Trauma Sensitive Schools benefit all children – those whose trauma history is known, those whose trauma will never be clearly identified and those who may be impacted by their traumatized classmates.

Schools are the central community for most children.

***IMPACTS***

Research shows that childhood trauma can

* Diminish concentration, memory and the organizational and language abilities that children need to function well in school.
* Studies show that abused children have more severe academic problems than comparison children. Specifically, they are more likely to receive special education services, have below grade-level achievement test scores and have poor work habits – they are 2 times more likely to be retained or fail a grade.
* They may anticipate that the school environment will be threatening and constantly scrutinize it for any signs of danger. Their mission is to avoid this perceived danger and pain.
  + For some children, this can lead to inappropriate behavior and learning problems in the classroom, the home and the community.
* For other children, the manifestations of trauma include:
  + perfectionism,
  + depression
  + anxiety
  + Self-destructive or even suicidal behavior.
  + Withdrawal
  + Perfectionism
* Relationships
  + Children may attempt to gain a sense of control by challenging school personnel or they may overact because they misinterpret classroom encounters. They know they are safe ONLY when they control their environment.
  + Complex trauma can impede the formation of personal attachments and may foster relationships that are based on fear and insecurity.
  + Abuse dichotomy—children who try to overcome their feelings of vulnerability by inflicting violence on others.
* Non-verbal communication -- becomes highly automatic and occurs for the most part outside of conscious awareness.
  + May learn to recognize subtle changes in facial expression, voice and body language as signals of anger, sexual arousal, intoxication or dissociation.
  + Children learn to respond without being able to name or identify the danger signals that evoked the alarm
* Traumatized children cannot simply remove their “trauma glasses” as they go between home and school, form dangerous place to safe place.

The Roles of Schools in the Lives of Traumatized Children:

* Schools ***do not*** provide treatment to traumatized children but can mitigate the effects of trauma
* Masten and Coatsworth findings align with the three primary components of the ARC model
  + Strong caregiver/child relationship or when such a relationship is not available, a surrogate caregiving (school personnel) figure who serves in a mentoring role = ATTACHMENT
  + The ability to self-regulate attention, emotions and behaviors = SELF-REGULATION
  + Good cognitive skills, while predict academic success and lead to rule-abiding behavior = COMPETENCY
* Teachers can use their existing expertise more effectively when they understand that many of the academic, social and behavioral problems of traumatized children involve such difficulties as
  + failing to understand directions
  + overreacting to comments from teachers and peers
  + misreading context
  + failing to connect cause and effect