How Kids Learn Foundation

TEMESCAL Associates
Building the capacity of leaders and organizations in education and youth development

Trauma- Informed Practice and Healing- Centered Engagement for Afterschool Practitioners

A Briefing Paper

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Samantha Fasen (she/her) joined Temescal Associates and the How Kids Learn Foundation in 2019 and has fully embraced her work with the afterschool field. She helps to coordinate and develop marketing campaigns and multimedia elements to reach a wider audience and share with people the importance of out-of-school time and youth development.

Ren Daraio (they/she) brings over 35 years of experience working in the field of youth development as a facilitator, trainer, and coach. She has experience training and coaching diverse audience groups, from afterschool practitioners and parents to funders and technical assistance providers. Prior to her work with Temescal Associates, Ren was the Deputy Director at the Community Network for Youth Development and a consultant for the Institute for Research and Reform in Education.

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONS

Temescal Associates is dedicated to building the capacity of leaders and organizations in education and youth development.

The How Kids Learn Foundation (HKLF) is a 501(c)(3) organization. It is dedicated to improving the effectiveness of settings that support the education and healthy development of youth. This includes schools and out-of-school time programs. The HKL Foundation provides educational and training activities. Examples of activities include conferences, speaker forums, screenings of relevant films, training sessions, coaching sessions, the awarding of digital badges to acknowledge exemplar programs and the learning that happens within these settings. Activities also include the development and distribution of educational materials (papers, self-assessment tools, videos, program guides, etc.). You can see a catalogue of the resources we've produced for the afterschool field.

FRONT COVER PHOTOS SOURCES: Top Left: Champions, Top Right: Aspen Institute, Bottom Left, Center, Bottom Right: Temescal Associates.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2 About & Acknowledgements

4 Introduction
4 Trauma

5 About Childhood Trauma
5 Other Key Terms and Definitions
5 Type of Traumas

6 What Afterschool Programs Can Do?

7 What Are the Benefits of Providing Trauma- Informed Care?
7 What Are the Steps to Becoming a Trauma-Informed Organization?

8 Building Staff Capacity

9 Become a Certified Healing- Centered Engagement™ Practitioner
9 Frameworks to Guide Program Quality

10 Collective Trauma: Shifting from Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement

13 Conclusion
13 Resources

15 End Notes

Trauma- Informed Practice and Healing- Centered Engagement for Afterschool Practitioners

Source: Champions

INTRODUCTION

Many of the children we serve in afterschool programs have experienced individual or collective trauma. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), over two-thirds of children report experiencing at least one traumatic event by age 16, at least 1 in 7 children experience abuse or neglect annually in the U.S. each day, 14 youth die from homicide, and more than 1,300 are treated for violence-related injuries. [1] Organizations mirror the world they operate in—and every individual within them brings their own unique experiences and challenges. When trauma goes unaddressed, it creates barriers to trust, collaboration, and growth.

The purpose of this paper is to raise awareness and understanding of childhood trauma and the role of afterschool programs, as they can mindfully build a trauma- informed and a healing-centered environment.

TRAUMA

What do we mean by trauma? According to the SAMHSA, "trauma is an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being." [2]

About Childhood Trauma

Children are among the most vulnerable after traumatic events or disasters. Traumatic stress occurs when a child (0-18 years) feels intensely threatened by an event they experience or witness. Young people often need time and emotional support to feel secure again after experiencing trauma or a disaster. Their reactions are influenced by how parents, relatives, teachers, and caregivers respond. These individuals provide comfort and stability and play a vital role by maintaining normal routines or establishing new ones after a crisis. With proper caregiving and access to trauma-informed services, many children recover and thrive. [3]

Other Key Terms and Definitions

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0–17 years). Such as, but not limited to, experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect, witnessing violence in the home or community, and having a family member attempt or die by suicide. [4]

- Healing-Centered Engagement (HCE): A healing centered approach is holistic involving culture, spirituality, civic action and collective healing. A healing-centered approach views trauma not simply as an individual isolated experience, but rather highlights the ways in which trauma and healing are experienced collectively. The term *healing-centered engagement* expands how we think about responses to trauma and offers more holistic approach to fostering well-being. [5]

- Resilience: the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands. [6]

- Social Emotional Learning (SEL): SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. [7]

- Trauma-Informed Care (TIC): a universal, relationship-based framework that shifts the focus from "*What is wrong with you?*" to "*What happened to you?*". Instead of viewing a person's behavior, distress, or resistance as a standalone pathology, it recognizes how past or present trauma shapes their physical, emotional, and cognitive well-being. [8]

Types of Traumas

There are many types of child trauma. They include:

- "Abuse or assault (psychological, physical, or sexual)
- Domestic, school, or community violence
- National disasters or terrorism
- Loss of property or displacement due to disaster
- Sudden or violent loss of a loved one
- Refugee or war experiences
- Military family-related stress (e.g., parental deployment)
- Serious accidents or life-threatening illness
- Neglect." [9]

WHAT AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS CAN DO

"Expanded learning programs can provide a range of critical services that support the healthy development of young people. Over 10 million students are enrolled in expanded learning programs across the country, and these programs often serve vulnerable populations. Almost a quarter of students living in communities of concentrated poverty participate in expanded learning programs. Close to a quarter of African American children and 29% of Latino children participate in expanded learning programs. This fact is significant because recent studies show that African American and Latino children are exposed to more traumatic events than white children.

Source: Aspen Institute

Expanded learning programs are well positioned to support students impacted by trauma because they provide safe spaces, opportunities for students to explore their talents and build new skills, help to increase school engagement, provide academic support, cultivate social and emotional development, and much more. Programs can also leverage the investment already made into their basic infrastructure by enhancing services with the integration of trauma-resilient informed practices.

Additionally, expanded learning programs may serve as fertile ground for successfully adopting a trauma-resilient informed approach that includes the following:

- Strong Adult-Youth Relationships
- A Focus on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)
- A Positive Youth Development Framework
- The Ability to Reach Populations Most at Risk
- Consistent Time with Students
- The Ability to Cultivate a High Degree of Trust with Youth and Families
- Programmatic Flexibility to Create Spaces for Healing." [10]

Jennifer Smith, afterschool program manager at the Center for Community Health Advancement, Marshfield Clinic Health System shares the Trauma Informed Care Principles (adapted from Wisconsin Department of Human Services and Department of Public Instruction).

- "Safety – An environment where kids feel physically, emotionally, and culturally safe; helps kids regulate and fosters relationship building. Important components of this are staff to youth ratios and physical space. Fifty youth with two adult leaders in a large open area does not create an

environment of safety; smaller ratios and access to soft, comfortable spaces creates a safer environment and helps to support youth's ability to better regulate.

- Trustworthiness – Programming is predictable and consistent; youth know what to expect when arriving at the program. Staff "walk the talk" to alleviate any fear or anxiety that may be created by the unknown.

- Choice – Abuse and neglect are experiences which steal an individual's autonomy and ability to make choices for oneself. Providing opportunities for youth to have choice within programming (youth can choose from activity options) and choice in directives (it's homework time, you can sit at the table or grab a clipboard and go to the rug) can help fill that void. These choices allow for autonomy while giving youth multiple options to get to where it is we want them to go (getting out their homework).

- Collaboration – The understanding that learning happens in relationships; staff who intentionally work to make all youth feel like they belong and help youth to develop new skills allows for greater social-emotional learning. In addition, supporting parents and working with other agencies (such as schools, therapists, or social workers) builds a net of support for youth.

- Empowerment – The lifting up of youth's strengths and an understanding that troubling behavior patterns have served the youth in some capacity. Acknowledging the behaviors they have developed and helping them reframe those behaviors can be an incredibly powerful message. The idea that "sassy" is the strength of advocating for your needs and helping youth to find more successful ways to exercise those strengths is empowering and more likely to illicit skill development than rewards or punishment." [11]

What Are the Benefits of Providing Trauma- Informed Care?

"There are a number of benefits to using a trauma-informed approach. Many youth with trauma have difficulty maintaining healthy, open relationships with a health care provider. For youth, trauma-informed care offers the opportunity to engage more fully in their health care, develop a trusting relationship with their provider, and improve long-term health outcomes. Trauma-informed care can also help reduce burnout among health care providers, potentially reducing staff turnover." [12]

What Are the Steps to Becoming a Trauma-Informed Organization?

> ***"Organizations mirror the world they operate in—and every individual within them brings their own unique experiences and challenges. When trauma goes unaddressed, it creates barriers to trust, collaboration, and growth."*** [13]

"There are many ways to become a trauma-informed organization and the process does not have to be a burden to adopt. Foundational steps organizations can take to move toward fully adopting a trauma-informed approach to care include:

1. Building awareness and generating buy-in for a trauma-informed approach;
2. Supporting a culture of staff wellness;
3. Hiring a workforce that embodies the values of trauma-informed care; and
4. Creating a safe physical, social, and emotional environment.

For more details, see a brief on Laying the Groundwork for Trauma-Informed Care." [14]

Source: Temescal Associates

BUILDING STAFF CAPACITY

"We expect a lot from direct support professionals, and we have high standards for them. Compassion, dedication and commitment at the very least are necessary to promote resiliency and recovery in children and youth, but these qualities alone are not sufficient. We need to remind our employees how prevalent traumatic experiences are for those we serve and accept that every individual in our care most likely has had a traumatic experience. Training and retraining employees on the impact of trauma becomes a strong component in the individual's healing process." [15]

"Trauma awareness in the field of expanded learning is prevalent. However, the current depth and scope of implementation of trauma- resilient informed practices covers a wide spectrum from offering one-time trainings to comprehensive systems-level adoptions of a trauma lens. In most programs, the depth of implementation of trauma-resilient informed practices is limited. The ways programs approach and enter into this work varies and is largely dependent on staff's capacity and the resources available.

Most programs currently approach this work by offering trainings for direct-service staff in order for them to become trauma-aware and to learn strategies to implement in their programs. Trainings tend to focus on building awareness and providing practical strategies for working with young people. Common topics include the following:

- Building Trauma Awareness
- Dealing with Crisis
- Program Activities that Support a Trauma-Resilient Informed Approach
- Self-Care

Trainings are generally provided in partnership with university research departments, school district mental health services, and/or independent consultants. Site coordinators or leadership staff who attend trainings bring back content which is adapted to meet the needs of the program. However, trainings created and provided by expanded learning program experts and staff are more limited." [16]

Become a Certified Healing- Centered Engagement™ Practitioner

Flourish Agenda offers the only evidence-based certification program "that transforms how you work with young people of color—from the researcher who coined the term. Join thousands of educators, youth workers, and change-makers who have transformed their practice through Dr. Shawn Ginwright's groundbreaking Healing Centered Engagement™ approach. This comprehensive online certification gives you the knowledge, skills, and community to create lasting change." [17]

Source: Temescal Associates

FRAMEWORKS TO GUIDE PROGRAM QUALITY

Over the years, there have been a number of frameworks developed to promote quality afterschool programs. They align well with any and all support traumatized youth. These include Positive Youth Development, Trauma Informed Practice, Social Emotional Learning and Whole Child Approach. As a program it is important to determine which framework will guide your program design and actions. To learn more about the framework for Positive Youth Development, see our *Youth Development Guide 2.0*. This guide provides a comprehensive discussion of the youth development supports and opportunities, program assessment tools and youth activities. To learn more about the Social Emotional Learning framework, explore the CASEL website.

> ***"The effects of trauma can be reversed: Using trauma and related terms can establish a deficit orientation. People who have experienced trauma need to know that it can be fixed, without additional trauma or stigma. The brain is a dynamic living structure that can recover from trauma – it is electric and the fuel for brain development comes from experiences and relationships."*** [18]

Below, we detail Whole Child Development. According to the Afterschool Alliance, Whole Child Development requires a focus on the Three R's:

- Relationships: The science tells us that relationships are the active ingredient in the learning environment, and the antidote to toxic stress.

> ***"Afterschool settings cultivate relationships with caring adults: Central to positive developmental relationships is consistency, and 'creating the web' for young people to be surrounded by multiple caring adults who know and value them. Afterschool programs provide access to networks of caring adults that are able to build and***

sustain these developmental relationships: a recent survey of youth by the Search Institute found that children and youth in OST programs generally have stronger developmental relationships with OST staff than students do with adults in their schools." [19]

- "Routines: The brain is a predictive machine, and is calm when things are orderly and predictable, making routines and consistency vital pieces of environments that encourage brain development.

- Resilience: The key to building resilience is recognizing that we all – adults and youth alike – have strengths to build upon. Asset-based approaches allow us to help them understand and manage their emotions." [20]

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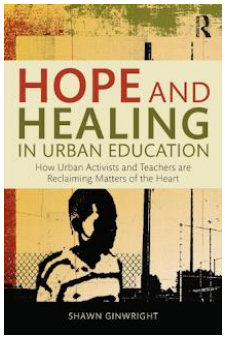
COLLECTIVE TRAUMA: SHIFTING FROM TRAUMA INFORMED CARE TO HEALING CENTERED ENGAGEMENT

"The Core Shift from Trauma-Informed Care: TIC Asks, 'What happened to you?' It often treats trauma as an isolated, individual clinical problem, whereas, Healing-Centered Engagement (HCE) Asks, 'What's right with you?' It views individuals as agents of their own well-being and addresses the systemic, environmental, and political roots of harm." [22]

There is another lens to view trauma. According to Dr. Shawn Ginwright, author of *Hope and Healing in Urban Education*, *"While trauma informed care offers an important lens to support young people who have been harmed and emotionally injured, it also has its limitations. For me, I realized the term slipped into the murky water of deficit based, rather than asset driven strategies to support young people who have been harmed. Without careful consideration of the terms we use, we can create blind spots in our efforts to support young people."* [23]

"By only treating the individual we only address half of the equation leaving the toxic systems, policies and practices neatly intact." - *Dr.* Shawn Ginwright

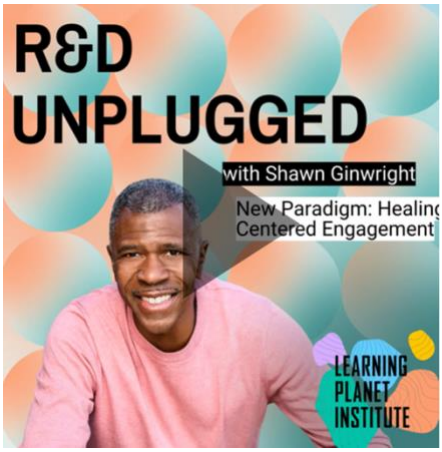


Dr. Ginwright, goes on to explain how current formulations of trauma informed care presumes that the trauma is an individual experience, rather than a collective one: *"To illustrate this point, researchers have shown that children in high violence neighborhoods all display behavioral and psychological elements of trauma…*

Second, trauma informed care requires that we treat trauma in people but provides very little insight into how we might address the root causes of trauma in neighborhoods, families, and schools. If trauma is collectively experienced, this means that we also have to consider the environmental context that caused the harm in the first place. By only treating the individual we only address half of the equation

leaving the toxic systems, policies and practices neatly intact.

Third, the term trauma informed care runs the risk of focusing on the treatment of pathology (trauma), rather than fostering the possibility (well-being). What is needed is an approach that allows practitioners to approach trauma with a fresh lens which promotes a holistic view of healing from traumatic experiences and environments. One approach is called healing centered, as opposed to trauma informed. A healing centered approach is holistic involving culture, spirituality, civic action and collective healing. A healing centered approach views trauma not simply as an individual isolated experience, but rather highlights the ways in which trauma and healing are experienced collectively.



Ginwright offers some thoughts on practice and policy: *"Shifting from trauma informed care or treatment to healing centered engagement requires youth development stakeholders to expand from a treatment-based model which views trauma and harm as an isolated experience, to an engagement model which supports* ***collective well-being****. Here are a few notes to consider in building healing centered engagement:*

Start by building empathy.
Healing centered engagement begins by building empathy with young people who experience trauma... However, building empathy is critical to healing centered engagement. To create this empathy, I encourage adult staff to share their story first, and take an emotional risk by being more vulnerable, honest and open to young people.

Fostering empathy allows for young people to feel safe sharing their experiences and emotions. The process ultimately restores their sense of well-being because they have the power name and respond to their emotional states.

Encourage young people to dream and imagine!
An important ingredient in healing centered engagement is the ability to acknowledge the harm and injury, but not be defined by it. Perhaps one of the greatest tools available to us is the ability to see beyond the condition, event or situation that caused the trauma in the first place.

Research shows that the ability to dream and imagine is an important factor to foster hopefulness, and optimism both of which contributes to overall well-being. Daily survival and ongoing crisis management in young people's lives make it difficult to see beyond the present. The greatest casualty of trauma is not

only depression and emotional scares, but also the loss of the ability to dream and imagine another way of living.

> ***"Core Principles of HCE:***
> - ***Culture: Restores and centers cultural identity, heritage, and community pride.***
> - ***Agency: Fosters personal and collective power, allowing people to actively shape their healing.***
> - ***Relationships: Builds transformative, authentic connections between youth, peers, and adults.***
> - ***Meaning: Helps individuals make sense of their experiences and narrative.***
> - ***Aspirations: Focuses on hope, future possibilities, and imagination rather than just symptom reduction.***
> - ***Healer-Focused Well-being: Acknowledges that educators, caregivers, and providers must also address their own trauma and emotional health to support others effectively."*** [24]

By creating activities and opportunities for young people to play, reimagine, design and envision their lives this process strengthens their future goal orientation. These are practices of possibility that encourage young people to envision what they want to become, and who they want to be.

Build critical reflection and take loving action.
Healing and well-being are fundamentally political not clinical. This means that we have to consider the ways in which the policies and practice and political decisions harm young people. Healing in this context also means that young people develop an analysis of these practices and policies that facilitated the trauma in the first place. Without an analysis of these issues, young people often internalize and blame themselves for lack of confidence. Critical reflection provides a lens by which to filter, examine, and consider analytical and spiritual responses to trauma.

Source: Temescal Associates

The other key component is taking loving action, by collectively responding to political decisions and practices that can exacerbate trauma. By taking action, (e.g. school walkouts, organizing peace march, or promoting access to healthy foods) it builds a sense of power and control over their lives. Research has demonstrated that building this sense of power and control among traumatized groups is perhaps one of the most significant features in restoring holistic well-being." [25]

CONCLUSION

According to LA's BEST, "Trauma continues to be a pervasive reality in the lives of many children and their families. As schools and school districts around the country build their efforts and supports for addressing trauma during the school day, expanded learning programs can and should be included as critical partners. Expanded learning programs can play an important role and make a difference in addressing trauma in the lives of young people.

Much groundwork has been laid to support youth in meaningful ways and to create safe and supportive environments to combat the impacts of trauma. However, as expanded learning programs consider ways to incorporate a trauma-resilient informed lens into their work or deepen the work they are already doing, they must acknowledge the many facets of this work. The right plan of action and correct resources are essential for programs to become successful in their work to become trauma-resilient informed.

For this reason, resources and support to build the capacity of the expanded learning field are needed. More ongoing, field-specific support for integrating this work into expanded learning programs can help young people heal and ultimately thrive in the face of trauma." [26]

RESOURCES

There is an abundance of writings on addressing childhood trauma on the internet. Also, check out those listed in the END NOTES below. Here are some additional resources:

- **Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, former Surgeon General of California -** Dr. Harris was California's first Surgeon General. She helped popularize the ACE Study and founded the Center for Youth Wellness in San Francisco, CA. Her book, *The Deepest Well: Healing the Long-Term Effects of Childhood Adversity* discusses her research on childhood trauma and its health implications in adulthood.

Video- TED Talk: How Childhood Trauma Affects Health Across a Lifetime

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is a government agency that works to protect America from health, safety, and security threats.

- **The Center for Youth Development Professionals**

- **Circle of Courage®** - The Circle of Courage® is a model of positive youth development based on the universal principle that to be emotionally healthy, all youth need a sense of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. This model integrates the cultural wisdom of tribal peoples, the practice wisdom of professional pioneers with troubled youth, and findings of modern youth development research.

- **The Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools** - The Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS) program is a school-based, group, and individual intervention. CBITS is designed to reduce symptoms of post- traumatic stress disorder,

depression, and behavioral problems, and to improve students' functioning, grades and attendance, peer and parent support, and coping skills.

- **The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning** – They are a leading source of information about evidence-based social and emotional learning.
- **The Expanded Learning Technical Assistance Unit, Region 11**
- **LA's BEST Expanded Learning Program**
- **The National Child Traumatic Stress Network**
- **The National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children** **-** The National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children (TLC) trains professionals and caregivers to help guide children, adults, families, and communities through the effects of trauma.
- **Reclaiming Youth At Risk**- Reclaiming Youth At Risk offers relationship-centered strategies that help educators, youth workers, and communities build resilience, restore dignity, and reclaim hope.
- **Sanctuary Model®** - The Sanctuary Model is an evidence-supported, trauma-informed, evolving, whole system organizational change process.
- **Sanford Harmony** - Sanford Harmony is a research-based social and emotional teaching program that cultivates strong classroom relationships between all students. Sanford Harmony strategies help children develop into tolerant, compassionate, and caring adults.
- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration**
- **Center for Trauma and Embodiment at Justice Resource Institute**
- **Tennessee Afterschool Network**
- **Wisconsin Afterschool Network**
- Infographic: Understanding Child Trauma

END NOTES

[1] Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), *Child Trauma*
[2] Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), *Trauma and Violence*
[3] Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), *Child Trauma*
[4] Cavelle McGrath, *Perspectives, Barriers, And Supports: Trauma-Informed Practices In Elementary Schools*
[5] Shawn Ginwright Ph.D, *The Future of Healing: Shifting From Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement*
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[18] Afterschool Alliance, *Caring for Children and Youth in Crisis: Using Evidence to Support Trauma Informed Approaches to Healing in Afterschool*
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[25] Shawn Ginwright, *The Future of Healing: Shifting From Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement*
[26] After School Programs in Region 11 (ASPIRE) and LA's BEST Afterschool Enrichment Program, *Trauma-Resilient Informed Practices in Expanded Learning Programs: A Snapshot of Trends in the Field*