

Every classroom in every school has students who have experienced trauma. Trauma can result from Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), including household dysfunction, abuse, or neglect. Witnessing or being a victim of violence, poverty, housing instability, or natural disasters can be equally traumatizing, as can immigration and refugee experiences. In school, students who have been traumatized may act out, withdraw, or have difficulty paying attention, all of which impede their ability to benefit from school. Schools can address these children’s needs and improve their ability to learn by implementing trauma-informed practices. These practices help create trauma-sensitive schools in which all children feel safe to learn.

Creating a trauma-sensitive school is a whole-school effort. It requires that leadership, staff, and families team together to identify and prioritize the policies and practices that fit best with the school culture and context. This chart describes foundational trauma-informed practices that can help schools become trauma-sensitive and how the *Second Step Suite* of programs can support them.

Foundational Trauma-Informed Practices	How the <i>Second Step Suite</i> Supports These Practices
<p><b>Create a safe, supportive learning environment.</b></p> <p>In order to learn, all students need to feel safe and supported in school. This is particularly true for students who have experienced trauma. They need school to feel like a sanctuary from the difficulties they experience in their homes and neighborhoods. Creating a safe, supportive learning environment is a central trauma-informed practice.</p>	<p>The <i>Second Step Suite</i> for Early Learning through Grade 8 helps create a climate of social-emotional safety in schools. When all students in a school are learning and practicing the social-emotional skills taught in the programs, a safe, supportive learning environment can develop.</p>
<p><b>Implement a social-emotional learning program.</b></p> <p>Social-emotional learning (SEL) in general has emerged as a powerful lever for changing school climate and improving overall student success. Implementing an evidence-based, universal SEL program schoolwide is considered foundational to creating a safe, supportive school climate. Teaching social-emotional skills to all students is also a recognized and recommended universal-level support for students’ trauma and behavioral health needs. Students who have experienced trauma may struggle with regulating their emotions, behaviors, and attention in order to learn in school. However, when schools implement SEL programs, the skills taught—such as perspective taking, emotion management, and problem solving—can help address traumatized children’s skill gaps and improve their ability to benefit from school.</p>	<p>Committee for Children’s evidence-based <i>Second Step</i> program is one of the most widely used SEL programs in the United States. The universal, classroom-based program promotes development of students’ social-emotional competence and self-regulation skills. Students with these skills are better able to maintain healthy relationships with peers and adults and have more coping strategies to manage stressful situations.</p>

Foundational Trauma-Informed Practices	How the <i>Second Step</i> Suite Supports These Practices
<p><b>Train all staff.</b></p> <p>First and foremost, school staff need to understand that trauma is much more common than they might imagine. Then the following knowledge and skills can help prepare staff to create a trauma-sensitive learning environment.</p> <p>All staff need to know that trauma can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affect students’ learning, behavior, and relationships at school</li> <li>• Compromise students’ self-regulation and cognitive and social-emotional development</li> <li>• Contribute to behavioral issues (such as acting out or withdrawing)</li> </ul> <p>All staff need to be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create safety and support for students who have experienced trauma</li> <li>• Teach and model social-emotional skills</li> <li>• Identify students who may need accommodations to help them succeed academically and socially</li> <li>• Manage their own responses to students’ challenging behavior so they’re able to respond in a supportive way, rather than just reacting</li> <li>• Reframe students’ behavior through a trauma lens, which involves being curious about what’s causing a student’s behavior rather than reacting to it with judgment and punishment</li> </ul>	<p>The <i>Second Step</i> SEL program has online resources and training to help prepare staff to teach the program, including developing an understanding of why self-regulation and social-emotional skills are important for students’ school and life success. Through training and teaching and reinforcing the lessons, staff become better able to model and reinforce social-emotional skills. Staff are also more prepared to help children dealing with trauma learn to regulate their emotions, a key strategy for diminishing trauma symptoms and helping these children reach their full academic potential.</p> <p>The <i>Second Step</i> Bullying Prevention and Child Protection Units emphasize training for all adults in the school and feature many resources to help create safety and support for students. These resources include the following.</p> <p><b>Bullying Prevention Unit:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive Classroom Climate Building Tools</li> <li>• Responding to Bullying: Ensuring Safety Guide</li> <li>• Behavior Change Plan</li> <li>• Safety Plan</li> </ul> <p><b>Child Protection Unit:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a Safe and Supportive Classroom Guide</li> <li>• Child Check: Reframing a Behavior of Concern Guide</li> <li>• Student Support Plan</li> <li>• Tracking Individual Time with Students Tool</li> </ul>
<p><b>Prevent bullying.</b></p> <p>Making changes to the school ecology can help decrease bullying and create a safer, more respectful learning environment. This is especially important for students dealing with trauma, for whom a calm school environment with no bullying or teasing is recommended. It’s also critical for these students because being victimized at home or in the community puts them at risk of further victimization.</p>	<p>The Bullying Prevention Unit, used in combination with the <i>Second Step</i> SEL program, provides schools with an excellent base from which a safe, supportive learning environment can grow. The unit’s goals are to develop specific staff and student knowledge and skills for preventing bullying, dealing directly with bullying situations, and fostering a climate of safety and respect for all. It does this by changing multiple levels of the school ecology through intervention components that affect schools and classrooms, peer norms and behavior, and individual attitudes, norms, and skills. The core components are: staff training, student lessons, positive classroom climate activities, and family engagement materials.</p>
<p><b>Protect children.</b></p> <p>Prioritizing comprehensive child protection policies, procedures, and practices can help schools strengthen the layers of protection, safety, and support all students need before they can learn. For students experiencing trauma, a protective layer that includes adults who will intervene when necessary and support them during the healing process is especially important. These students can’t recover if trauma is still happening, and when it does stop, healing is bolstered when students feel safe with and supported by the adults they rely on.</p>	<p>Implementing the Child Protection Unit alongside the <i>Second Step</i> SEL program helps schools further enhance their safe, supportive learning environment. The goal of the Child Protection Unit is to develop staff, adult caregiver, and student knowledge and skills for protecting students from unsafe and abusive situations, both in and out of the classroom. Specific skills for recognizing and reporting abusive situations and responding supportively to students who disclose abuse are also targeted. These goals are accomplished via the four core components: staff training, student lessons, staff support resources, and family education and engagement materials.</p>

## THE SECOND STEP SUITE

The *Second Step* Suite is a research-based, universal prevention program for Early Learning through Grade 8. It’s designed to promote school success, school connectedness, and a safe, respectful school climate and to prevent problem behaviors. It does this by teaching self-regulation and social-emotional skills and by addressing bullying and unsafe behaviors. It’s developmental and sequential, with skills being reviewed and expanded on each year and gradually becoming more complex as students get older. The program provides clear schoolwide norms for prosocial behavior.

To learn more about the *Second Step* Suite, visit [cfchildren.org/suite](http://cfchildren.org/suite).