Building a Trauma-Informed Framework for COVID-19 Fallout: A Systemic and Equity Model for Schools

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SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK TRAUMA-INFORMED PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES FOR SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

- COVID-19 significantly disrupted U.S. K-12 schools, impacting both students and school professionals.
- School closures and remote learning led to frayed school communities, learning losses, increased absenteeism, a rise in mental health issues, and heightened feelings of isolation and loneliness among students[1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10].
  - Impacts were disproportionate for BIPOC students, students from low-income and rural households, and those with disabilities/existing mental health challenges[2, 8, 9].
- Teachers and school professionals experienced heightened stress and anxiety, leading to a decline in morale and increased staff turnover[3, 5].
- Recognizing how systemic processes shape pandemic experiences is crucial for effective interventions, highlighting the need for a system-wide, trauma-informed approach.
- **Goals of the review**: We examined how the Trauma-Informed Programs and Practices for Schools (TIPPS) framework helps schools build resilience to the effects of the pandemic through a comprehensive, system-wide approach based on 10 core pillars.

TIPPS FRAMEWORK: 10 CORE PILLARS

1. Ensure all members of the school community feel safe, respected, and valued
2. Increase awareness of the signs and symptoms of trauma
3. Increase awareness of biases and stereotypes
4. Build community
5. Develop and model positive relationships
6. Reduce punitive discipline
7. Communicate and reinforce goals and expectations
8. Avoid deficit thinking and deficit language
9. Incorporate social-emotional skills and positive coping
10. Create a support system to address emergent needs

RECOMMENDATIONS

Table 1. TIPPS-based actionable recommendations to address challenges facing students

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic	Relevant TIPPS pillars to help address the impact	Actionable recommendations for schools
Challenges and Recommendations for Students		
Learning loss and educational attainment	TIPP 3: Increase awareness of biases and stereotypes	Conduct implicit bias training workshops for all school staff and facilitate open discussions about biases and stereotypes
	TIPP 6: Reduce punitive discipline	Promote the use of restorative practices in place of punitive disciplinary strategies (e.g., community-building circles)
	TIPP 7: Communicate and reinforce goals and expectations	Encourage students to set SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) goals with their teacher
Absenteeism	TIPP 4: Build community	Incorporate regular community-building activities like team-building games and morning meetings
	TIPP 8: Avoid deficit thinking and deficit language	Conduct professional development workshops with teachers to increase their understanding and use of strengths-based language
	TIPP 10: Create a support system to address emergent needs	Establish ways for school professionals/peer mentors to provide additional tutoring/mentoring opportunities to students, as needed
Internalizing symptoms/mental health concerns (e.g., depression and anxiety)	TIPP 2: Increase awareness of the signs and symptoms of trauma	Provide training sessions to all school staff about recognizing signs of trauma in students
	TIPP 5: Develop and model positive relationships	Encourage teachers to develop positive relationships with all students in their classroom
	TIPP 9: Incorporate social-emotional skills and positive coping	Include standardized SEL for all students as part of the school curriculum
Social isolation and loneliness	TIPP 4: Build community	Organize regular community-building events like game nights and talent shows for students and school professionals
	TIPP 10: Create a support system to address emergent needs	Provide students and staff with mental health resources and support services such as counselling or peer support groups

Table 2. TIPPS-based actionable recommendations to address challenges facing teachers and school administrators

Challenges and Recommendations for Teachers and School Administrators		
Teacher stress and fatigue	TIPP 2: Increase awareness of the signs and symptoms of trauma	Establish a regular check-in system between teachers and the school's mental health professionals to encourage teachers to reflect on their mental and physical wellbeing
	TIPP 10: Create a support system to address emergent needs	For teachers experiencing increased stress/fatigue, consider offering temporary flexible work arrangements (e.g., work from home, fewer assigned classes) and mental health services
School staff turnover	TIPP 1: Ensure all members of the school community feel safe, respected, and valued	Set up ways to compensate all school staff for any additional time they might spend planning or working in their role
	TIPP 4: Build community	Establish ways for school staff to actively participate in school administration meetings
Low staff morale	TIPP 1: Ensure all members of the school community feel safe, respected, and valued	Celebrate staff achievements and contributions via staff meetings, newsletters, social media, events, awards, and other incentives (e.g., job promotions)

DISCUSSION

- Schools should use the 10 pillars of the TIPPS framework to prioritize system-wide changes to the school environment that can help address the negative impacts of COVID-19.
- Pillars intersect and build on each other, offering multiple entry points for intervention. No specific hierarchy exists among pillars; they are designed to be foundational.
- School professionals should identify areas of difficulty for their school and develop strategies using relevant pillars for systemic change and trauma-informed operations.
- Schools may face challenges in implementing recommendations based on the TIPPS framework, such as:
  - Limited funding and resources to implement a comprehensive trauma-informed program
  - Difficulty in achieving buy-in from all stakeholders, including parents and the wider community
  - Balancing the implementation of TIPPS with existing academic and administrative responsibilities
  - Ensuring ongoing support and professional development to sustain the trauma-informed approach

FUNDING STATEMENT

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To learn more about the TIPPS initiative and gain access to additional resources, check out our website using the QR code below.

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