TRAUMA-INFORMED EDUCATION FOR EL STUDENTS WITH ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

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Welcome & Introduction

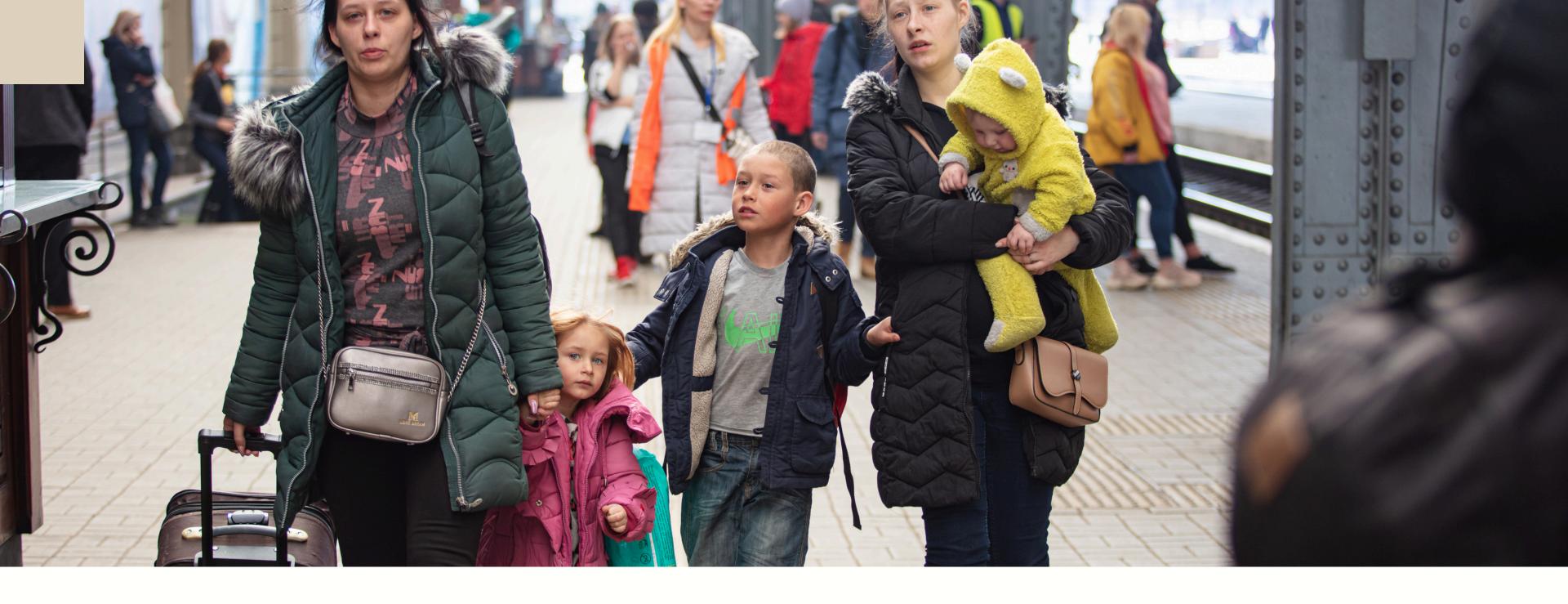
I am a Ukrainian psychologist, a licensed ESL teacher and a school counselor.

I am a mom of three and a refugee myself.

Objectives:

- Define Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)
- Explore how ACEs impact learning and behavior
- Identify trauma-informed strategies for ESL settings
- Foster resilience and safety in multilingual classrooms





What Do You Know About ACEs?

ACEs are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0–18 years)

- Physical, sexual, or verbal abuse;
- Physical and emotional neglect;
- A parents who is an alcoholic (or addicted to other drugs);
- Witnessing a mother who experiences abuse;
- A family member in jail;
- Loss of a parent due to death or abandonment, including abandonment by parental divorce; or
- Mental illness or a depressed suicidal person in the home





ACEs and ELL Students

Students may face additional stressors

- Migration trauma
- War or danger in the home country
- Language barriers
- Cultural dislocation
- Family separation or instability
- Interrupted learning (SLIFE)

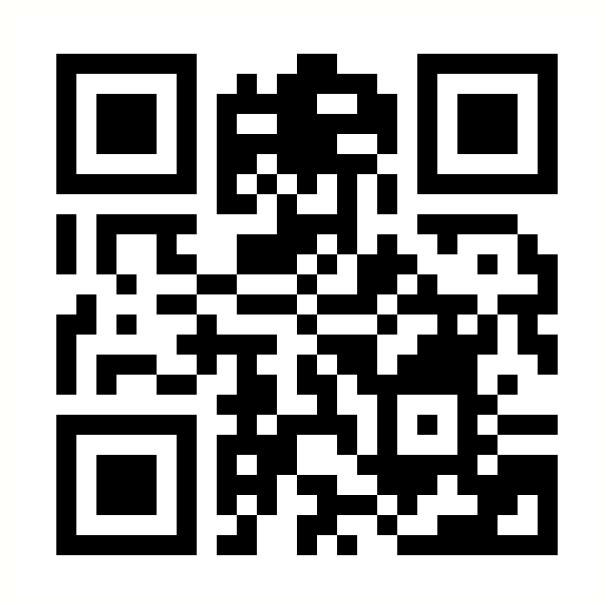
How ACEs Affect Learning

- Difficulty concentrating
- Hypervigilance or withdrawal
- Delayed language acquisition
- Avoidance
- Aggression or defiance
- Inconsistent attendance

Preventing ACEs could reduce many health conditions. For example, preventing ACEs could reduce suicide attempts among high school students by as much as 89%, prescription pain medication misuse by as much as 84%, and persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness by as much as 66%.

(Swedo et al, 2024)

Lets play a game





Some statistics

As of late 2025, there are nearly 42.5 million refugees globally, with the total number of people forced to flee their homes due to conflict, persecution, and violence reaching 117.3 million.

117.3 million in 2025

- In 2015, <u>U.S. Department of State</u> reported that 69,930 refugees were admitted to the United States, with the largest groups coming from African, South Asian, Asian, and Latin American countries.
- 4.1 million children born in the United States have at least one parent who is undocumented (American Psychological Association, 2016).
- Many of the nation's children of undocumented immigrants experience high levels of chronic stress from fear of deportation, living in extreme poverty, and being isolated from peers (Yoshikawa, 2011).
- 60 percent of English learners' families had incomes that were 185 percent below poverty level (<u>Grantmakers in Education Report, April 2013</u>).

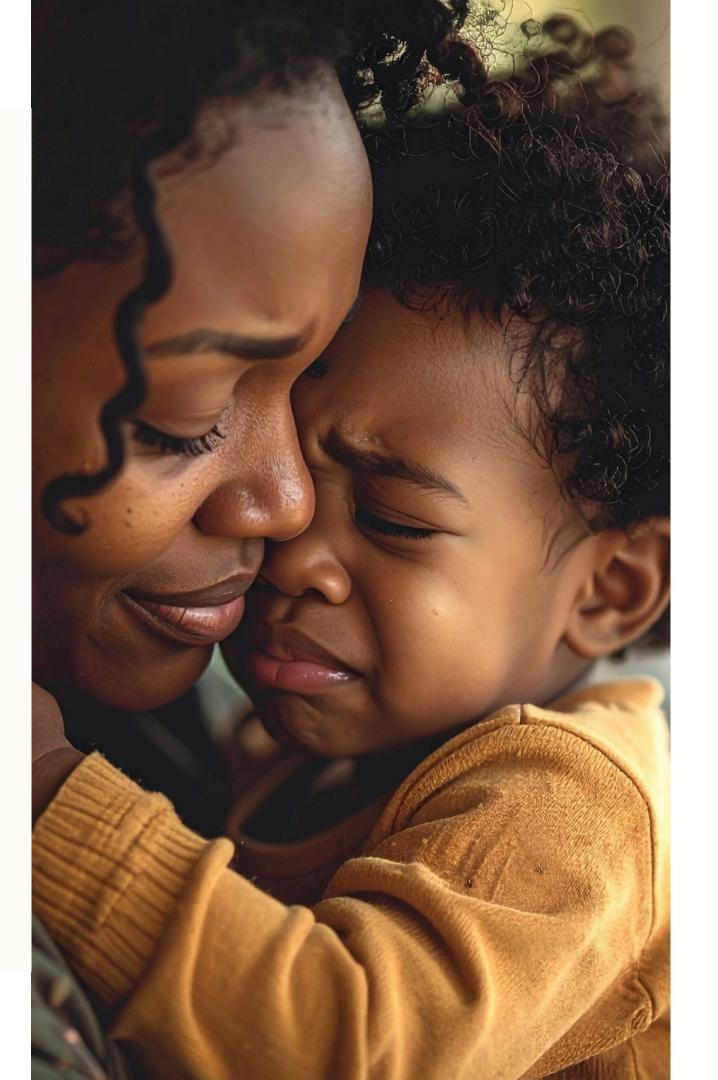


Immigrant

Refugee

Asylum seeker

Resettlement



Newcomers

- an individual who leaves one's country to settle in another.
- an individual who flees one's country due to restriction or danger to their lives and is unable or unwilling to return because of a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.
- someone who seeks
 international protection from dangers in their
 home country, but whose claim for refugee
 status has not been determined legally.
- the transfer of refugees from the country in which they have sought refuge to another State that has agreed to admit them.

Signs of distress

The student exhibits difficulties in any of the following areas:

- o Academics
- Attendance
- Grades
- Classwork completion
- Homework completion
- o Peer relationships
- Hard time making and/or sustaining friendships
- Participation in activities

The student exhibits behavior issues at school, home and/or community

- o Disruptive behavior
- o Absenteeism/Avoidance
- o Lack of participation
- ☐ Does the student appear:
- o Sad
- o Anxious
- o Isolated/Withdrawn
- o Fearful, distrustful,
- apprehensive
- o Inattentive
- o Hyperactive
- o Impulsive
- o Angry/hostile/destructive

o Family relationships

o Relationship with other adults

(teachers, community

members)

☐ The student complains of physical

problems

- o Stomach aches
- o Head aches
- o Other physical symptoms
- □ Other

TRAUMA

- Feelings of fear, helplessness, uncertainty, vulnerability
- Increased arousal, edginess and agitation
- Avoidance of reminders of trauma
- · Irritability, quick to anger
- · Feelings of guilt or shame
 - Dissociation, feelings of unreality or being "outside of one's body"
 - Continually feeling on alert for threat or danger
 - Unusually reckless, aggressive or self-destructive behavior

OVERLAP

- Difficultyconcentrating and learning in school
 - · Easily distracted
 - Often doesn't seem to listen
 - Disorganization
 - Hyperactive
 - Restless
 - Difficulty sleeping

ADHD

- Difficulty sustaining attention
 - Struggling to follow instructions
 - · Difficulty with organization
 - Fidgeting or squirming
 - Difficulty waiting or taking turns
 - Talking excessively
 - Losing things necessary for tasks or activities
 - Interrupting or intruding upon others

Trauma-Informed Teaching Principles

Safety:

Create predictable routines and safe spaces

Trustworthiness

Be consistent and transparent

Empowerment

Offer choices and validate student voices

Cultural Sensitivity

Respect diverse backgrounds and experiences



Teaching approaches

"Islands of Competence"

Discover student's areas of competence, give opportunities to be successful and promote student's interests

Predictability

Focus on classroom environment that supports student's success. Establishing routines is especially important for traumatized children



Teaching approaches

Positive behavioral supports

Breaking tasks into smaller parts and providing reinforcement

Building nonacademic relationships with students **Ensuring students** receive appropriate supports



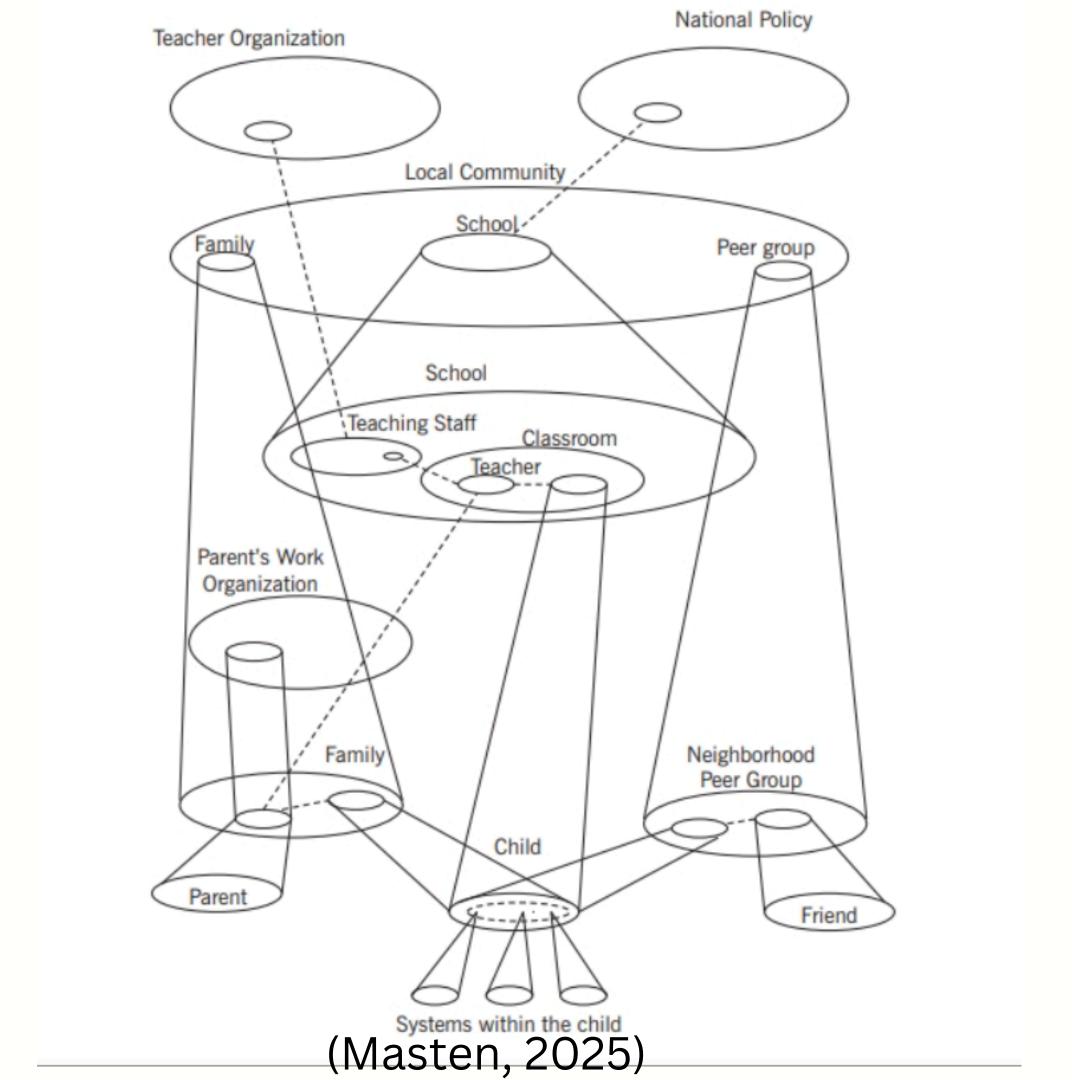
Implicated Adaptive Systems

TABLE 6.1. Short List of Psychosocial Resilience Factors for Children and Youth

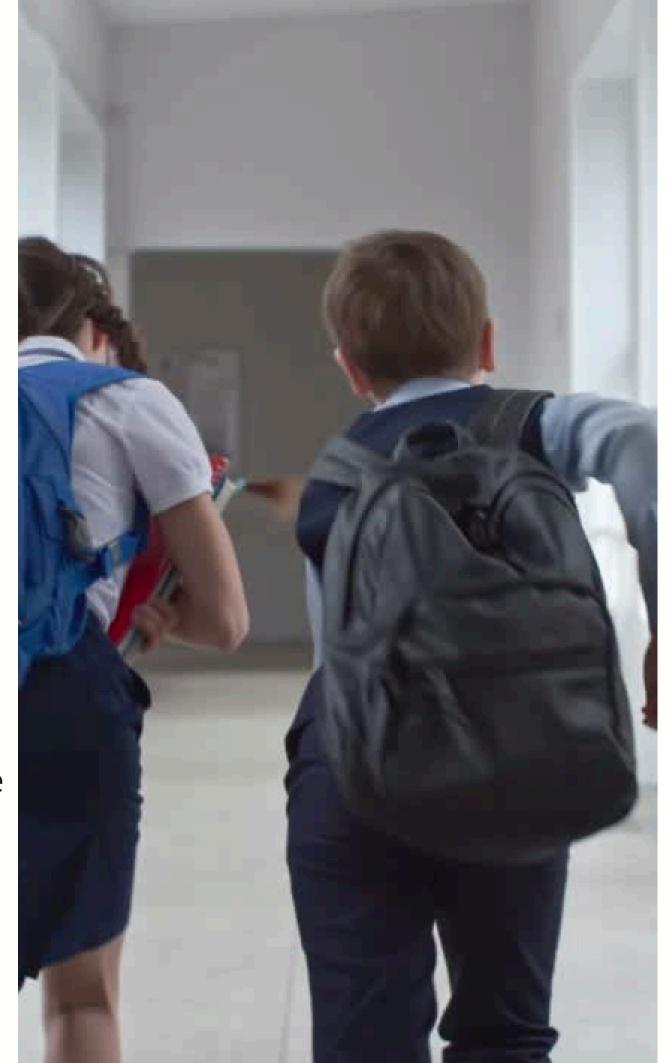
- Nurturing and sensitive care, parenting quality, close relationships, social support
- Sense of belonging
- Problem-solving skills, adaptive intelligence
- Self-regulation, self-control, executive function skills
- Motivation to adapt or succeed, mastery motivation
- Self-efficacy, sense of agency
- Positive identity and views of self
- Hope, optimism, faith, positive outlook on the future
- Sense of purpose, belief life has meaning
- Positive routines, rituals, and cultural traditions
- Effective schools or early childhood education, school engagement
- Community connections, support of safe and well-functioning communities

TABLE 6.2. Examples of Adaptive Systems Implicated by the Short List

- Attachment, social affiliation systems
- Family systems
- Cognitive learning and memory systems
- Cognitive control systems
- Motivation and reward systems
- Neurobiological stress regulation systems
- Language and communication systems
- Cultural belief systems and religious systems
- Child education and school systems
- Child and family support systems in communities
- Public safety systems in communities

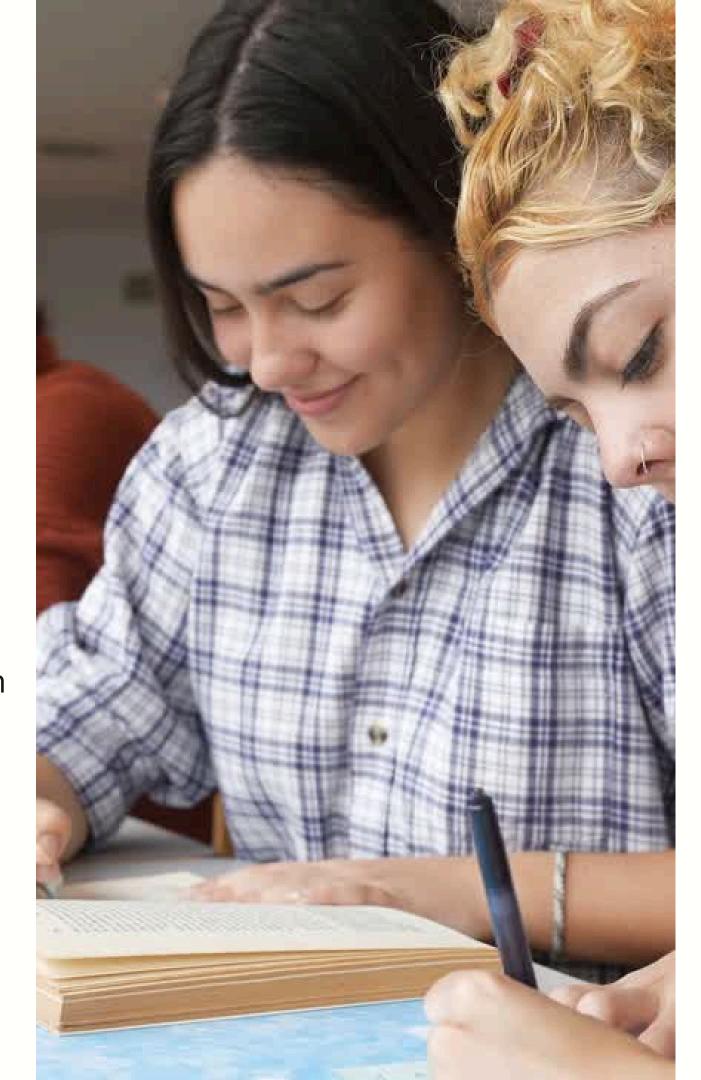


- training for educators and student peers on newcomer experiences;
- creating a school reception team to assist with orientation;
- dedicating time with newcomer parents and students to learn hopes, strengths and needs;
- posting signs in common languages;
- adopting a learning stance that avoids assumptions about a student's prior experiences.



Strategies to create welcoming school environments

- greeting students individually by name daily and with a smile;
- ensuring classroom
 environment reflects the
 linguistic and cultural
 diversity of students;
- building relaxation breaks into the day, particularly during transitions;
- pairing each newcomer with a peer helper to help with orientation and routines;
- sharing information with the class to help students understand and welcome newcomers.



Strategies to create welcoming classrooms

How to promote resilience?

Implement evidence based programs

Family engagement

Focus on inclusion

TABLE 11.1. Components of a Resilience Framework for Intervention: The Five Ms

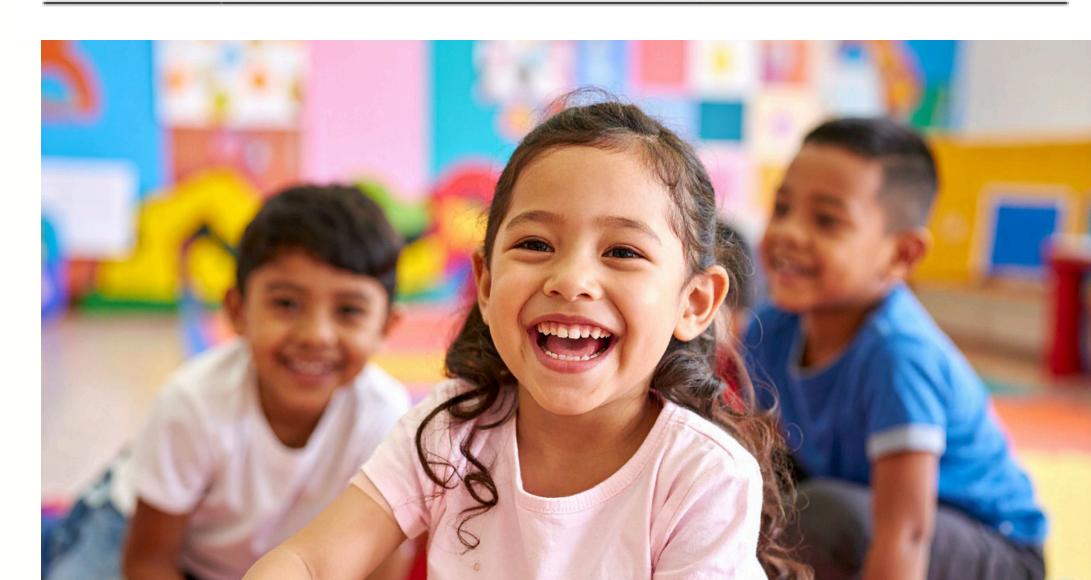
Mission Frame positive goals

Models Include positive factors, influences, and outcomes

Measures Track the positive as well as the problems

Methods Reduce risk, boost assets, mobilize or restore protections

Multisystem Combine multisystem strategies for synergy







MEnd: Mental health interventions for students experiencing distress or difficulties related to the newcomer experience and transition (Tier 3).

COpe: Coping and resilience skills to support students as they transition to a new school and community (Tier 2).

(Tier 1)

WELcome and WELLbeing
WELcome and WELLbeing: School staff and student peer strategies for welcoming all newcomer students (Tier 1).

QUESTIONS FOR SELF-REFLECTION:

- Is this the first time you are co-creating a welcoming environment with newcomer students? Is this not your first time?
- Are you aware of your biases, power, privilege, and feelings when engaging and encountering differences with newcomer students?
- How do you celebrate and affirm the identities of newcomer students in learning environments?
- How can you develop a trusting relationship with the newcomer while also keeping within the context of their beliefs and values?

Resources:

American Psychiatric Association: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, Text Revision. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2022.

Corin Colorado https://www.colorincolorado.org/

Helping Traumatized Children Learn - Trauma Sensitive Schools. (2013). Trauma Sensitive Schools. https://traumasensitiveschools.org/tlpi-publications/download-a-free-copy-of-helping-traumatized-children-learn/

Hoover, S., Bostic, J., Orenstein, S., & Robinson-Link, N. (2019). Supporting Transition Resilience of Newcomer Groups (STRONG). Ellicott City, MD: Hoover Behavioral Health, Inc.

Levine, P. A., & Kline, M. (2007). Trauma through a child's eyes: awakening the ordinary miracle of healing: infancy through adolescence. North Atlantic Books; Lyons, Co.

Masten, A. S. (2025). Ordinary magic: Resilience in development. The Guilford Press.

Swedo EA, Pampati S, Anderson KN, et al. Adverse Childhood Experiences and Health Conditions and Risk Behaviors Among High School Students — Youth Risk Behavior Survey, United States, 2023. MMWR Suppl 2024;73(Suppl-4):39–49. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.su7304a5.

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