

Health and Wellbeing Transitions: Working With Trauma

What is the current situation?

There has been a growing awareness of the prevalence of adverse and traumatic experiences in children and young people and the associated risk to physical and mental wellbeing, and educational and social outcomes. Learners will have had a range of experiences during COVID-19 some of which may have been traumatic. These children and young people will be coming back to school at some point in the future, bringing their experiences with them. A **trauma informed approach** can help practitioners better understand learners and how best to support them. It will also help them to understand and make appropriate provision for children making transitions following COVID-19, including those beginning primary school for the first time.

Scottish education has a key focus on wellbeing and relationship-based approaches to support children and young people. An understanding of how early experiences impact on children and young people's behaviour and the importance of relationships in shaping later outcomes is also the foundation which underpins much of the Scottish policy landscape and curriculum. Every child and young person has the right to expect appropriate support from adults to allow them to grow and develop and reach their full potential. This is now enshrined in the Children and Young Person's (Scotland) Act (2014).

What is trauma?

In this context, [trauma](#) refers to a 'stressful event or situation (either short or long lasting) of exceptionally threatening or catastrophic nature, which is likely to cause pervasive distress in almost everyone'. This is usually subdivided into two types of adverse and abusive life events:

- **Type 1:** Sudden and unexpected events which are experienced as isolated incidents such as road traffic accidents, rapes or terrorist attacks. This can happen in childhood or adulthood.

- **Type 2 (Complex):** traumatic events which are repeated, interpersonal and often occur in childhood. This includes all forms of childhood abuse which is chronic and cumulative such as childhood sexual abuse, childhood physical abuse, witnessing domestic abuse and neglect.

What does good practice look like within a nurturing and trauma informed educational context?

- **Safe, secure, flexible and caring environments** where positive relationships are seen as being fundamental.
- A **whole school focus on wellbeing**; social and emotional learning and the building of resilience.
- An **awareness amongst practitioners of the impact of adverse experiences and trauma** across the whole school community (including staff and parents/carers).
- Assessment and planning that has a **focus on what has happened to an individual rather than what is wrong with them**.
- Identification of **developmentally appropriate supports** that promotes self-regulation.
- A range of **universal whole school approaches** that enhance the wellbeing of all children and young people **alongside targeted support** that is proportionate and meets the needs of children and young people.
- Senior Leadership Teams and **practitioners who are reflective and supportive in their practice** and recognise the importance of the wellbeing needs across the school community.
- Establishments are **able to take forward many features of highly effective practice** as outlined in How Good is Our School? 4, such as all staff and partners modelling behaviour which promotes and supports the wellbeing of all.

For further details, see [Nurture, Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma informed practice: Making the links between these approaches \(Education Scotland, 2018\)](#)

[Compassionate & Connected Community](#) – this Professional Learning Activity is part of a suite on Education Scotland's [Professional Learning](#) website and gives an introduction to trauma informed practice

PRACTITIONER BRIEFING

Are education resources available?

[The Compassionate and Connected Classroom](#) resource was developed by Education Scotland to help upper primary children deal with challenges and adversity by developing their confidence, resilience, compassion and empathy. It forms part of a wider set of materials that includes a professional learning resource to support practitioners' understanding of adversity and trauma.

The resource:

- is designed to build teacher confidence and support the emotional and mental wellbeing of children and young people.
- supports the delivery of the National Trauma Training Programme within education.
- supports delivery of 'Responsibility of All' within Curriculum for Excellence and follows the ethos of Getting in Right for Every Child by recognising that every child has the right to expect adults to allow them to reach their full potential.

It aims to support children and young people:

- to understand that experiencing adversity and trauma can happen to anyone;
- to understand the possible impact of adversity and trauma on their wellbeing;
- to develop compassion, empathy and tolerance in their relationships with others;
- to understand that they have the right to be protected and supported by the adults in their lives; and
- to provide them with strategies and personal coping skills to help them deal with challenge and develop resilience.

It will also support staff to:

- recognise the importance of positive, nurturing relationships in protecting children from the impact of adversity and trauma.

What professional learning is available?

Introductory and more involved learning materials include:

- [Compassionate & Connected Community](#)
- [Trauma Informed Practice in Schools](#)

- [Scottish National Trauma Training Video Series](#)
- [Trauma Informed Practice: Animations for Professionals](#)
- [Developing your trauma skilled practice \(e-module\)](#)
- [Teaching Students Who Have Suffered Complex Trauma \(2-week online course\)](#)
- [Resilience Alphabet](#)

Guidelines and Frameworks

[The Scottish Psychological Trauma Training Plan, 2019](#) is the basis for professional learning related to trauma. It emphasises:

- **Getting the basics right:** Make every point of contact and communication count as a chance to develop respectful, empowering relationships;
- **Importance of trust:** people need reliable, honest and dependable communication and interactions;
- **Early recognition of the impact of trauma:** enabling access at the earliest opportunity to effective places, people and responses to support recovery;
- **Absolute requirement for collaboration:** breaking down barriers across all sectors to enable person-centred, consistent and effective trauma informed systems, networks and responses;
- **Commitment to support innovative, multi-disciplinary approaches:** challenging and overcoming trauma and adversity related barriers to life chances across all areas of public service.

It is supported by the [National Trauma Training Framework](#) and the [Knowledge and Skills Framework](#)

Further information:

- [Trauma Informed Organisations \(graphic\)](#)
- [The Impact of Trauma \(graphic\)](#)
- [Trauma Venn Diagram \(graphic\)](#)

There is also a PowerPoint presentation associated with this briefing which can be used with school staff.