

# Creating Trauma-Informed Classrooms & Schools

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**Complex Trauma Symposium 2019**



# Learning Objectives

1. Understand findings on teachers' training needs around child maltreatment
2. Review the child maltreatment training curriculum that we developed for elementary school teachers
3. Acquire information on strategies that promote trauma-informed classrooms and school environments

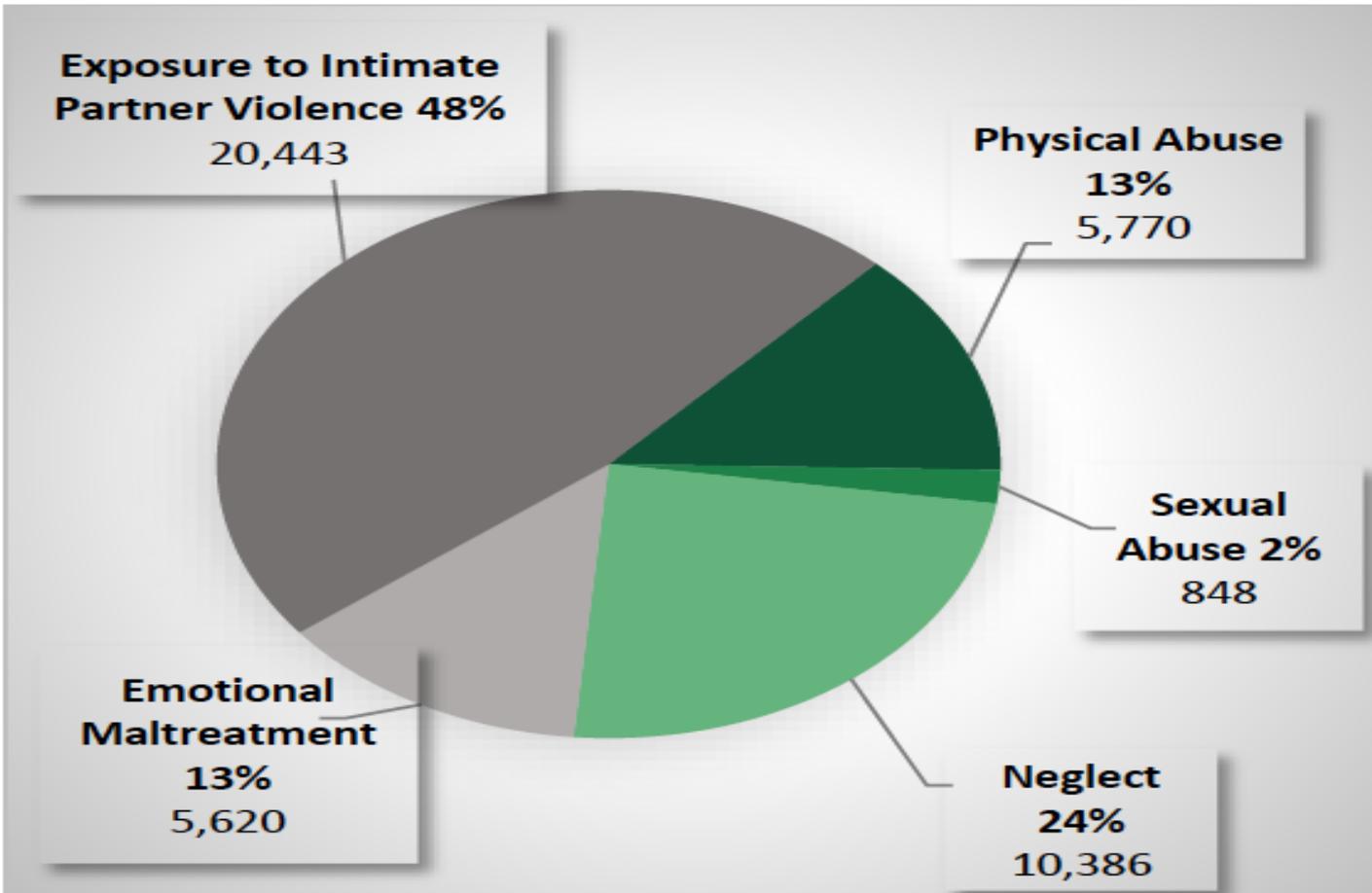


# Setting the Stage



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**FIGURE 5: Primary Category of Substantiated Child Maltreatment in Ontario in 2013**



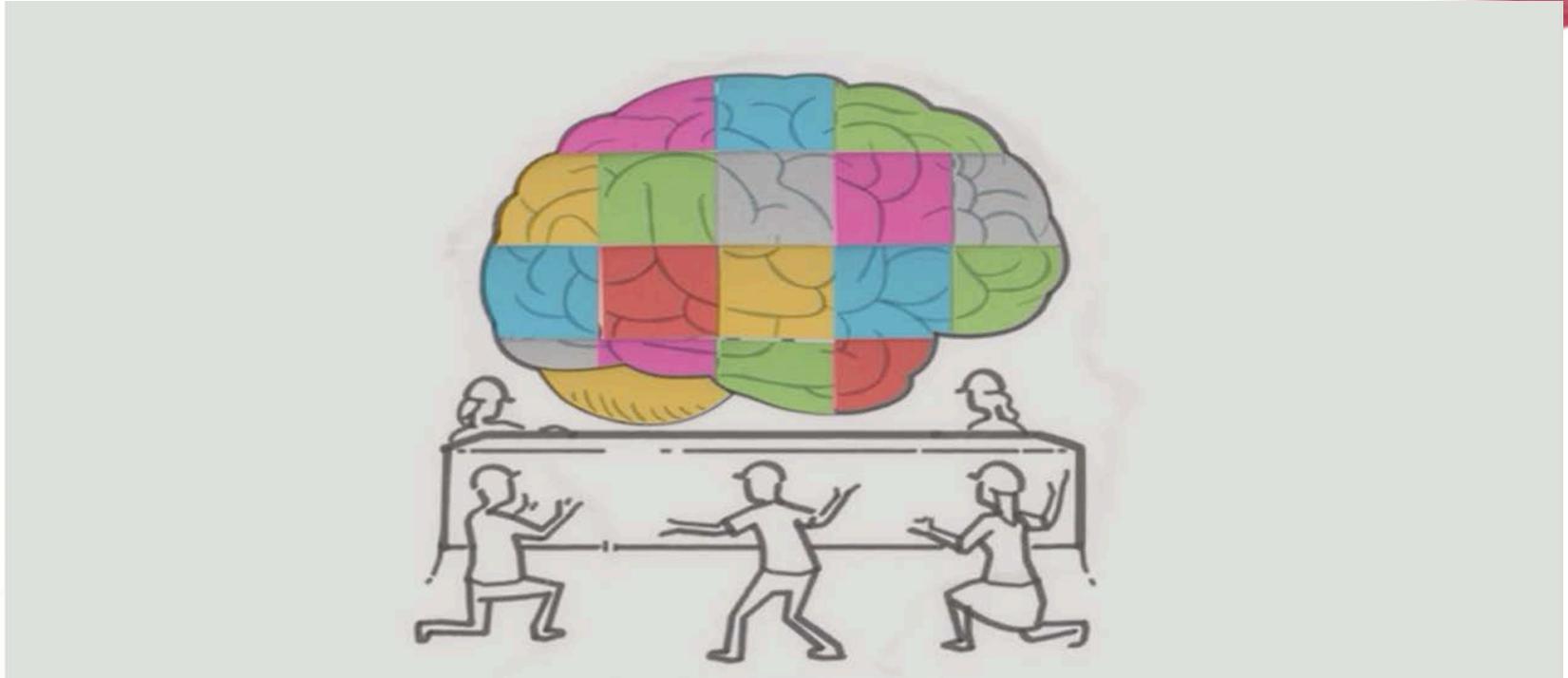
An iceberg floating in a blue ocean. The tip of the iceberg is above the water, while the much larger, jagged base is submerged. The sky is a gradient of blue with a few birds flying. The water is a deep blue. The submerged part of the iceberg is enclosed in a white, rounded rectangular frame.

5-10% of child  
maltreatment cases are  
reported (e.g., to child  
welfare, police)

# Complex Trauma Impacts



# Brain Development



<http://www.albertafamilywellness.org/resources/video/how-brains-are-built-core-story-of-brain-development>



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# Impact on Academic Performance



- ✓ Brain development is hindered ...
- ✓ Memories of maltreatment are unexpectedly triggered ...
- ✓ Emotions are overwhelming ...
- ✓ Difficulties staying calm if distressed ...
- ✓ Relationships can feel unsafe or unstable ...

Unsurprisingly, the capacity of maltreated children to learn is often significantly compromised.

- More failing grades
- More likely to fall behind their same-aged peers
- Perform poorly on tests of academic achievement



# Child Maltreatment Training Needs Among Teachers



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# What Do You Think?



- Do you believe there is a need for improved training for teachers about child maltreatment?
- What would be important to cover in training for teachers about child maltreatment?





# Research Overview

- Overall objective: to develop and evaluate a child maltreatment training program that meets the training needs of local elementary school teachers

Study 1: Training needs assessment

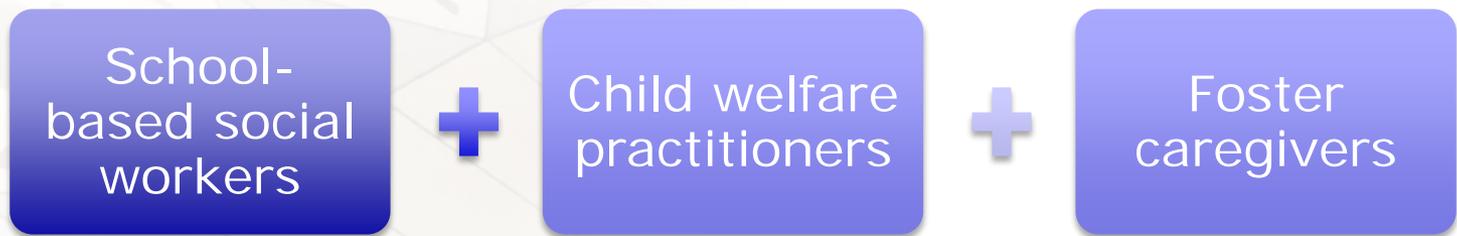
Study 2: Training development and evaluation





## Study 1 Objective

- To conduct a needs assessment for a child maltreatment training curriculum for elementary school teachers in one large urban region of Ontario
- Training needs (e.g., knowledge and practice gaps) identified by various stakeholders:





# Methods

- Multi-informant, qualitative design

## Semi-structured focus groups

- child welfare practitioners (n = 9)
- school-based social workers (n = 19)

## Questionnaires (paper or online)

- foster caregivers of maltreated children (n = 21)





## Key Questions

1. What gaps exist for teachers regarding maltreatment-related knowledge and skills?
2. What factors may influence delivery of child maltreatment training to teachers?
3. What factors may influence teachers' use of maltreatment knowledge and skills?

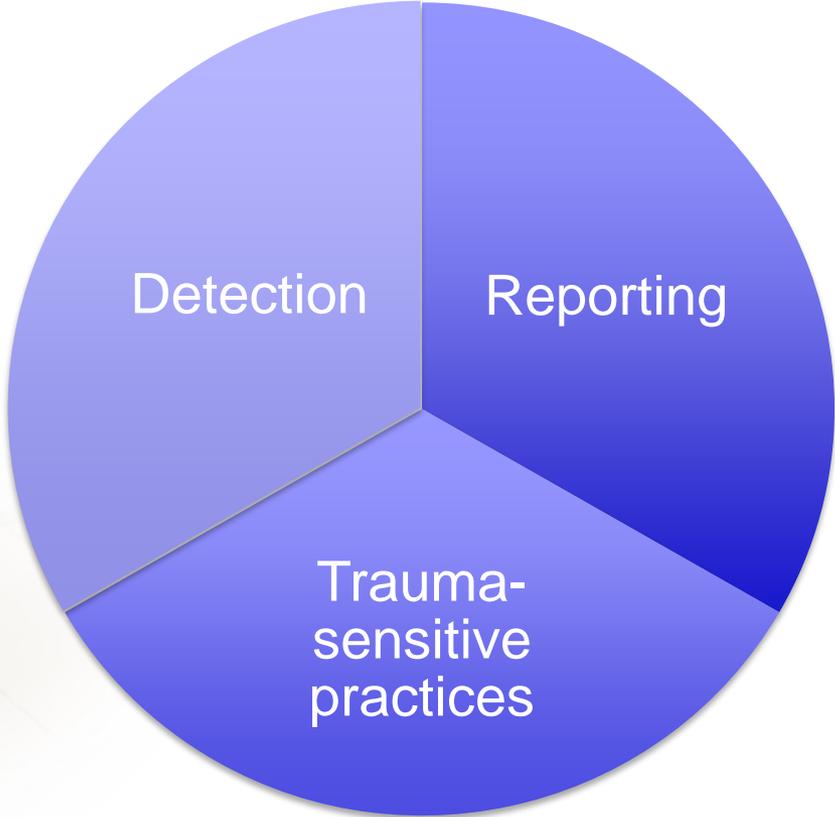




# Teachers' Maltreatment-Related Knowledge and Skills

Existing knowledge/skills

Gap in knowledge/skills





## Detection of Child Maltreatment

### **Gap in knowledge/skills:**

#### 1) Child maltreatment signs

*"Other signs can be a little bit harder to understand, like why the kids are holding the teacher's hand literally all day or the opposite ... you know, pushing everybody away or bullying, right?" (child welfare practitioner 9)*





## Reporting of Child Maltreatment

### **Existing knowledge/skills:**

- 1) Training regarding duty to report
- 2) Timely child maltreatment reporting

*"We've saturated these schools with training about [duty to report] and the policy has been, you know, um, circulated widely." (school social worker 10)*



# Reporting of Child Maltreatment



## Gaps in knowledge/skills:

- 1) Duty to report
- 2) Failure to report in a timely manner or all  
*"[Teachers] are not calling because they want to preserve the relationship with that parent." (school social worker 13)*
- 3) Child welfare-related responsibilities
- 4) Over-reporting
- 5) Responses to child maltreatment disclosures  
*"Assumptions are sometimes made on how the system works and that rescuing them and putting them in a foster home is what needs to happen and ... it's not always the best solution." (school social worker 4)*



# Trauma-Sensitive Practices



## **Existing knowledge/skills:**

### 1) Trauma-sensitive practices

*"[In the classroom] he learned zones, he learned how to tell when he was starting to escalate ... he learned tons of skills to help understand his own self-regulation." (child welfare practitioner 10)*



# Trauma-Sensitive Practices



## Gaps in knowledge/skills:

- 1) Trauma-sensitive practices
- 2) Impact of maltreatment/outcomes on school functioning  
*"[Schools] are pretty quick to [punish]... they are too quick in using suspension and all that." (child welfare practitioner 7)*  
*"One thing I've heard from teachers is that the child is manipulating them or the child is choosing this behaviour, so just working with teachers around that." (social worker 7)*
- 3) Impact of maltreatment on brain development
- 4) Stigma toward maltreated students/families at school
- 5) Available supports in schools/school boards
- 6) Teachers' role in supporting maltreated children  
*"Just the importance of their role and the protective things they can do to make the child more resilient." (school social worker 5)*



## Applied Implications



- Future teacher training should address the following:
  1. Trauma-sensitive practices;
  2. Impact of maltreatment on a child's school functioning;
  3. Duty to report;
  4. Impact of maltreatment on brain development;
  5. Warning signs of different types of maltreatment.
- Future training needs to consider teacher well-being (e.g. signs of burnout, self-care strategies)
- Teacher, school, community, and case factors may affect teachers' decision-making in response to maltreatment
- Complimentary efforts are needed (within school and school-child welfare collaborations)





# Child Maltreatment Training for Elementary School Teachers



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# Training Goals



1. To increase teachers' understanding regarding:
  - a. The impact of maltreatment on the development and behaviour of children
  - b. When and how to intervene with children in a trauma-sensitive manner
  
2. To increase teachers' confidence and skills so they can effectively serve children who have, or may have, experienced maltreatment, including detection, reporting, classroom support, and self-care

# Training Modules



1. Introduction to Child Maltreatment
2. Identifying & Reporting Child Maltreatment
3. How Does Maltreatment Impact Children's Functioning at School?
4. Trauma-Sensitive Classroom Strategies
5. Enhancing Teacher Well-Being
6. Trauma-Sensitive School Environments
7. Case Culmination Activity & Conclusions



# Training Delivery



- In-person training
- One full day (9:00 AM to 4:00 PM with breaks, 5.5 hours total)
- Delivery methods: didactic presentations supplemented with case examples and group discussion questions, and a case culmination activity (Module 7)

Case Vignette – “Zoey”



What is the nature of Zoey's maltreatment history? What signs suggest this?

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How might this affect Zoey's functioning at school?

Behaviour  
Relationships with you and peers  
Academic performance

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What are some areas of strength/resilience?

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What trauma-informed strategies could be used in the classroom and at school with Zoey?

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<https://www.removedfilm.com/>



# Training Materials

**Child Maltreatment Training for  
Elementary School Teachers**  
Saturday, December 2, 2017

Facilitators:  
Kelly Weegar, Ph. D. Candidate  
Elisa Romano, Ph. D., C. Psych

**Presenter  
Slides**

**Child Maltreatment Training for  
Elementary School Teachers**  
Participant Manual  
December 2017

Kelly Weegar (Ph.D. Student), Dr. Elisa Romano (Supervisor)  
Children's Well-Being Laboratory, University of Ottawa

**Participant  
Manual**

**Child Maltreatment Training for  
Elementary School Teachers**  
Recommended Readings & Other Resources  
December 2017

Kelly Weegar (Ph.D. Student), Elisa Romano (Supervisor)  
Children's Well-Being Laboratory, University of Ottawa

**Supplementary  
Material**



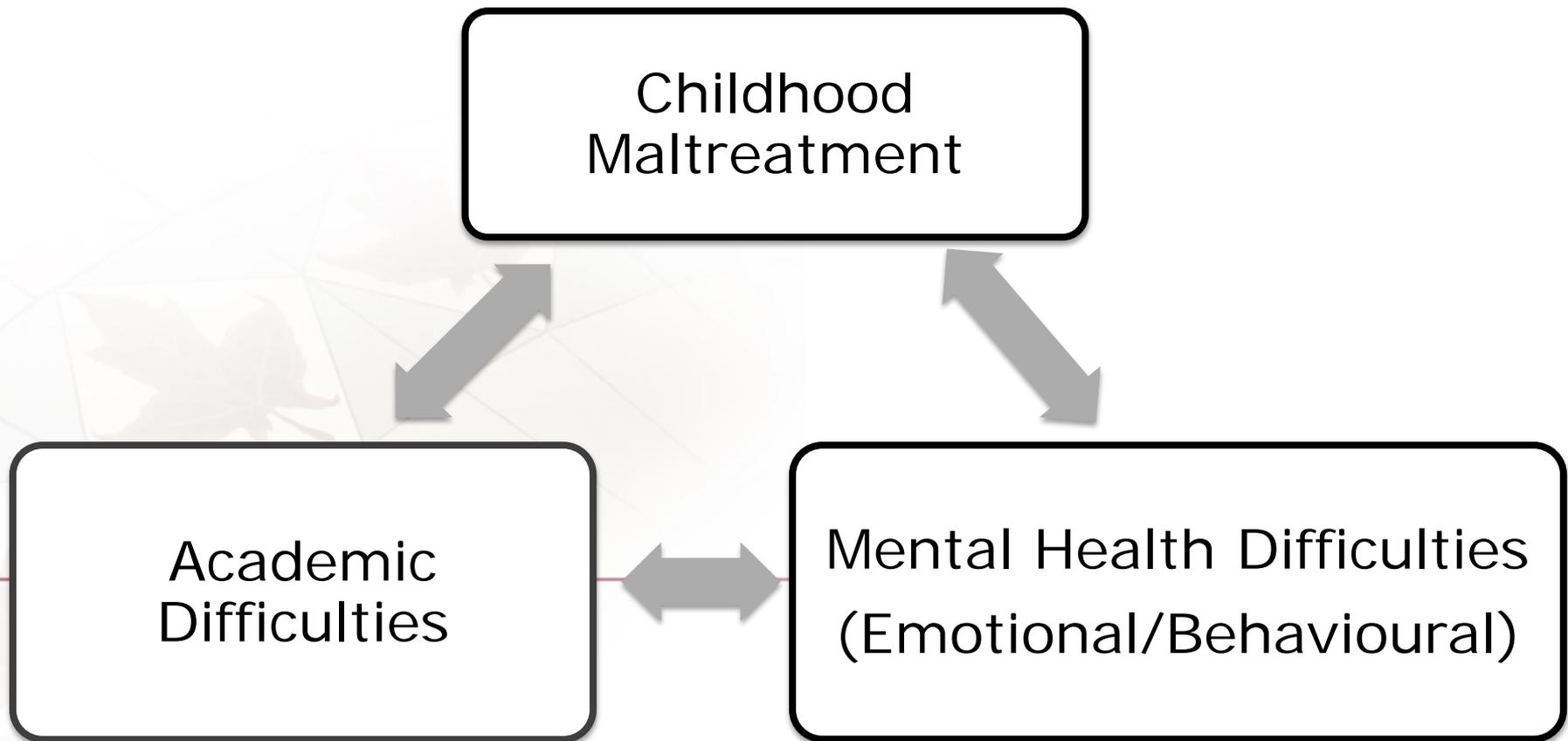
# Trauma-Informed Classroom Strategies

*Trauma-informed responses are healing and increase resilience*



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*As schools maintain their critical focus on education and achievement, they must acknowledge that mental health and wellness are integrally connected to students' success in the classroom and to a thriving school environment (NCTSN)*



# Strategies



- Create safety
  - Ongoing duty to report responsibilities
  - Safe classroom environment that is consistent, structured, and predictable
- Understand difficult behaviour through a trauma lens
  - Compassion, empathy, and emotion regulation/problem-solving instead of punishment
  - Time in versus time out
  - Natural consequences to repair property and relationships (include the child's voice)

- Focus on the relationship (attachment)
- Create opportunities for academic and social success
- Work with others to help the child succeed at school
  - Caregivers, mental health professionals, child welfare practitioners, other school personnel
- Self-care
  - Understand and address one's own triggers
  - Have a supportive work and personal environment





# Strategies in Action?



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## Case Examples

Mr. O'Callahan teaches fourth grade in a school where family and community violence are quite common. He wants to have a good year with his class, but is concerned about how to create an environment where children feel safe enough to learn.

What would you tell him?



## Case Examples

Ms. Brown is troubled by the behaviour of several children in her classroom. She can never be sure of how they are going to behave. On some days they can get work done and seem to enjoy playing with the other children. At other times, they get frustrated easily and give up on trying to do their work. They avoid the other children or pick fights with them. She wonders how she can get them on a more even keel.

What would you suggest?



# Trauma-Informed School Environments



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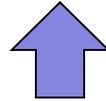
# What is a Trauma-Informed School?



- A safe and respectful environment that enables students to build caring relationships with adults and peers, self-regulate their emotions and behaviours, and succeed academically, while supporting their physical health and well-being
- “ ... one in which all administrators, staff, students, families, and community members recognize and respond to the potentially negative behavioural, relational, and academic impact of traumatic stress on those within the school system including children, caregivers, teachers, other school staff, as well as on the system itself.”



**Tier 3**  
Intensive Support



**Tier 2**  
Early Intervention/Identifying Students and  
Staff At-Risk



**Tier 1**  
Creating Safe Environment and Promoting  
Healthy and Successful Students

## 10 Core Areas



1. Identify and Address Traumatic Stress
2. Address and Treat Traumatic Stress
3. Trauma Education and Awareness
4. Partnerships with Students and Families
5. Create a Trauma-Informed Learning Environment
6. Cultural Responsiveness
7. Emergency Management/Crisis Response
8. Staff Self-Care and Secondary Traumatic Stress
9. School Discipline Policies and Practices
10. Cross-System Collaboration and Community Partnerships



**Thank you for your participation!**



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