

The Basic Principles of Trauma-Informed Schools

Design - Build - Connect

The Planned Learning Environment

The Definition of Trauma

NOUN

1. A deeply distressing or disturbing experience

MASS NOUN

2. Emotional shock following a stressful event or a physical injury, which may lead to long-term neurosis. *'the event is relived with all the accompanying trauma'*

ORIGIN

Late 17th century: from the Greek word; 'wound'.

Oxford Online Dictionary (2019)

Signs and Symptoms

After unexpected, tragic or harmful events, where a child has experienced intense feelings of fear, terror or helplessness, they are likely to suffer ongoing physical and psychological reactions to the event/s. They may experience regular and distressing memories, or re-experience the feelings of fear and worry. They may also suffer from anxiety, feel unsafe and seem hyper-alert, withdrawn or distant.

What is a Trauma-Informed School?

A trauma-informed school is one in which all children feel physically and emotionally safe, warmly welcomed, and inclusively supported. Where the school, as a social and academic learning community, ensures that the impact of trauma on life and learning is understood, embraced and explicitly considered across the whole school community.

This is a school with healing and recovery at the heart of its social and educational vision.

It is a community with warmth, care, support and curiosity at its centre. A school with space and time for professional collaboration, teamwork, love, creativity, and a shared responsibility for all children.

A trauma-informed school recognises the far reaching and lived impact of traumatic and adverse childhood experiences, whilst promoting and embracing the relational pathways to healing and recovery.





The Aim of the School Design Brief

The initial school design brief should create spaces that are deliberately planned, emotionally considered and physiologically warm. They should provide a predictable and safe environment to ensure that the prioritisation of mental health, safety and emotional well-being is woven through the entire fabric of the school building.

The physical environment is as much an integral part of the curriculum as the school timetable, the planned routines, the lesson plans and the activities that encompass the school day. The caring adult relationships are the healing-centre that offers nurture and comfort, alongside acceptance and inclusion.

The school building should be designed to provide a warm, safe and secure foundation for the children to spread their wings, whilst learning to fly and embrace life from their own unique perspective of the world around them.

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This is a school that accepts children unconditionally, and recognises the signs and symptoms of upset and distress, alongside the real possibility of trauma-transference to empathetic and care-giving adults. It is a school that responds to dysregulated and upset children by infusing the fabric of the school with a trauma-responsive culture of love, care and unconditional acceptance.

A trauma-informed school is carefully and deliberately considered within school-wide policies and procedures, which inform practice through predictable, relational and healing approaches. All interactions are inclusive and supportive and learning takes place through both deliberate and naturalistically occurring opportunities for personal development and growth. Relational approaches and nurture-based inquiry are designed to actively resist and desist re-traumatisation.

Architects, Builders and Interior Designers

A Trauma-informed school-building is designed with love. It is designed for comfort, nurture, inclusion and care. Its design plan must be carefully crafted with both structural and environmental considerations. Buildings should be designed to support staff and pupils through a trauma-responsive lens, whilst deliberately considering the physical, physiological and social psychological safety of both children and grown ups alike.

Consideration of the biophilic effect within the design plan will provide a sustainable ethos that promotes both direct and indirect experiences of nature. This can be achieved through the consideration of comfortable, light, spacious indoor and outdoor areas and thermally considered designs which consider the whole-school building and its surrounding physical space. Planning with regard to biophilia will provide transitional and naturalistic spaces, as well as placing great importance upon attachment to nature, nurture and place to create a sense of safety, integration, inclusion and well-being.

Biophilia Hypothesis

Biophilia is defined as the inherent human inclination to affiliate with the natural world. Biologist E.O. Wilson (1984) hypothesised and popularised the theory that human health and well-being are dependent upon our relationship with the natural environment.

