

Compassionate Learning Communities  
Supporting a Trauma-Informed Practice

# Participant Handout

## CAPACITY



# Acknowledgements

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# Contents

Participant Self-Care	6
Let's Begin	6
Why Trauma-Informed Practice Matters in Education	7
Component 4: Capacity	9
Videos	16
Sample Resources	17
References	17
Slide Deck Notes	18

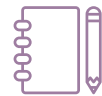
## Participant Self-Care

In keeping with a trauma-informed lens, you are invited to engage with the materials at your own level, especially if you have experienced adversity. We invite you to move around, have tea, coffee or water and to leave the room if you feel triggered or overwhelmed. The sharing of personal histories is not recommended in this format and facilitators have contact information for community resources. Hopefully your school or district has school counsellors or school psychologist available to speak to today if needed.

## Let's Begin

If time and resources permit, please watch the [Meet the Speakers](#) video; alternatively, you may wish to read brief introductions to the specialists who appear in the video interviews (provided at the end of this guide).

These Participant Handouts include the following components:



1. Highlights from the slide deck:
  - Student voices / scenarios
  - Compassionate Educators
  - Discussion topics and questions for reflection
2. Some of the many available resources to supplement your study and practice
3. Brief introductions for speakers included in the videos
4. Slide screenshots with space for notes



## Why Trauma-Informed Practice Matters in Education

Trauma-informed practice, sometimes referred to as ACEs (Adverse Childhood Events) informed practice, is a compassionate lens of understanding that is helpful to all children, youth and adults, especially those who have experienced traumatic events and early hardships. The main components of this lens are rooted in understanding that all behaviour and actions happen for a reason and that it is up to each of us, in our helping capacity, to acknowledge current coping strategies and to assist children, youth and adults find other ways of coping, building on personal capacity and growth through supportive relationships and creative opportunities.

The lens of trauma-informed practice is relevant to all helping practitioners as it focuses on safety, stabilization and reconnection. Trauma-informed is different than the trauma-specific work that many counsellors and psychologists do, which requires specialized clinical training. In the education system, school counsellors and school psychologists may have this additional training to support children and youth with significant adversity issues, but educators and staff stay in the world of trauma-informed to ensure competence in helping.

Trauma-informed practice is not intended to be a one-shot training or the latest educational fad; it involves the long-term work of transforming schools into compassionate learning communities. Trauma-informed is not about doing more in the classroom and community but rather, about doing things differently. This lens is about life and how children's environments have the potential to shape their beliefs and behaviours along the way.



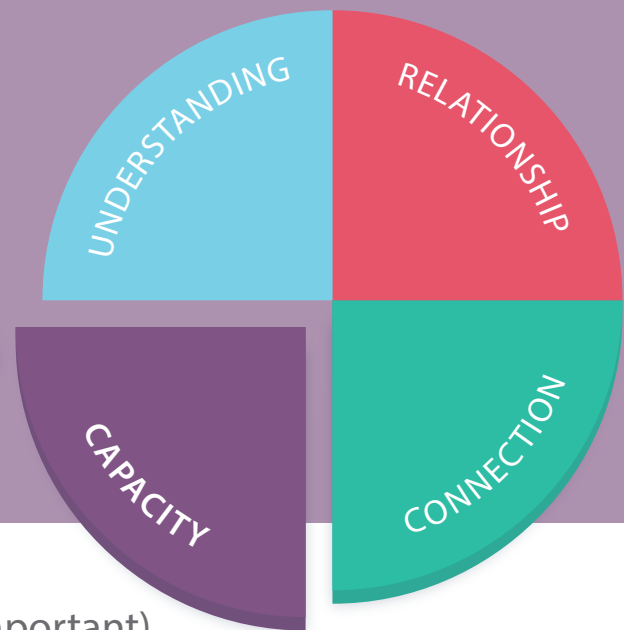


# Component 4

# Capacity

Capacity is the fourth part of a four-part framework for creating compassionate learning communities.

- Students' abilities
- Reframing behaviour as coping
- Strength-based



## Slide 1

### Introduction (What this is, why it is important)

Thank you for joining us today for the *Capacity* presentation on building compassionate learning environments. Through building on the components presented in *Understanding*, *Relationship* and *Connection*, the Framework element on increasing Capacity within students, educators, districts, families and communities in addressing the possible effects of early adverse events is envisioned. This *Capacity* refers to a strength-based approach where behaviours are reframed to understanding coping, providing educators with the opportunity to help students develop alternative coping to increase safety so that students can learn. The element of Capacity guides the compilation of resources intended to help educators better support students who have experienced adverse events; in supporting these students, educators may better support all students.

Some objectives of this presentation:

- Identifying strengths of children, youth, families, staff and community in order to build capacity, moving from where students are operating (at this time) to what is possible to achieve, building competence and confidence through successful experiences.
- Acknowledging the importance of assessing child or youth's developmental stage rather than chronological point emotionally, cognitively, psychologically, and physically.
- Increasing the capacity of children and youth to regulate emotions and move to more positive relationships and social interactions. Acknowledging the importance of staff regulation in order to provide the base of co-regulation for students who need attunement and modelling.
- Providing frameworks and visions for schools to build on in the process of becoming fully trauma-informed.

## Slide 2 **School**



We are hard-working educators at a school in a resource community reaching out for ways to support our students and staff. Staff turnover has been high over the past ten years, with educators identifying feeling overwhelmed by the needs of our students. Up to a third of our students struggle with affect regulation and what we describe as hyperactivity. Many of us have struggled to connect with families and community, especially when new to the school. Most of the staff is just beginning to learn about trauma-informed practice. Our school has a new principal who is passionate about building a compassionate learning community and has asked us to begin to brainstorm about next steps to implement on the journey of becoming trauma-informed.

In hearing the situation of this school, note some ideas you have on where to start the process of becoming trauma-informed with this school staff. We will revisit the school later in the presentation where you are invited to share your ideas with the larger group.

## Slide 3 **Compassionate Educator**



The fact is that given the challenges we face, education doesn't need to be reformed — it needs to be transformed. The key to this transformation is not to standardize education, but to personalize it, to build achievement on discovering the individual talents of each child, to put students in an environment where they want to learn and where they can naturally discover their true passions.

*Robinson (2009)*

## ▷ Slide 4 **Compassionate Educator: Something Inspirational**



Teachers have the toughest job: we answer to administration, other teachers, parents, kids, society, and even our own families sometimes. It can be difficult to see the good in all the challenges.

I invite you to find a partner and pair share one amazing thing you as an educator have done this year. No modesty allowed.

*Callista (long-time educator)*



### **Wondering Questions**

What are the current ways your school creates a supportive environment?

## ▷ Slide 5 **Strength: Personal agency, Competency: Let Me Show You What I Can Do**



[Play Video: Personal Agency](#)

## ▷ Slide 7 **Let's Start From Here**

Educators, Staff, Parents/Caregivers help:

- Acknowledge whole child, and their immediate strengths and needs
- Validate adaptive/protective nature of current behaviours, understanding from where they might develop.
- Educate child about brain response, using age appropriate material and
- Differentiate past and present with awareness of the importance that school context not replicate adversity context



[Play Video: Capacity to Support Children Part 1](#)

## ▷ Slide 11 **Building Capacity for Everyone**

In order for educators to increase capacity for complex learners, including children who have experienced adversity, basic principles of trauma-informed practice include:

- Lowering stress in the classroom to the best of their abilities using varied strategies for your students who are hyperaroused and hyperactive and other approaches for children who are dissociative;
- Enriching the environment through language, art, music, outdoor/land-based activities;
- Establishing safe boundaries for everyone working with the class with all students contributing at the beginning of the year to their development; and
- Then connecting children and youth from adversity with staff and students who can regulate, providing them with opportunities to build on their strengths.

## ▷ Slide 12 **Everyone Contributes**

 [Play Video: Building Students' Capacity](#)

## ▷ Slide 16 **Socio-Emotional Process**

 [Play Video: Strategies](#)

## ▷ Slide 19 **Implementing and Sustaining: Integrating Trauma-Informed Practice in Schools: This lens fits**

The task of becoming fully integrated trauma-informed schools takes time and shared commitment by staff. Writers describe that implementing trauma-informed practice is challenging, but sustaining this lens is often more difficult due to the “gravitational pull of a more punitive approach” (Baker et al., 2009)

 [Play Video: Capacity to Support Children Part 2](#)

## ▶ Slide 22 **Vision for Schools: Trauma Informed**



### **Wondering Questions**

- Does this vision contain components you already have in your school?
- Any you believe the school should work towards?

## ▶ Slide 24 **Compassionate Capacity Questions**



### **Possibility Discussion**

In table groups, spend 5 minutes or so discussing a choice of the following questions, and then share whatever is most relevant with the larger group.

- How is compassionate practice defined within the school?
- What is currently being done in practice in this school?
- Where does the staff want to go, want to change, want to add?

## ▶ Slide 25 **Compassionate Capacity Questions (continued)**



### **Possibility Discussion**

In table groups, spend 5 minutes or so discussing a choice of the following questions, and then share whatever is most relevant with the larger group.

- What are the identified and untapped strengths of students in your school?
- What are the identified and untapped strengths of your staff?
- What successes do you witness?

## Slide 26 **School**

In revisiting the school introduced at the beginning of the presentation, initial steps are now being taken to begin the journey on becoming a trauma informed, compassionate learning community.



Lead by our passionate principal, the school staff have organized a working group consisting of educators and other staff members who are keen to work on shifting their school to becoming trauma-informed. Using the 10 main topics defined as components of trauma-informed schools, the group has decided to work on two each year, one that they feel the school is doing well and one that will require more work and discussion.

All staff have received basic training on possible implications for children who have experienced adverse events, with a focus on the brain response. Strategies for teaching children living with the effects of adversity have been included and mentoring teachers are supporting new teachers.

Staff wellness activities and events have been scheduled and organized for the upcoming school year and creative ways of including families are being shared.



### **Wondering Questions**

If this is the way for your school and staff, how will you begin your journey?



### **Possibilities Discussion**

At your table, discuss your thoughts on current supports and barriers to incorporating trauma-informed practice into your school or district.

**Thank you for engaging in this material and we hope it leads to productive conversations, the sharing of expertise and ideas and creative interventions over time. We hope the information helps with awareness and holding hope for your school, your staff and all children and youth from adversity that you support.**

————— **End of slides** —————

# Follow up

We suggest checking-in with staff over the following days or weeks to understand what discussions have developed out of the presentation. At this stage, staff interested in moving toward a fully trauma-informed school may want to download a working document on Developing Compassionate Learning Communities available on the website.

One page downloadable and links to other resources are included.

# One-Page Tip Sheet

Download this reference sheet for Understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma.

**CAPACITY**  
Why trauma-informed practice matters in education

A school in a resource community is looking for ways to support their students and staff. Staff turnover has been high over the past ten years, with educators identifying feeling overwhelmed by the needs of their students. Educators have described that up to a third of their classes struggle with affect regulation and hyperactivity. Educators are also struggling to connect with families and community if they are new to the school. The school has a new principal who is passionate about building a compassionate learning community and has asked the staff to brainstorm steps to support the journey of becoming trauma-informed.

**STRENGTHS BASED**

Recognizing the unique strengths of everyone involved in the school, from support staff to principal to students, ensures that the school community sees its own members as meaningful. This models to students that everyone belongs. With this mindset, everyone benefits, not just those impacted by trauma.

Meet the child where they are at, and recognize their inherent capacity

Cultural Awareness

Everyone contributes, everyone benefits

What unique strengths do you bring to your school? How can you be supported to share these strengths?

**TRANSFORM**

Transformation means focusing on the small yet powerful ways you can bring compassionate practice to your school through your daily interactions with students and with each other as staff.

Realizes How trauma impacts children

Recognizes Behaviours related to trauma

Revisits Re-Traumatization Providing a different, safer response

Responds With attention and compassion

SAMSHA, 2014

How is Compassionate Practice defined in your school?

Ontario  
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

# Videos

## Personal Agency

Allison Pooley, MAL, B.Ed; Executive Director, The Asante Centre

Suman Hothi, Registered Clinical Counsellor, BC Borstal Association

## Capacity to Support Children Part 1

Dr. Jennifer Wolowic, Managing Director of the Stigma and Resilience Among Youth Centre (SARAVYC)

## Building Students' Capacity

Sonia Pieraccini, Teacher, Annieville Elementary, Delta School District

## Strategies

Allison Pooley, MAL, B.Ed; Executive Director, The Asante Centre

## Capacity to Support Children Part 2

Dr. Jeffrey Schiffer, Sessional Instructor, Justice Institute of BC; Special Projects Officer, Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society



## Sample Resources

Craig, S. E. (2016). *Trauma-Sensitive Schools. Learning Communities Transforming Children's Lives.* New York, NY. Teachers College Press

*Trauma-Informed Classroom Strategies.* Compiled by O'Neill, L., George, S., & Wagg, J. (2015)

Available at <http://web.unbc.ca/~loneill>

*Interventions for Children Experiencing Complex Trauma: Preliminary Compilation.* O'Neill, L., Kichenham, A., Fraser, T. George, S. Pooley, J. Henklemen, S. (2012)

Available at <http://web.unbc.ca/~loneill>

*Supporting Trauma Informed Practices Working with Adolescents and Youth: A Manual for Service Providers,* Compiled and written by Wagg, J., George, S., & O'Neill, L. (2017).

Available at <http://web.unbc.ca/~loneill>

**These are just a few of the many resources available. We encourage you to seek out additional resources relevant to your practice, school, and community.**

## References

Blaustein, M.E. & Kinniburgh (2010) *Treating Traumatic Stress in Children and Adolescents.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Cole, S., O'Brian, J.G., Gadd, M.G., Ristuccia, J., Wallace, D.L., & Gregory, M. (2005). *Helping Traumatized Children Learn I*

Cole, S., Eisner, A., Gregory, M., & Ristuccia, J. (2013) *Helping Traumatized Children Learn II Creating and Advocating for Trauma-Sensitive Schools*

Hertel, R., Frausto, L., & Harrington, R. (2009). *The Compassionate Schools Pilot Project Report.*

Pearlman, L.A., & Courtois, C.A. (2005). Clinical applications of the Attachment Framework: Relational treatment of complex trauma. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 18(5), 449-459.*

# Slide Deck Notes

**Capacity**  
Why trauma-informed practice matters in education

Trauma Informed Practice Resources

A circular graphic divided into four quadrants: top-left is light blue, top-right is red, bottom-left is purple, and bottom-right is teal.

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**School**

**Becoming a Trauma-Informed School**

A small speaker icon is located in the bottom left corner of the slide frame.

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**Compassionate Educator**

**Personalizing education:**

- builds achievement by discovering the individual talents of each child.

**Creates environments where:**

- students want to learn; and,
- students can discover their true passions.

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"I invite you to find a partner and pair share one amazing thing you as an educator have done this year. No modesty allowed."  
– Callista (long-time educator)

**Compassionate Educator**



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**Strength**



Personal Agency, Competence:  
*Let me show you what I can do*

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**Assessing Strengths and Capacity**

Unique characteristics of each child's development, where they are currently at, building on their strengths:

- Cognitively
- Emotionally
- Physically
- Psychologically

*Understanding current capacity*

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## Let's Start From Here



Acknowledge whole child  
Validate adaptive/protective nature of current behaviours, understanding from where they might develop.  
Educate child about brain response  
Differentiate past and present  
*(Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010)*

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## Framework for Interventions

Relational repair in supportive relationships helps the child with:

- affect regulation,
- interpersonal skills,
- self-capacity, competence

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## Elementary Interventions

- Unstructured play
- Redirection
- Grounding (downregulation and upregulation)
- Movement



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## Secondary Interventions

- Relational repair and attunement
- Self-esteem through competence
- Avoiding shame and guilt
- Multiple strategies to communicate information
- Information and work on healthy relationships and mentors

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## Building Capacity for Everyone

A component of healing may be a part of all connection and reconnection activities for children and youth.

Basic principles of trauma-informed practice include:

- Lower stress
- Enrich environment
- Establish positive boundaries
- Connect

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**Everyone  
Contributes**



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## Working with Strengths

Which co-regulators of staff fit best with which child requiring co-regulation?  
What interests of staff align with current interests of the child requiring successful experiences?

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## Feel

Emotion (Affect) Regulation:  
*Help me name what I feel*

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## Regulation

The need to regulate emotions  
in children's trauma/adversity  
recovery is paramount  
*(Herman, 1997)*

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## Social-Emotional Focus



- Assessing and teaching resiliency skills for students as a part of curriculum
- Reframing reactions to events to help students respond rather than react

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## Power and Control

Children/youth may compete with their parents/caregivers/teachers for power because they believe that they can achieve safety by controlling their environment.  
Children fight for control with safe people in safe settings.

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## Staff Regulation

In order to support children and youth experiencing adverse childhood events as co-regulators in the school system, staff need to find ways to assess their own emotions and current ability to regulate.

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**Implementing and Sustaining**



Capacity to Support Children Part 2

Integrating Trauma-Informed Practice in Schools: *This lens fits*

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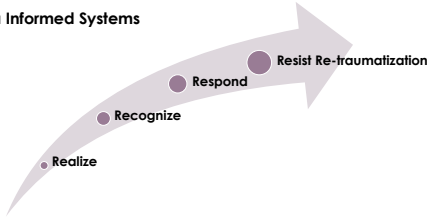
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**Trauma-Informed Systems**

**The 4 Rs of Trauma Informed Systems**  
(SAMHSA, 2014)



Realize

Recognize

Respond

Resist Re-traumatization

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**Steps in Helping Traumatized Children Learn**

It starts with school leadership.  
Principals involved and working with staff to identify needs and integrate trauma-sensitive approaches.



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## Vision for Schools: Trauma-Informed

Shared understanding of how trauma impacts learning and the need for trauma sensitivity in order to support all students to feel safe.  
(Helping Traumatized Children Learn II, 2013)

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## Components of Trauma-informed Schools

### Understanding Trauma

- Safety/Assurance of Wellbeing
- Cultural Competence
- Supportive School Climate
- Social-Emotional Skills/Personal Agency

(Puget Sound Educational Service District rubric)

### Behavior/Emotion Regulation

- Positive Boundaries
- Family Partnerships
- Community Partnerships
- Student/Learner Partnerships

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## Compassionate Capacity Questions

- How is compassionate practice defined within the school?
- What is currently being done in practice in this school?
- Where does the staff want to go, want to change, want to add?



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## Compassionate Capacity Questions

- What are the identified and untapped strengths of students in your school?
- What are the identified and untapped strengths of your staff?
- What successes do you witness?



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