

# Handle with Care for Communities



**Handle with Care** is a notification system that enables police to notify schools that a child has been at the scene of a potentially traumatic event, allowing schools and mental health partners to provide trauma-sensitive support.



**Police.** Police are trained to identify children at the scene and to send a confidential notification to the school with the child's name, age, and school and a message to "Handle with Care". No further information pertaining to the incident is shared.



**Schools.** Schools are alerted to provide a "heads up" to observe the students behavior and to provide trauma-sensitive support. This is *not* an opportunity to approach the child, but rather an opportunity to observe any changes in behavior.



**Mental Health.** Schools partner with community mental health providers to provide on-site therapy when school-based interventions are not enough. On-site therapy does require consent from the parent(s) or guardian(s).

## Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic events experienced during childhood. Trauma can be emotional, sexual, or physical abuse, witnessing violence, experiencing death, neglect, or poverty, racism, and substance use. ACEs are linked to an increased risk of chronic health problems, mental health challenges, and substance use in adulthood.

As children develop, exposure to trauma can have negative impacts on the brain's development. This can significantly interrupt a crucial time for children to develop critical skills and can disrupt their ability to focus and learn, turning off their "learning switch." It is important for law enforcement, schools, and communities to understand the impacts of trauma and how to address it within their community.

## Helping children through Handle with Care

Protective factors are important in mitigating the effects of trauma. Children need a safe environment where they can build positive relationships with adults and peers, learn to manage their emotions and behavioral responses, and find academic success. Handle with Care prepares schools to be proactive and trauma-sensitive, offering students an environment of support, resilience, and academic success.

For additional information on how to bring Handle with Care to your community, please email:

Chelsie Irwin at [Clrwin@health.in.gov](mailto:Clrwin@health.in.gov)



# Bring Handle with Care to Your Community



## Start the Conversation

Generate partnerships and collect letters of commitment from local stakeholders (school staff and administration, law enforcement, emergency services, mental health organizations, probation, child service advocates, etc.).

## Identify Champions

Establish a core multidisciplinary team in schools, law enforcement, and mental health to facilitate discussions and maneuver potential barriers.

## Establish a Plan

Determine the notification plan most feasible for effective communication between first responders and schools. The notification system (text, email, app, dispatch, etc.) should be easy-to-use for all involved. An example flow of notification can include law enforcement contacting a school administrator, who then contacts additional staff who may interact with the impacted student(s).

## Prepare with Trainings

### Law Enforcement

- Department-specific trainings to identify, document, and report children at the scene
- *Handle with Care*-specific training and roll call video

### Schools

- *Handle with Care* all-school presentation
- Trainings focusing on individual, classroom, and school-wide interventions

### Mental Health

- Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)

## Gather Resources

All partners should be familiar with local resources to guide decision making and trauma-informed responses to support children exposed to trauma.

## Commit to Regular Meetings

Regular meetings with partners allow for continued attention and commitment to program success and improvements throughout the school year.

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