Turning Trauma Around: Transforming Negative Experiences into Personal Growth, Healing, and Resilience

Maryland School Mental Health Response Program (MD-SMHRP)

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PRESENTED BY

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Agenda

Introduction

Moving Beyond Trauma

Strategies for Addressing Trauma

Case Examples

Resources

Objectives

By end of this presentation, participants will be able to:

- Explain the concept of trauma and some of its effects on youth.

- Describe ways to move beyond trauma to foster youth's well-being.

- Implement supportive strategies when working with youth who have experienced trauma.

Sam Reaves, PhD

Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry

Clinical Supervisor

Measuring Improvement

Student's Socioemotional Functioning

Who is in the room today?

Please raise your hand if you are a:

- Behavioral health provider (social worker, therapist, psychologist)

- Parent/Caregiver

- Other

What kind of services do you provide?

What supports do you currently have to support students exposed to trauma?

What is trauma?

Event witnessed or directly experienced leading to feelings of stress, sadness or other distressing emotions over an extended period of time that affects a person's functionality including their ability to cope.
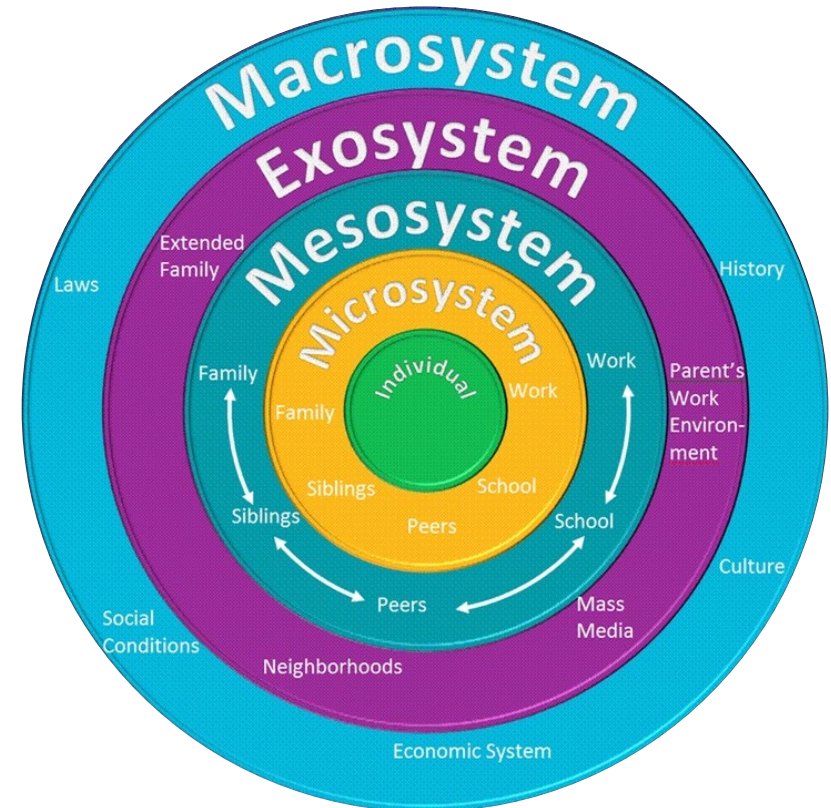
Types of Trauma

Acute

Complex

Chronic

Intergenerational

Language Matters

Terms to Avoid	Replacements
Acting out	Emotionally dysregulated
Aggressive	Fight
Runner	Flight
Disengaged	Freeze
Uncontrollable	Lacking skills

National Center for School Safety, 2021

Behavior is communication

Take a step back

Are this child's needs being met?

Do they have a history of reliable relationships?

Are they still being exposed to trauma (advertently or not)?

Trauma informed seeks to understand what happened to the child

Note:

- Not all trauma looks like retreat and fear, sometimes hypervigilance appears in acting out and high reactivity.

- Not all exposure results in traumatization.

Behavioral Manifestations

Hypervigilance

Fear of separation

Often seeking approval

Angry outbursts

Persistent concern for others well-being

Fatigue

Trouble focusing
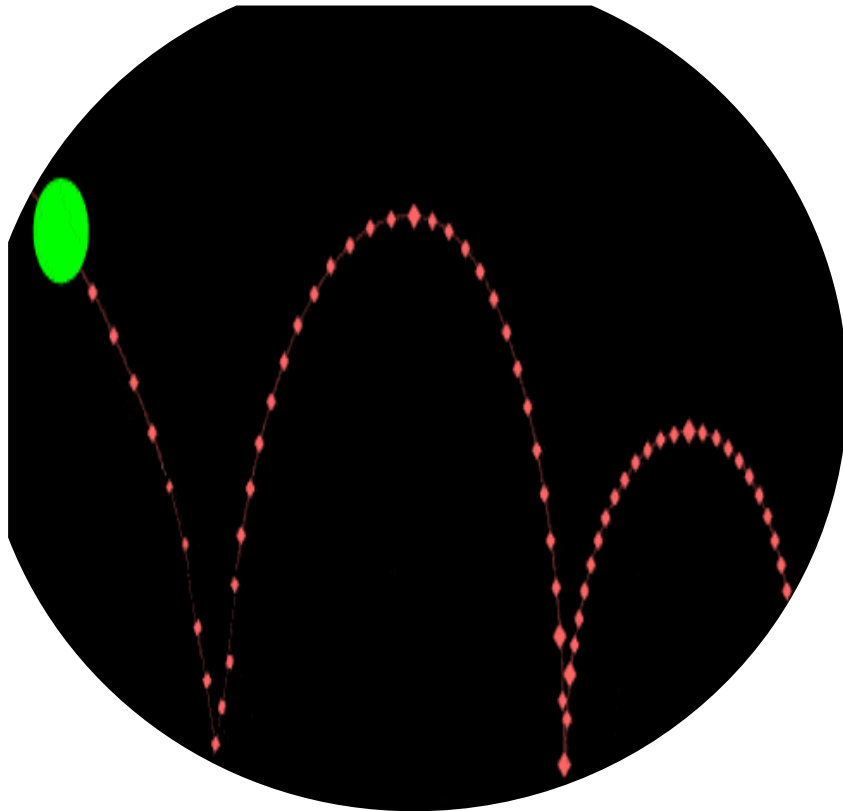
School refusal

Hypersensitivity to sensory stimuli

What have you seen?

Moving Beyond Trauma

This section will include ways to move beyond trauma to promote well-being.

Resilience

SAMHSA, 2014

Internal trait

Ability to thrive despite negative experiences and heal from them

Self-efficacy, beliefs prior to experiences, ability to experience positive emotions

Strong relationships, spirituality, and humor and creativity
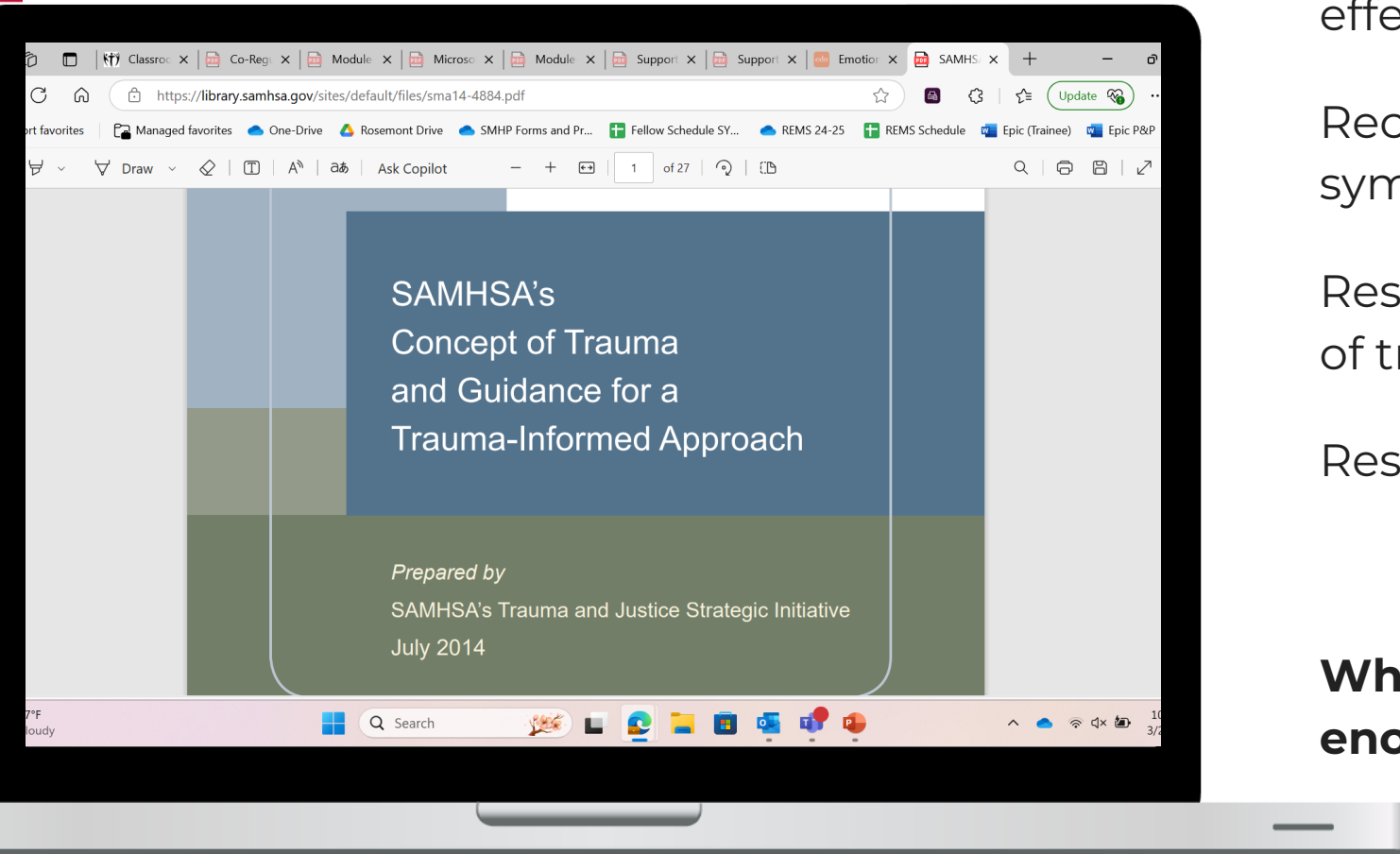
Trauma-informed systems

Realizes- understands trauma and its effects

Recognizes- identifies the signs and symptoms of trauma

Responds- integrating understanding of trauma into policies and practices

Resists re-traumatization

What are we missing? Is resistance enough?

SAMHSA, 2014

Healing-centered

What's is right with this child?

Restoring the child's identity

• What does the child want now?

Emphasizes well-being over symptom suppression

Consider how your current practices are promoting the student's well-being?

In what ways are we restoring student's sense of safety, belonging, efficacy, etc.?

Posttraumatic Growth (PTG)

Process

Positive transformation experienced in one or multiple areas following a traumatic event.

Can be assessed

- PTG inventory assesses appreciation of life, relationships, new possibilities, personal strength, and spiritual change

Strategies for Addressing Trauma

This section will review strategies to promote student wellness and restore a healthy sense of self.

What do youth exposed to trauma need?

Predictability

Safety

Hope

Belonging

Sense of value/purpose

What else?

How are these needs different from others?

2024-2025

Principles of Trauma-Informed Approach

Safety

• Physical and psychological- what does your building/room look like?

Trustworthiness and Transparency

• Are procedures and policies accessible and openly shared with families and students?

Empowerment, Voice and Choice

• What goals do students have and how can they be supported in planning to meet them?

Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues

• How do our policies and practices acknowledge and rectify injustices towards groups?

SAMHSA, 2014

Student Behavior plans and levels of distress

Student Name: Click or tap here to enter text.

Review Date: Click or tap here to enter text.

Level	Behaviors Exhibited	Positive Interventions	Student Response	Adult Self-Care
1 – Calm				
2 – Agitation 3 – Acceleration				
4 – Peak				
5 – De-escalation 6 – Recovery				

Sample High School Behavior Plan

Level	Behaviors Exhibited	Positive Interventions	Student Response	Adult Self-Care
1 – Calm	Plays/listens to music Reads books Goes on websites Does work	Nonverbal cues Verbal reminder List expectations	Will stop action of request, but will exhibit another Level 1 behavior Will comply with request or expectation	Identify student's positive actions. Reflect on interventions that have worked before.

TR-Schools-4-Tool-Tier-III-Individual-TIROS-Student-Behavior-Plan.docx

Emotion Regulation

- Develop a plan for known triggers (problem-solving)

- Deep breathing (promotes calmness)

- Progressive muscle relaxation (control)

- Guided Imagery (distraction and recentering)

- Calming corner/ safe person or space

- Break passes (autonomy, it's ok to walk away)

Self-Awareness

- Teach students how to identify triggers

- Work with them to identify what dysregulation looks like for them (happening in bodies, thoughts, feelings)

- Identify strengths and interests (self-confidence)

- Feelings thermometer (understanding emotional intensity)

- Anxiety response (body's alarm system, helpful and unhelpful functioning)

Classroom Environment

- Morning meetings (e.g., starting the day with compliments, identifying strengths, proud moments)

- Visual agenda (promotes predictability)

- Positive affirmations that promote growth mindset

- Inclusive artwork (student's voices, cultures, etc.)

- Prepare students for changes (e.g., drills)

- Consider sensory triggers (e.g., lights, loud noises, being touched)

- Offer choices (promotes autonomy and voice)

Secondary Traumatic Stress

- Assess current levels (trauma, burnout, wellness; self-awareness)

- Connect to people in a supportive environment (community, belonging)

- Consider workload adjustments (e.g., capacity, how you schedule appointments, etc.; self-management)

- Incorporate breaks between tasks (autonomy)

- Add enjoyable activities to sessions (e.g., games or wins to end sessions/meetings)

- Set boundaries (e.g., unavailable hours, separate number for clients, etc.; self-management)

- Consider changes to policies and practices that promote staff well-being

- Participate in supervision or workgroups that promote wellness over problem admiration

Case Examples

This section includes case examples to think through how the concepts and strategies reviewed might apply in direct services.

Deon

- 4th grade

- Aggressive behavior (fighting, cursing)

- Complex trauma (car accidents, incarceration, parental separation)

- Reactive and Avoidant

- Mom condones inappropriate behavior, dad does not

What strategies do you recommend?

What services are available?

Angela

- 7th grader, sexual abuse history

- Anxiety symptoms (calling/texting parents in a panic, expressing great discomfort)

- School refusal

- Disconnected from peers and staff

How would you engage Angela? Her family?

How might you take a healing-centered approach to move her beyond what happened?

Marco

- 9th grader

- Immigrant family, older sibling and mom are in home country

- Quiet, keeps to self, guarded

- Hard worker but struggles academically

What are Marco's basic needs? What might you ask him to get his perspective?

**What support would you offer him and his family?**

Resources

Classroom Wise (Resource Library)

Child Trauma (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network)

SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach (SAMHSA)

Strategies and Resources to Support Trauma-Informed Schools (Schoolsafety.gov)

Trauma-Informed, Resilience Oriented Schools Toolkit (National Center for School Safety)
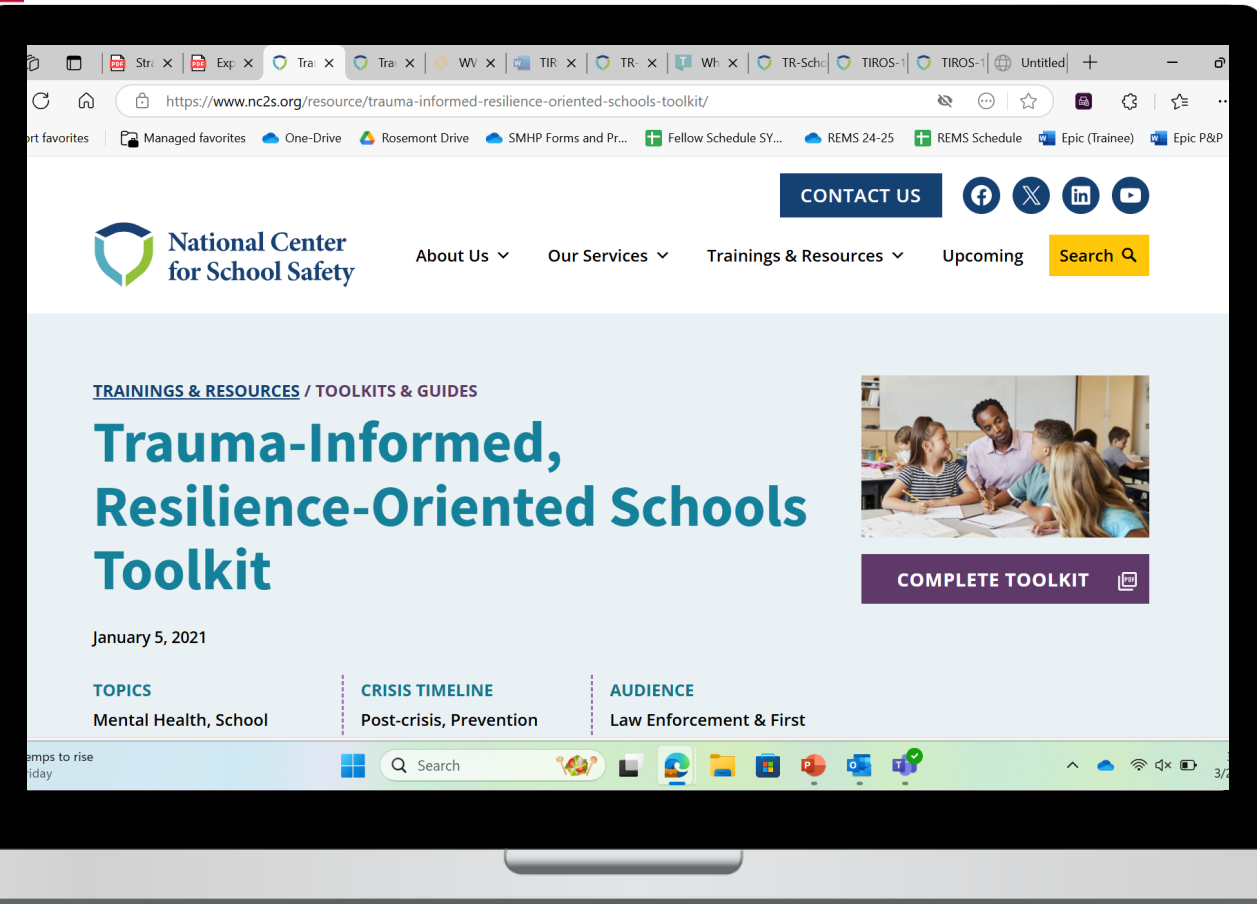
Secondary Traumatic Stress resources

Secondary Traumatic Stress and Self-Care Packet ([National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments](#))

Secondary Traumatic Stress ([The National Child Stress Network](#))
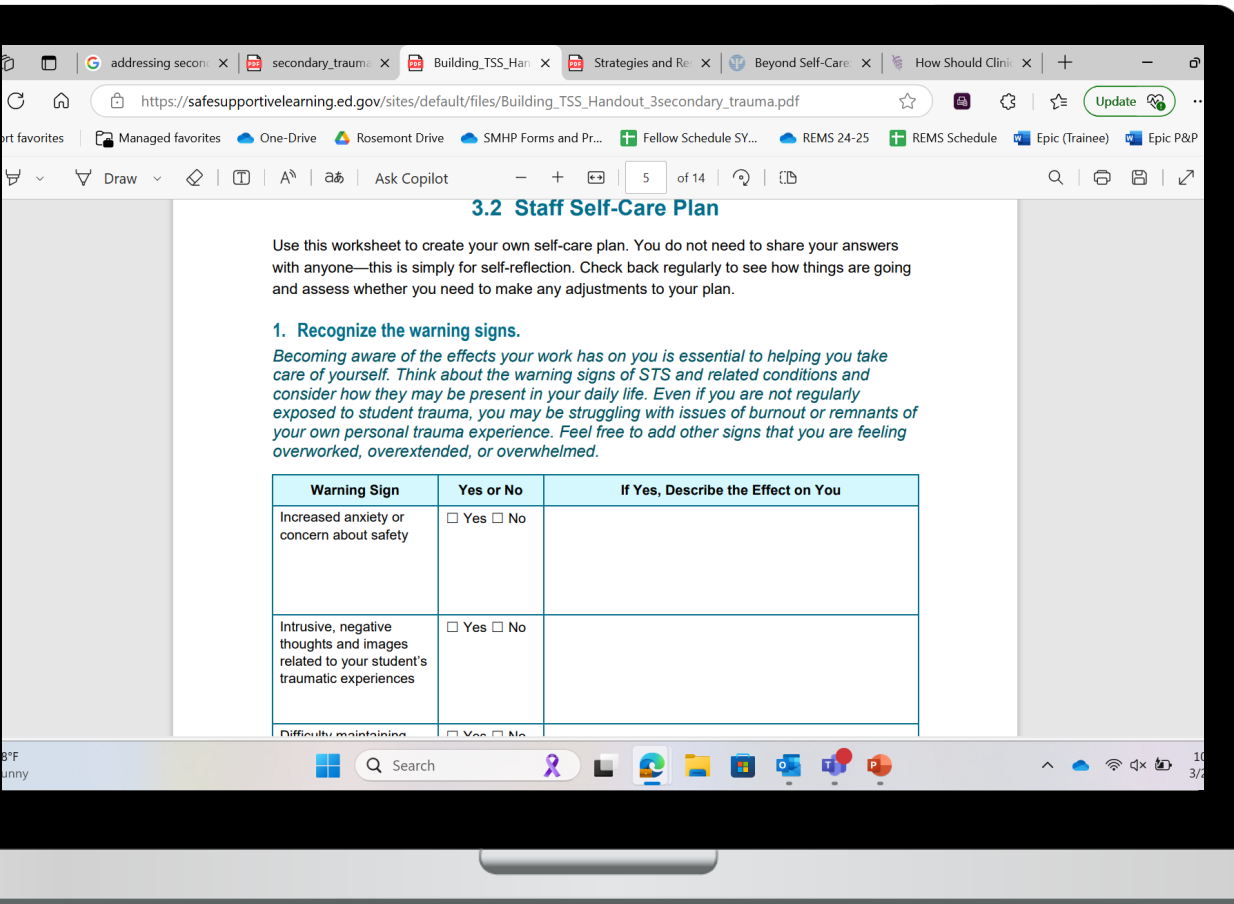
Survey

Please fill out this survey to provide feedback on today's training!