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# Systems of Care for addressing the traumatic impact of violence exposure on student well-being

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UNC CHARLOTTE

# SYSTEMS OF CARE FOR ADDRESSING THE TRAUMATIC IMPACT OF VIOLENCE EXPOSURE ON STUDENT WELL-BEING

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# PRESENTATION

# ROADMAP

- ❑ Trauma and violence exposure
- ❑ Systems of Care approach
- ❑ Best practice strategies for schools
- ❑ Participatory activities
  - ❑ Groups report on top 5 recommendations



# Trauma and Violence Exposure

“The children who are the most disruptive in the classroom are called ‘conduct disordered’ children. For the most part, these problems originate in abuse, neglect, and exposure to violence at home, and are often exacerbated by punitive measures in school”

(Bloom, 2013, p. 246)



# Trauma and Violence Exposure

- Trauma results from chronic exposure to harmful behavior/events during developmentally vulnerable times

(Bloom, 2013; Perry, 2007)

Trauma affects brain development, behavior and learning, and leads to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

(Adams, 2010; Perry, 2007; Rich, et.al., 2009; Van der Kolk, 2014)

# Trauma and Violence Exposure

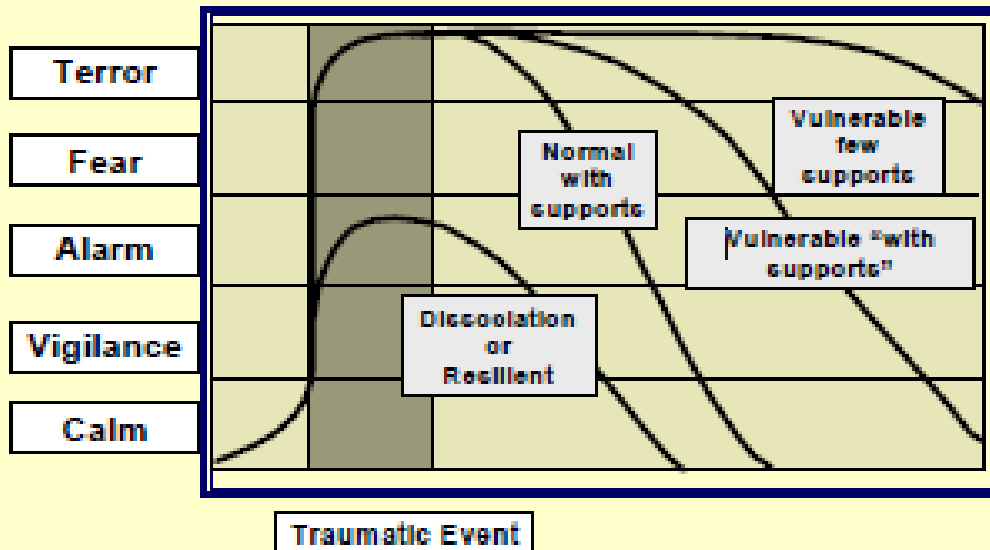
- Detrimental impacts on **children's mental and emotional well-being**

(Adams, 2010; Bloom, 2013; Buffington, Dierkhising, & Marsh; 2010; Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015; Finkelhor, et.al, 2009; Ford, et.al, 2007; Listenbee, et.al, 2012; Van der Kolk, 2014)

- Affects children's **behavior and learning**

(Bethell, Newacheck, Hawes, & Halfon, 2014; Flannery, Wester & Singer, 2004; Perry, 2007)

## ACUTE RESPONSE TO TRAUMA

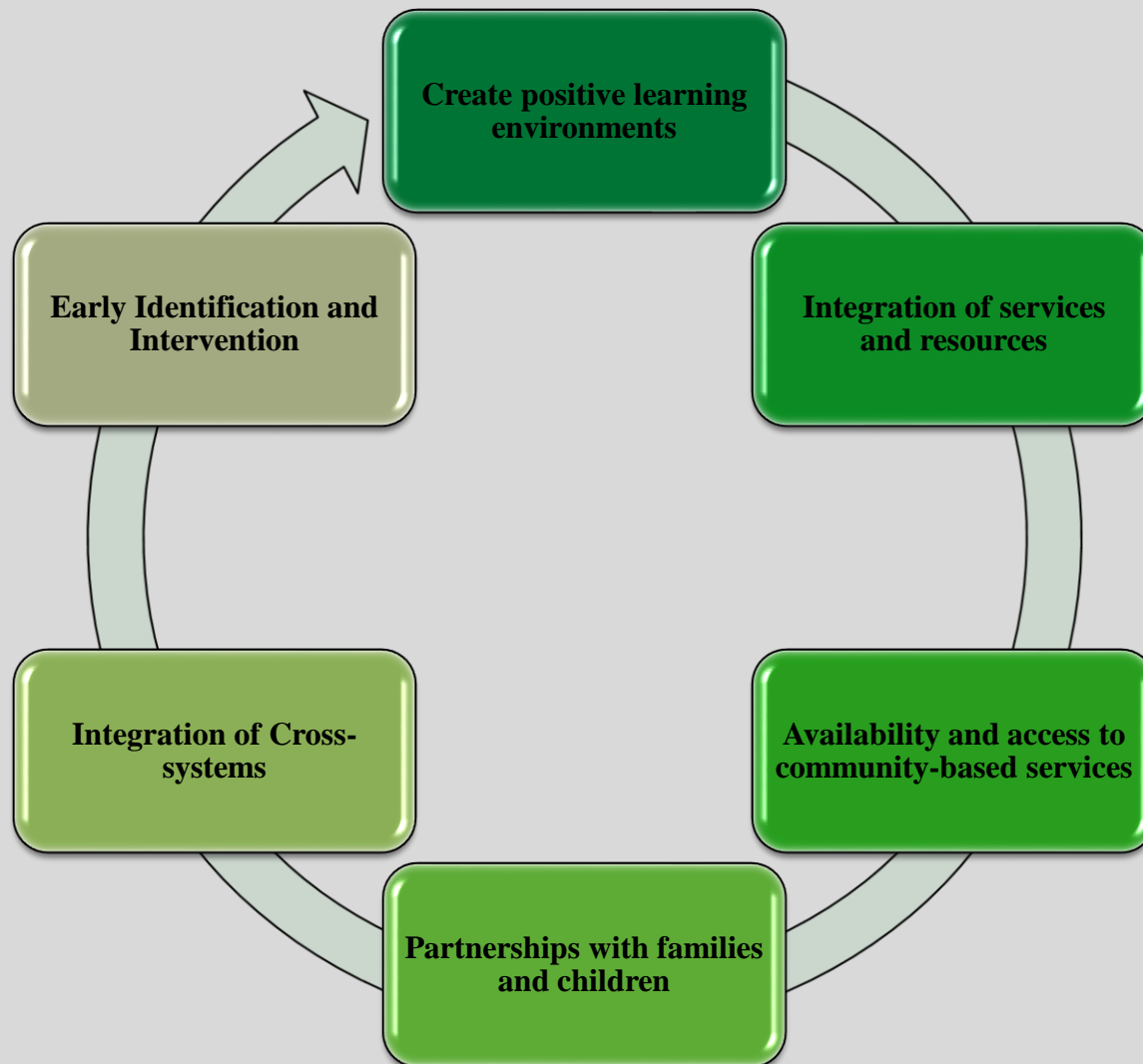


BD Perry MD, PhD

**The Acute Response to Trauma:** Each traumatic event has a beginning and an end. As the traumatic event begins, the individual will move along the arousal continuum. Their internal state will shift from calm to vigilance, alarm, fear and then terror. The descriptive labels – calm, vigilance, alarm, fear, terror - merely designate various points along this continuum and are common descriptive terms for the emotional state corresponding to various stages of the response to threat.

**Figure:** From: Perry, B. (2003) Effects of trauma on children: An introduction. The ChildTrauma Academy, p. 3.  
[www.ChildTrauma.org](http://www.ChildTrauma.org)

# Systems of Care Approach





# Systems of Care Approach to Violence Prevention and Improved Well-Being



- Collaboration of partnerships with families and children to address cultural and linguistic needs and to help them to function better at home, in school and in the community.
- Multi-agency, multi-professional approach for improved access to mental health services, engagement of children and families in care, efficacy of treatment interventions and integration of care across systems, and attention to cultural differences.

# Best Practice Strategies for Schools

## Recommendations from the Trauma Literature

- ❑ Creating Sanctuary: Toward the Evolution of Sane Societies (Bloom, 2013)
- ❑ Animating learning by integrating and validating experience (ALIVE) (Sanjnani, Jewers-Dailley, Brilliante, Puglisi, & Johnson (2014)
- ❑ The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma (Van Der Kolk, 2014):
  - Treating Trauma through Theater: “confrontation of the painful realities of life and symbolic transformation through communal action” (Van Der Kolk, 2014, p. 335)
    - The Possibility Project (New York City)
    - Urban Improv (Boston public schools)
    - Other Culturally Responsive Creative Arts Therapies



# Creating Sanctuary in the Classroom

( from Bloom , 2 1 3 , p . 2 4 6 – 2 4 8 )

- ❑ Reclaiming the **sense of safety** via “zero tolerance” for violence yet without creating a more punitive school environment
- ❑ Includes special programs for conduct disordered children with **links to juvenile probation, mental health and other community resources**
- ❑ Create **multiple opportunities for children to develop attachments with caring adults** in the classroom and the school; caring adults provide comfort, soothing; assist children with managing emotions.
- ❑ Teach children to **practice democracy within the school setting**; create **cooperative environments** where children learn constructive ways to resolve conflict through “community meetings”.
- ❑ Reinforce to children their abilities to **think for themselves, manage aggression, govern cooperatively, solve problems peacefully.**
- ❑ Enable multiple opportunities for **creative artistic expression.**

# Animating learning by integrating and validating experience (ALIVE)

<http://www.ptsdcenter.com/aliveschoolprograms.html>

- ALIVE programs provide trauma-informed, prevention-based support to students and schools, Kindergarten through 12th grade.

## ALIVE offers

- 1) screenings for **stressful experiences**
- 2) **stress reduction sessions** for selected students
- 3) **child safety education** programs
- 4) the **Miss Kendra program** which allows students to express their worries and receive acknowledgement and support
- 5) **parent engagement** sessions
- 6) special programs such as ALIVE Humanities and summer programs for high school students
- 7) professional development and **support for teachers** and administrators.

## **BASIC PRINCIPLES OF ALIVE**

- ❑ ***Bottom Up Approach***: Engage directly with students to empower their capacities for expression.
- ❑ ***Changing Institutional Norms***: Create a school environment that is open to conversations about toxic stresses, maltreatment, and trauma experienced by the students.
- ❑ ***During the School Day***: Integrate the program into the daily school activities.
- ❑ ***Prevention-Oriented***: Attend to every student *before* they become upset.
- ❑ ***Sustainable***: Recruit teachers, volunteers, parents, and interns to extend the reach of trained ALIVE staff.
- ❑ ***Inexpensive***: Simple, low-cost interventions, not dependent upon experts.
- ❑ ***Data Driven***: Assesses the impact of the program on student behavior, symptomatology, and school performance.

## Miss Kendra's Letters

- Students write letters about their worries to a fictional character named Miss Kendra, who herself went through hard times.
- They then receive letters of validation and support back from her.
- Classroom discussions focus on the meaning of child safety and proper care of oneself and one's family.
- <http://www.ptsdcenter.com/aliveschoolprograms.html>

Dear Miss Kendra,

One time where I had to be strong was where my mom's old boyfriend Jimmie physically abused me and he picked me up by my neck, choked me, and threw me down the stairs, he punched a hole in my door he would steal money out of my moms purse and he threatened me if i told anybody he was abusing me he would kill me and my family and I felt that i had to stay strong and not tell anybody.

Sincerely, Charlie

<http://www.traumainformedschools.org/programs/letterstomisskendra.html>

# D r a m a      T h e r a p y

## Drama Therapy:

- “Drama Therapy is an active, experiential approach to facilitating change. Through storytelling, projective play, purposeful improvisation, and performance, participants are invited to rehearse desired behaviors, practice being in relationship, expand and find flexibility between life roles, and perform the change they wish to be and see in the world.”
- From: North American Drama Therapy Association: <http://www.nadta.org/>

# D r a m a      T h e r a p y : T h e   P o s s i b i l i t y   P r o j e c t

- The Possibility Project uses the performing arts as the vehicle by which teenagers enact their positive development and lead change in their communities.
- “The performing arts provide a low-risk, metaphorical means for youth to **examine and construct new ideas, new identities and new relationships**”.
- <http://the-possibility-project.org/the-program/program-features/the-performing-arts/>



# D r a m a T h e r a p y : T h e P o s s i b i l i t y P r o j e c t

## Components

- ❑ Skill Building
- ❑ Voice
- ❑ Physical Awareness
- ❑ Collaboration
- ❑ Discipline
- ❑ Creativity
- ❑ Improvisation
- ❑ Emotional Competency
- ❑ Conflict Resolution
- ❑ Public Speaking
- ❑ Excellence



<http://the-possibility-project.org/galleryvideo/videos-original-musicals/>  
<http://the-possibility-project.org/galleryvideo/videos-community-action/>

### **Foster Care Project:**

[http://www.knowhowmovie.com/movie\\_trailer](http://www.knowhowmovie.com/movie_trailer)

# Urban Improv

<http://www.urbanimprov.org/>

- Urban Improv: an interactive program for young people that uses improvisational theater workshops to teach **violence prevention, conflict resolution, and decision-making.**
- The program's innovative curriculum helps students deal creatively with major issues in their lives.
- Urban Improv conducts workshop series for the Boston Public Schools four days a week, over 27 weeks of the school year.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUxUG8pE8nI>

# Urban Improv

<http://www.urbanimprov.org/workshops>



## **The curriculum is organized into three, 9-week units that explore various themes :**

- ❑ **Grade Four:** imagination, friendship, self-esteem, peer pressure, conflict, family, fairness.
- ❑ **Grade Five:** bullying, peer pressure, snitching, physical challenges/differences, prejudice, conflict, coping.
- ❑ **Grade Six:** responsibility, electronic addiction, bullying, conflict, personal boundaries, homophobia.
- ❑ **Grade Seven:** bystander, cyber bullying, conflict, peer pressure, prejudice, communication.
- ❑ **Grade Eight:** gangs, drugs, bystanders, teen pregnancy, racism, homophobia and changing home lives.
- ❑ **High School:** Violence/conflict resolution, friendship, bystander issues, gangs, drugs, teen pregnancy, homophobia, and racism.

# Other Culturally Responsive Creative Arts Therapies

- ❑ **Dance as Therapy: Children who are refugees of war and disabled by agent orange:**
- ❑ Natalia Duong is a performance artist, choreographer and scholar. Her interdisciplinary research explores kinesthetic empathy as a resource for conflict resolution, community theater and the embodied transmission of trauma
- ❑ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J9gAe9H5Rok&ebc=ANyPxKrJWO1hXX54NRAk3pNGJN8JLF8E4bXQ87MW4R1U0xQHx8KgWo6wf0pps1EsEHuof0FQdjkp>
- ❑ **South African Example: School's Dramatherapy Project:**
- ❑ This project builds resilience in **adolescents affected by school based violence**. The project culminated in the creation of a piece of therapeutic theatre which was performed at each school and at a public performance on Heritage Day.
- ❑ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBMA5eY6XIU>

# Other Culturally Responsive Creative Arts Therapies

- **Embodying Empathy and Reconciliation: Dance/Movement Therapy after Unthinkable Trauma**
- In **post-conflict Sierra Leone**, David Alan Harris launched the world's first dance/movement therapy group for former child combatants.
- Dancing essentially reprogrammed the ex-boy-soldiers' traumatized nervous systems and enabled the youths to mend the mind-body split that had alienated them from themselves and their communities.
- Calling themselves Poimboi Veeyah Koindu (Orphan Boys of Koindu, in their tribal language) this group of former boy soldiers claimed an international human rights award, the 2009 Freedom to Create Youth Prize, which honored their exceptional courage in using the **transformative power of art** to reconcile with the community they'd violated.
- American Dance Therapy Association
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=la3ohS7GZOA>

# Participatory activities

- Groups – selected scenario
- Given the material from this presentation,
- What can teachers do to create a safe and caring environment for students like those in the scenarios who suffer from trauma manifested during their developmental years?

# Group Findings:

- Pre-School/Elementary:
- “Safety team” meetings (weekly) - systems of care approach with counselors, case managers, juvenile court officer, county attorney’s office – address behavior, truancy, other issues.....share resources and ideas for early intervention with children experiencing trauma.
- Counselor as mediator between child and teacher.
- Iowa – cutting edge approach being used.
- Academic, behavioral issues addressed when they occur –in lieu of sending students home (OSS). Root causes uncovered to assist children – Marietta City Schools.

# Group Findings:

- Middle School:
- Recommend a proactive rather than reactive approach to intercept the child before behavior gets out of hand, build attachments, notify teachers of a child's condition. Teacher awareness helps to build teacher – child relationships.
- Teacher can anticipate child issues and know how to intervene rather than exacerbate through their own frustrations.



# Group Findings:

- High School:
- Children experiencing neighborhood violence, rape
- Recommendations for rape victim: student to speak with counselor, involve a rape crisis center, speak with attorney to prepare for court appearance, make sure therapy and counseling are available
- Recommendations for children experiencing neighborhood violence: Mentoring program, family counseling, gang prevention programming.

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- Note: references as web links are provided on specific slides.

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