

TRAUMA AWARENESS RESOURCE  
FOR SCHOOLS

**SAFE SPACES.  
SAFE FACES.  
SAFE PLACES.**



# INTRODUCTION

Children who are adopted, or who have spent time in the out-of-home care (OOHC) system, have often experienced trauma to an extent that their ability to learn is compromised.

Repeated exposure to traumatic situations and stressful events can lead to 'toxic stress', or the constant flooding of cortisol and adrenaline to the brain.

Toxic stress during the early years of life changes a child's brain development, making them sensitive to further stress, and impacting their activity levels, their memory, their ability to concentrate and ultimately to learn.

In 2016, a research report by Adopt Change "Post Adoption Support in Australia: Is it Time for a Triple A approach?" found that the cohort of children affected by trauma appears to be growing, and this is highlighted universally across the community services and welfare sectors as an issue of deep concern.

The research also highlighted the increasing body of evidence which suggests that unless safe environments can be created for children who have experienced trauma, their ability to recover and restore resilience may be compromised in the long term.

The role of teachers and schools in the life of these children is key. This booklet is a starting point for education professionals in developing a trauma-aware practice, and outlines the three main principles which make up a trauma-informed education environment. It is also intended as a resource for parents and carers to understand the impact of trauma on their children at school, and to assist them in communicating this to their child's teacher.

Implementing these principles will help traumatised children to feel safe in the classroom and at school, and develop positive relationships with teachers and peers, so that they have the best possible chance of being able to engage in learning.

A trauma-aware learning environment benefits everyone. Strategies that work for children who have experienced trauma create an environment in which all children feel safe, not just those who are known to have experienced trauma.



# POST TRAUMA



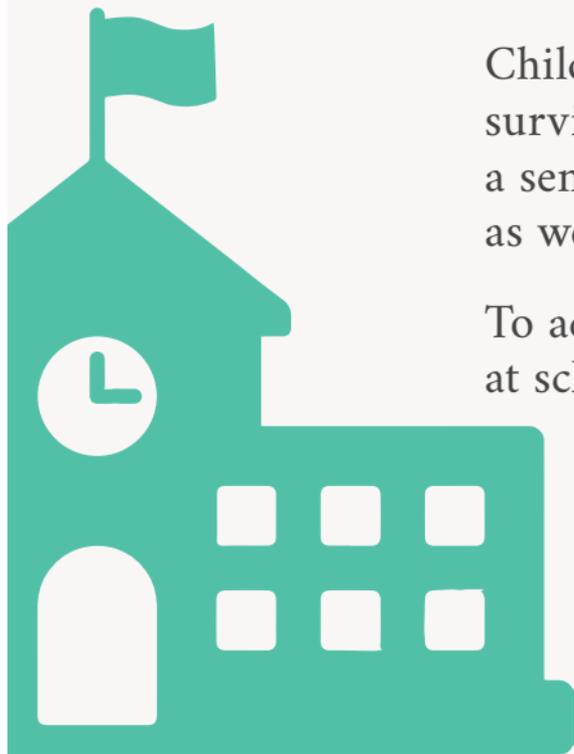
What do child survivors of trauma need?

How might schools help children navigate the rough seas of life after trauma?



Child survivors of trauma are often 'all at sea'. They may feel alone, and need extra reassurance to feel safe. In periods of intense fear, children may feel as if they are 'emotionally drowning'. Some children may react in ways which attract attention, others may simply become withdrawn.



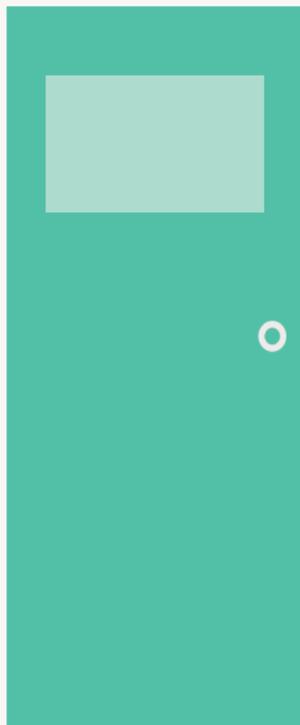


Children and young people who are survivors of trauma need to experience a sense of felt safety, outside the home as well as inside the home.

To achieve this, they need three things at school.



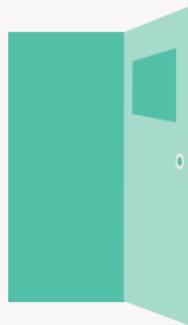
# 1 SAFE SPACES



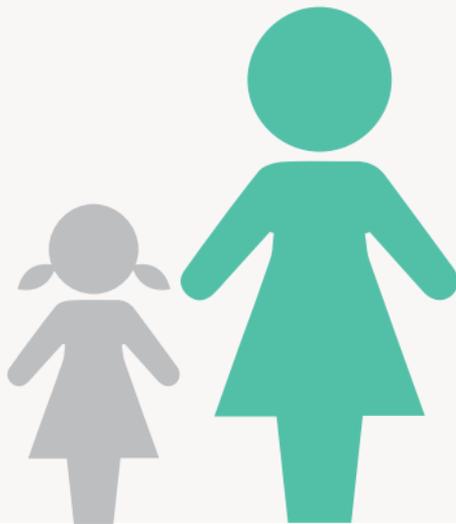
For children who have survived trauma to fully engage at school, the environment must offer them an ability to feel safe. Only when children feel safe can they focus on work, and build trusting relationships with teachers and peers.



Child survivors of trauma may need extra support in engaging, connecting and participating with the teacher or with other students. A teacher can provide additional help in building and creating these connections.

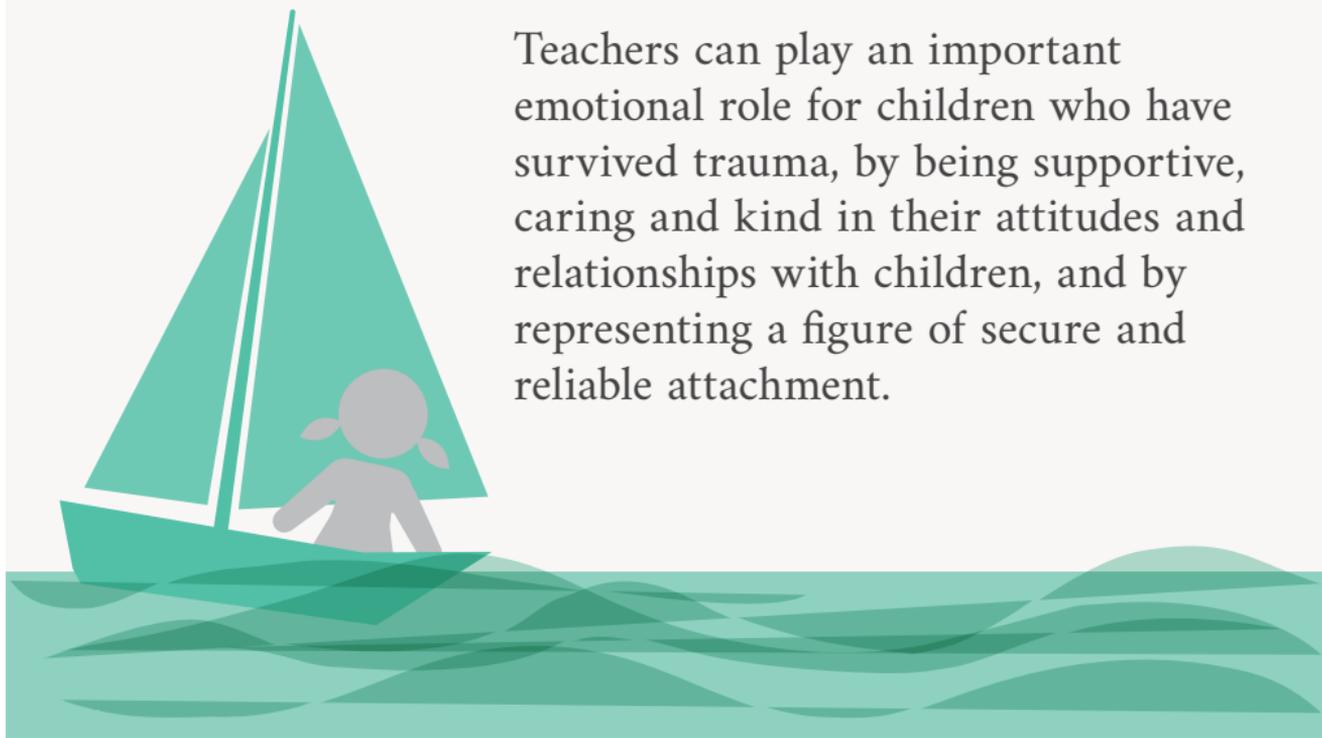


# 2 SAFE FACES



Teachers are not therapists, but they can help children who are trauma survivors by being reassuring and showing consistency. Trusted teachers can represent an anchor for children because they can become someone on whom the child knows they can rely, when emotional seas become rough.

Teachers can play an important emotional role for children who have survived trauma, by being supportive, caring and kind in their attitudes and relationships with children, and by representing a figure of secure and reliable attachment.



# 3 SAFE PLACES



Child survivors of trauma also need a safe place. Classrooms and school sites can be made trauma-aware places in which the child begins to feel certainty and safety in very real ways.



For further reading see our information paper:

*What is it to be 'trauma-aware':  
An introductory resource for  
practitioners who work with  
children and young people.*

Visit the Adopt Change website to read or download a copy of this paper and other resources for teachers and schools.





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