



Creating TRUST in Schools

TRUST in Schools: Trauma, Understanding & Sensitive Teaching.

TRUST in Schools is the trauma sensitive schools program from the Australian Child & Adolescent Trauma, Loss & Grief Network (ACATLGN). Trauma sensitive schools programs were initiated in the United States of America. TRUST in Schools is an Australian adaptation that incorporates elements of these initial programs.

Adversity and trauma for Australian children

Approximately two thirds of Australian children are affected by an adverse event that is not abuse or neglect and around 20% of these children will experience three or more adversities. These figures are higher for Indigenous children, with some studies finding 70% of Indigenous children experiencing multiple adversities. We know that the cumulative impact of trauma and adversity is significant and leads to poor outcomes for children socially, developmentally and educationally. There is strong evidence of a strong correlation between experiences of multiple adversity and trauma and low academic achievement. There is evidence that providing services to children and families early, can mitigate the impact of this adversity.

Trauma informed and trauma sensitive services

The need for all services working with children and families to be trauma informed is well recognised. Children who have experienced adversity and trauma may present with a range of emotional and behavioural symptoms that can be frequently and problematically attributed to a range of other difficulties, for example, behavioural and attentional difficulties. When left

untreated, or treated inappropriately, symptoms arising from experiences of adversity and trauma can lead to further difficulties for children, such as mental health difficulties, and difficulties staying engaged in education.

Creating trauma informed and trauma sensitive services have benefits for children and families on many levels. These include:

- Children receive the support they need from services and from families, promoting better outcomes in mental health, wellbeing and educational engagement and attainment.
- Children are identified early as being at risk of the potentially negative impacts of trauma and are referred to appropriate services.
- There is an increase in the efficacy and cost effectiveness of services as children and families are able to access appropriate services early, alleviating the need for more intensive service provision later on.
- Trauma informed services and families are better equipped to prevent future adverse and potentially traumatic experiences, or to mitigate these experiences if, or when, they occur.
- Families are provided with appropriate information on how trauma and adversity impacts on children and young people, increasing their capacity to provide support to their children.
- Children have a better chance of engaging in learning and being educationally successful.



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Trauma sensitive schools

Given the prevalence of adversity and trauma in the lives of children, and the potential impact this has on children across a number of domains, there exists a clear need in Australia for schools to become trauma informed and trauma sensitive. It is well established that prevention programs are more effective and economical than later interventions and provide better outcomes for individuals. These programs are most successful when integrated into existing systems that make them accessible by all children.

A whole school approach to creating trauma sensitive schools addresses the impact of adversity and trauma at a student level and also at an interpersonal level in relationships between teachers and students and between students; and at a systems level through systems procedures.

Trauma sensitive schools interventions are based on the goals of supporting the quality and number of safe and secure intimate relationships a child has; teaching the essential skills of social-emotional competence and increasing the opportunities children have to learn and contribute to others. Trauma sensitive schools programs achieve this by increasing the capacity of schools to meet these needs.

The focus of trauma sensitive schools programs is not on identifying experiences of adversity and trauma in individual students and responding to this, but rather on improving the quality of relationships between teachers and all students and building children's social and emotional competence in order to improve academic engagement and success.

TRUST in Schools

The TRUST in Schools project is working in four primary schools to implement a whole of school approach to create trauma informed and sensitive schools that provide safe, secure environments for all children.

The main areas of focus for TRUST in Schools are:

- A whole of school environment where the impact of experiences of adversity and trauma on all children is recognised.
- A school executive that promotes trauma sensitive practices through policies, procedures and whole of school support.
- All school staff are supported in implementing trauma sensitive practices.
- Families, carers and school communities that are engaged and understand the need for a whole of school trauma sensitive approach.

For more information:

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