. Evelin Gómez and Dr. Angèle Fauchier of the Trauma Informed Practice team at the Kempe Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect, guided by an advisory council of representatives from 16 different schools, districts, and other agencies. The Toolkit is designed to guide users to develop a plan and/or organize efforts to meet evidence-based practice standards in creating trauma-responsive schools. The Toolkit aims to integrate knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, as well as to avoid re-traumatization. The Toolkit provides an action-oriented guide for schools (administrators, staff, and teachers); other systems in the community that serve children, youth, and families (CYF); and families, to apply the TRSTC.

TRSTC is based on three features:

- 1) preconditions that are necessary to achieve trauma-responsive schools,
- 2) indicators to assess the status of each precondition, and
- 3) interventions to achieve each precondition.

The Toolkit aims to describe each precondition, offer approaches to assessing indicators, and provide guidance on approaches to intervention.

TRSTC Toolkit Moves Progressively Through Five Phases, Which Build on Each Other:

