

# Trauma-Informed Teaching and Learning

## What is Trauma-Informed Teaching and Learning?

- Trauma-informed teaching is a pedagogical approach that understands the possible affects of trauma and crises on students' learning and behaviours, during or after a period of stress and/or upheaval.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted students' schedules, routines, home lives, and social lives, and for some students, it has affected their emotional states, access to nutrition, and connection to the world.
- Trauma-informed teaching and learning (TITAL) is a way to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of schools have affected students; once school buildings and schools reopen, students of all ages may have experienced circumstances that have been physically, socially, mentally and/or emotionally difficult and/or harmful.



## What is trauma, and what does COVID-19 have to do with it?

- According to the [American Psychological Association](#), emotional trauma is “an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident [...] or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea. While these feelings are normal, some people have difficulty moving on with their lives.”
- Given the COVID-19 context, TITAL takes into account that:
  - Some students' experiences may be more complicated, especially if there were difficult or tumultuous situations taking place at home;
  - We are all still not in a “normal” schooling context. Children find themselves in a different classroom experience with varying rules, procedures, and safety precautions, which might make a regularly safe and happy classroom feel unfamiliar. Allowing students to discuss how they feel is essential; and,
  - Such trauma, after a period of stress and upheaval, could resemble in some ways or present as a milder form of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).



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## What are some signs of trauma in the classroom?

One in five minds suggests the following list, as a starting point:

- Developing new fears;
- Separation anxiety;
- Sleep disturbances (e.g. nightmares, lack of sleep);
- Sadness;
- Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed;
- Reduced concentration;
- Decline in quality of schoolwork;
- **Anger**, irritability.



## What are some strategies for teachers to help students?

- Learn to recognizing the signs and symptoms;
- Create a caring learning environment that recognizes the importance of social, emotional, and wellness skills for students of all ages. Based on the concepts of “Healing and Repair,” and “Growth and Strength,” the University of California (Berkeley) suggests five approaches:
  - Positive relationships;
  - Positive physical space;
  - Positive priming;
  - Using character strengths; and,
  - Building resilience.
- Adopt a whole community or team approach to assisting students, which should include special education professionals and paraprofessionals, school administration, the child’s family (where appropriate), etc.



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## What are some strategies for teachers to help each other and their schools?

- [The National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#) has identified its “Essential Elements of a Trauma-Informed School System”:
  - Identifying and assessing traumatic stress;
  - Addressing and treating traumatic stress;
  - Teaching trauma education and awareness;
  - Having partnerships with students and families;
  - Creating a trauma-informed learning environment (social/emotional skills and wellness);
  - Being culturally responsive;
  - Integrating emergency management and crisis response;
  - Understanding and addressing staff self-care and secondary traumatic stress;
  - Evaluating and revising school discipline policies and practices;
  - Collaborating across systems and establishing community partnerships;
- Every school should develop and implement a plan for TITAL for the month of September and beyond.



## Resources for teachers

- Canadian Red Cross – [Guidebook for Well-Being in Recovery](#)
- Cornerstone for Teachers – [A Crash Course on Trauma-Informed Teaching](#)
- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network – [Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators](#)
- Teaching Tolerance – [A Trauma-informed Approach to Teaching Through Coronavirus](#)
- The Resilient Educator – [What is trauma?](#)
- Edutopia – [Social Emotional Learning](#)
- Government of Alberta – [Trauma Informed Practice](#)

