



# **HANDLE WITH CARE STL** **PROTECT • HEAL • THRIVE**

A regional trauma informed response to child maltreatment and children's exposure to violence.



# St. Louis Area Violence Prevention Commission

Works to reduce violent crime in the region by promoting and advocating for coordinated, well-resourced policies, support systems, and interventions among area governments, institutions and agencies that serve individuals and families most at risk of violent crime.

Improve community level response to nonfatal shootings.

Advance trauma-informed and evidence-based violence prevention practices in community, systems, and service delivery.



# Meeting Objective



To introduce a program aimed at ensuring that children who are exposed to violence receive appropriate interventions so they can succeed in school to the best of their ability.

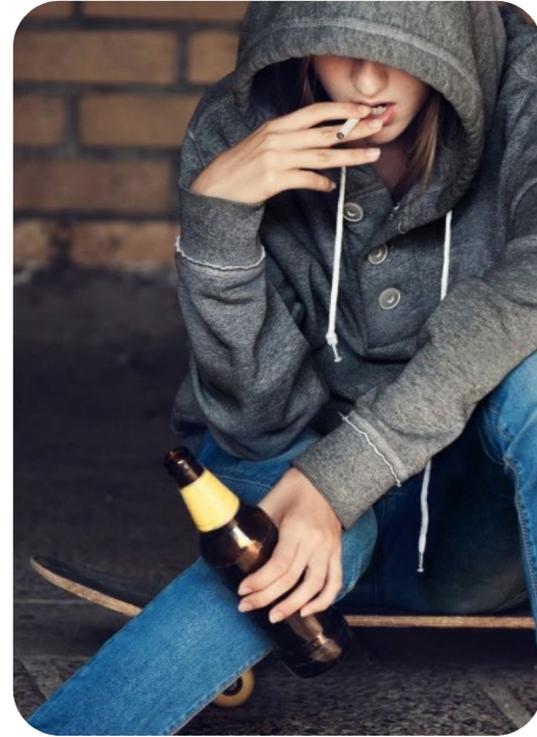


**HANDLE WITH CARE STL**  
**PROTECT • HEAL • THRIVE**



How many children are exposed to trauma nationally?

How many St. Louis children are exposed to trauma?



What is trauma's impact on children?

What happens at school the day after a child is exposed to trauma?



We have a solution:  
We can use Handle With Care to help youth and establish a direct line of communication between law enforcement and schools.

# Program Introduction

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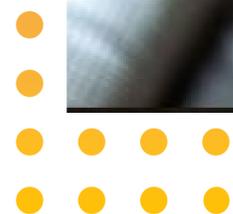
# Trauma Happens Everyday



A recent national survey found that **60%** of U.S. children have been exposed to violence, crime, or abuse in their homes, schools or communities

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and **40%** were direct victims of two or more violent acts.





## Trauma Happens Here

**According to the Post-Dispatch analysis of FBI homicide data, children in St. Louis City have been killed 10 times the national rate for decades.**

# What Is Childhood Trauma?

Childhood trauma, commonly called Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), are potentially stressful events that can have negative, lasting effects on health and well-being.

## Abuse

Emotional  
Sexual  
Physical  
Domestic  
Violence  
Witnessing Violence  
Bullying  
Cyberbullying

## Loss

Death  
Abandonment  
Neglect  
Separation  
Natural Disaster  
Accidents  
Terrorism  
War

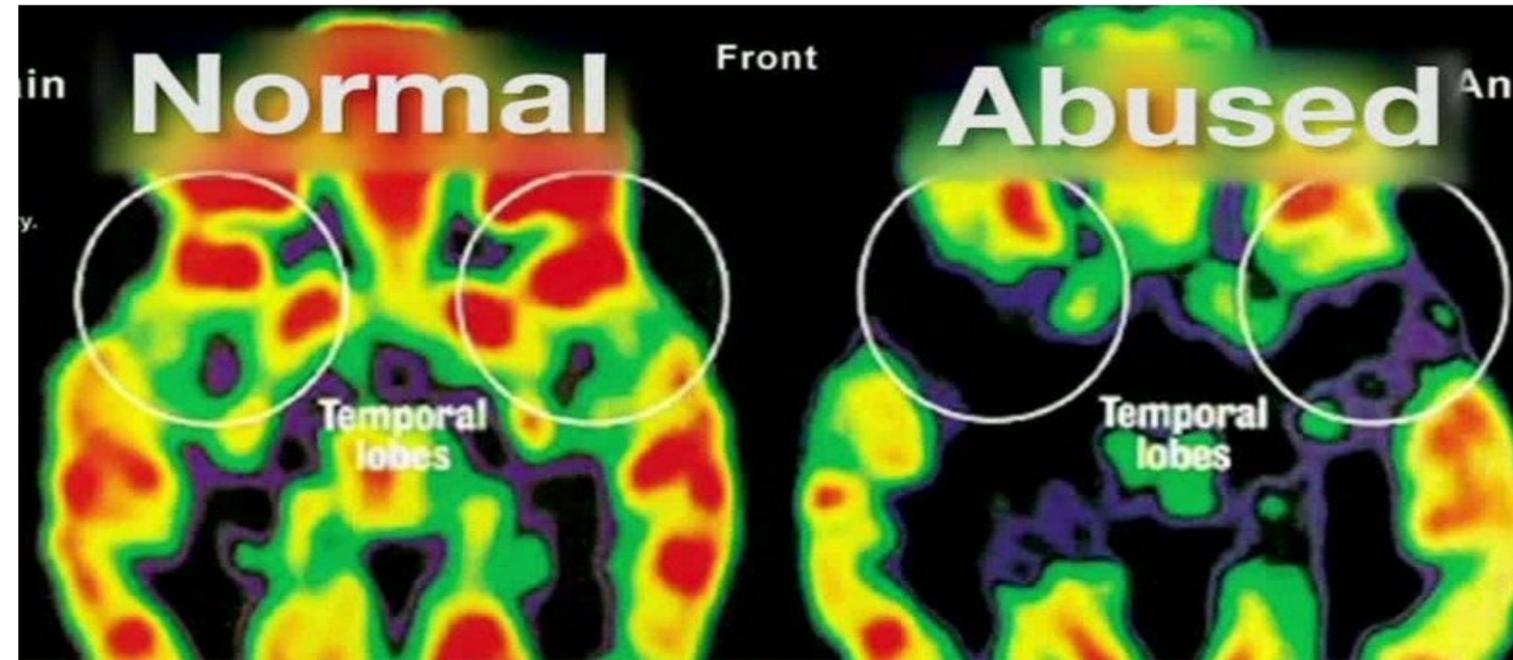
## Chronic Stress

Poverty  
Racism  
Invasive Medical  
Procedure  
Community Trauma  
Family Member  
with Substance  
Abuse Disorder



# What is trauma's impact?

Trauma disrupts brain development, brain chemistry, and the nervous system.



## Impairs

Trauma impairs social, emotional, and cognitive development.

## Weakens

Trauma weakens the ability to regulate emotion and manage impulse control.

## Disrupts

Trauma disrupts the development of organs, circulatory system, immune system, and the inflammatory response system.



What happens the next day at school . . . .



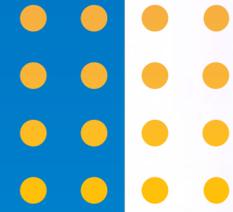
. . . . after the traumatic event?

- Hungry?
- Falling asleep in class?
- Not doing their homework?
- Failing a test?
- Staring off into space?
- Having an outburst?

# A Solution: Handle With Care

The “Handle With Care” program enables police to notify schools if they encounter a child at a traumatic scene, so schools and mental healthcare leaders can provide trauma-sensitive support right away, to help kids succeed.

Proactive not Reactive



Handle With Care is funded by the St. Louis Area Violence Prevention Commission.



# Goals of Handle with Care

- To **respond as a community** when a student experiences or witnesses a potentially traumatic event out of school.
- To **support that child or youth in school**, helping to mitigate trauma and helping him or her to build **resilience and safety at school**.
- To **connect students** with accessible mental health services in the community if any additional support is needed.
- To **strengthen and improve relationships** in the community.



# Educators Most FAQ's

- **Will law enforcement provide information about the type of incident the child witnessed?**

NO. You will not receive and don't really need any information about the incident. Your role is to be aware that something occurred involving law enforcement and that the child may have experienced trauma. That information is enough for you to observe the child's behavior and provide supportive interventions.

- **Should I ask the child about the incident?**

NO. Your role is to observe and listen to whatever the child shares. You can be supportive without having detailed information about the incident.



# Educators Most FAQ's

- **What if a staff person is aware of a potentially traumatizing incident that did not involve law enforcement?**

For example, a CPS worker comes to school to interview a child or a child or parent shares information with staff person. School staff can initiate an internal HWC notice.

- **Should I accept inappropriate behavior from a child who has a HWC notice?**

NO. An HWC notice does not condone inappropriate behavior in school. However, it does provide context for the child's behavior. This information can enable staff to prevent inappropriate behaviors. It also allows staff to respond in ways that acknowledge that the behavior may be the result of trauma and teach the child more appropriate ways to express feelings.



# Role of Law Enforcement



- “Handle with Care” provides the school with a “heads up” when a child has been identified at the scene of a traumatic event.
- The traumatic event could be a drug overdose, domestic violence situation, a shooting, witnessing a crime, a drug raid, a motor vehicle accident, etc.
- Police are trained to identify children at the scene and send a confidential communication to the school that simply says . . . .

**“Handle him/her with Care”**

## Before the school day begins



Law Enforcement will send a “Handle with Care” notice to the school district.



A child in your care was on the scene of a police action in the last 24 hours and could exhibit academic, emotional and/or behavioral problems as a result of exposure to a traumatic event.

**“Please Handle him/her with Care”.**

# Role of the School District

- The Handle with Care district's contact will receive a confidential notice from law enforcement.
- That school liaison will forward the HWC notice to the school that the student attends.
- The school building "HWC Champion" will determine "*who needs to know*".
- *There is no breach in confidentiality - there is no other information shared with the school about the incident.*



# Role of the School District

- If the student exhibits behavior or emotional problems in or outside the classroom, the teacher will implement trauma sensitive interventions and/or refer the student to the counselor.
- Ideally, teachers and counselors will be trained on the on the impact of trauma on learning and will incorporate interventions to mitigate the negative impact of trauma for identified students.
- Interventions may include such things as: re-teaching lessons, postponing testing, small group counseling, referrals to counseling, social service or advocacy programs.



# Being Trauma Sensitive



First - an important note above privacy:

- Law enforcement will not provide any details of the incident to the school.
- It's important to remember that not all incidents involve violence or a violent crime.
- We must all be vigilant that there is not stigma attached to a Handle with Care notice.
- Discussion of students who have received a Handle with Care notice should not leave your school building.
- The Handle with Care notice should not be a part of the child's permanent school record.



# Notification Process

- The school district will be notified before the school starts the next day.
- Law enforcement will use a web portal to email a simple notice to the designated individuals at each school district to alert the school that the child was involved in a police incident the previous day and may have academic or behavioral difficulties in the coming days.
- The school district will forward the email to the child's school building champion before the school day starts.
- The school building champion will **deliver a Handle with Care notice to the child's teacher.**
- The Handle with Care notice gives examples of internal and external distress reactions to look for that the child or youth may exhibit.





## Handle With Care Notification

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

HWC Notice Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please be alert to potential reactions by the Handle With Care student. Reactions may include:

### Internal Distress:

- Regression of previously mastered stages of development (i.e. toileting accidents)
- Decline in participation or loss of interest
- Anxiety, fear, and worry about safety
- Hyperarousal (i.e. easily startled)
- Increased distress (i.e. unusually whiney, irritable, moody)
- Discomfort with feelings (i.e. recognizing troubling thoughts)
- Distrust of others, including peers and adults
- Separation anxiety or extra clingy with teacher or other trusted adults
- Avoidance
- Emotional numbing (seeming to have no feelings about event)
- Re-experiencing or recreating trauma (i.e. reliving or drawing memories)
- Repetitive thoughts/comments about death or dying
- New fears (i.e. fear of dark, animals, monsters)
- Morbid thoughts, questions or drawings
- Change in appetite

### External Distress:

- Unpredictable or impulsive behavior
- Angry outbursts or aggression
- Over- or under-reacting to physical contact, bright lights, sudden movements or loud sounds
- Defiance or difficulty with authority
- Irritability with friends, teachers or events
- Headaches or stomachaches
- Lack of energy or fatigue
- Increased risk or signs of substance abuse
- Increased activity level
- Difficulty concentrating or lack of attention
- Physical harm to others or to self
- Increased absenteeism
- Slipping schoolwork
- Withdrawal from usual activities or suspiciousness

Other(s)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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HWC REFERRAL FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES

I would like to refer this student to: \_\_\_\_\_ (on-site mental health professional)

### Because this student has:

- Exhibited changes that prohibit regular school activities for the student and/or for other students (***please check all above that apply***)
- Exhibited changes for more than 2 weeks after the HWC Notice (***please check all above that apply***)

Referring Staff: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Referral: \_\_\_\_\_

More resources on Handle With Care & Trauma are available at [www.handlewithcarestl.org](http://www.handlewithcarestl.org)

The school building champion will deliver a **Handle with Care** notice to “*need to know*” staff before the start of the school day.

This notice gives examples of internal and external distress reactions to look for that the student may exhibit.

# A “Handle with Care” School **Responds** not **Reacts**



**REACT**

**RESPOND**

**Didn't bring homework**

Got a zero

Teacher gave extra time to do homework and offered 1:1 help

**Fell asleep in class**

Lost recess

Sent to nurse to get some rest

**Got into a scuffle at lunch**

Received detention

No scuffle because student was rested and supported throughout the morning

**Didn't bring permission slip for field trip**

Had to stay back and read in the library

Homeroom teacher called family and got verbal permission over the phone



## In Summary – Handle with Care

- Identifies the students most at risk.
- Provides teachers with a heads up.
- Connects children with accessible mental health services if needed.
- Strengthens and improves relationships in the community.



“Thinking of a child as behaving badly disposes you to think of punishment. Thinking of a child as struggling to handle something difficult encourages you to help them through their distress.”

~ Unknown



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[www.handlewithcarestl.org](http://www.handlewithcarestl.org)



*Thank  
You*



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