

# Beyond Awareness: Trauma Informed Practices in K-12 Education

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Dr. Mark Bunten

Mark Bunten  
EdD, CCC, RP  
Head of University  
Counselling



EST. 1899



# Land Acknowledgement

We engage in learning on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Huron -Wendat, Métis, and Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, all of whom have call this land home from time immemorial.

More specifically, we acknowledge the seven Williams Treaties First Nations for their care and stewardship of these lands. These include the Chippewas of Beausoleil Island, Georgina Island, which is closest to us, and Rama, as well as the Mississaugas of Alderville, Curve Lake, Hiawatha and Scugog Island.

From special days of remembrance like September 30 (Orange Shirt Day) to our curriculum throughout the academic year that addresses the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, we mean to honour the Indigenous people of these lands, their lifeways and their cultures and languages.



# Agenda

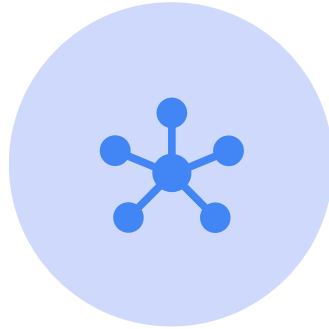
- **Introduction & Land Acknowledgement**
  - Counsellor Leadership, Positionality, and Lens
- **Trauma -Informed Schools**
  - Definition
  - Adolescent Mental Health
  - A Trauma -Informed Approach
  - Benefits of a Trauma -Informed Approach
- **School Level** (*Ways of Working Together*)
  - Case Studies
    - TPLI, Southern California Title 1, Bayor Charter School
  - Resources
- **Counsellor Level** (*Ways of Working On Your Own*)
  - Self-Care
  - Leadership
  - Helping Conversations
  - Solution -Focused Tools
  - Mindfulness & Compassion -based Tools



# Why School Counselor Leadership?



**SOCIAL -EMOTIONAL  
LEARNING AND  
SKILLSET**



**SYSTEMIC AND  
RELATIONAL  
NETWORKS**



**DISTRIBUTED  
LEADERSHIP**

# A Trauma -Informed Approach: Mental Health and Wellbeing

**Trauma** - an inner injury due to difficult or hurtful events that result in impaired functioning (van der Kolk, 2014).

**T** - War, chronic homelessness, deprivation, illness, etc.

**t** - Everyday inequities, toxic relationships, bullying, marginalization, etc.

## Trauma-Informed Researcher Lens

- Can be applied to organizational design, behaviour, and change processes (SAMHSA, 2014)
- Complements an anti-oppressive praxis in that it can accommodate:
  - **Disproportionality** - Impacts of trauma on youth from marginalized communities (Lal, 2021; Lee & Boykins, 2022)
  - **Decolonization** - Legacy of colonization on the education system (Shah, 2017)
  - **Discourse** - Hegemonic normativity (Capper, 2016)
  - **Deprofessionalization** - Deskillling of education workers (Apple, 2016)
- Provides conceptual clarity and focus to the potentially ambiguous and subjective nature of wellbeing measures



# Adolescent Mental Health

Adolescence represents a key developmental period along the lifespan, characterized by significant psychosocial, emotional, and biological change (Choudhury et al., 2008; Siegel, 2013).

- $\frac{3}{4}$  of mental health disorders prevalent by late adolescence (Kessler et al., 2007)
- Two thirds of U.S. children have experienced at least one traumatic event before age 16 (Fondren et al., 2020)
- Social-Cultural Factors
  - Digital World Influences (Smartphones & Social Media)
  - COVID (Isolation)
  - Gen Z (increased depression, anxiety, loneliness, pessimism, and lower physical activity)
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
  - 2SLGBTQ+ greater incidence of family conflict, substance abuse, negative social stigma, and discrimination (Russell & Fish, 2016)
  - Barriers to access for access for youth from marginalized backgrounds and identities (Lal, 2021)



# What is a trauma-informed approach?

- School Framework for Change

- Trauma-Informed Organizations (SAMHSA, 2014; Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021)
  - Realize (Name)
  - Recognize (Own)
  - Respond (Frame)
  - Resist (Sustain)

## 1) Realize / Name

Understand the pervasiveness of trauma and its effects on individuals, groups, organizations and communities.

Critical consciousness raising through self-reflection, unlearning and learning about identity-related, systemic inequities.

## 2) Recognize / Own

Recognize the signs of trauma.

Recognize responsibility and identify potential anti-oppressive actions to take.

## 3) Respond / Frame

The organization, system, or program responds by applying principles of a trauma-informed approach to all areas.

Intentionality and purpose around taking anti-racist and anti-oppressive action. Action areas include policy, curriculum, awareness raising, and systemic change.

## 4) Resist / Sustain

Resist re-traumatization through a focus on organizational practices that promote wellbeing and decreasing potentially harmful practices.

Collaborative mentorship to promote further reflection and identify growth areas for personal and professional practice to further the journey aspects of change.

**Trauma-Informed Organizational Characteristics:** Psychological safety; trustworthiness and transparency; peer support; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment, voice and choice; and, cultural, historical, and gender issues (SAMHSA, 2014)

# Trauma -Informed Schools

“A trauma-sensitive school is one in which all students feel safe, welcomed, supported, and empowered to participate fully in all the school has to offer. It is a place where an **on-going, inquiry-based process** allows for the necessary teamwork, coordination, creativity, and sharing of responsibility for all students, and where **continuous learning is for educators** as well as students.”

## Trauma-Sensitive Schools

<https://traumasensitiveschools.org/tools-and-resources/what-is-a-trauma-sensitive-school/>



## The Case of Ash Elementary, Birch Elementary, and Cedar Academy

**Context:** These three self-selected schools in the Massachusetts area—Ash and Birch Elementary (K-5) and Cedar Academy (a K-12 charter school)—participated in a **three-year trauma-informed, inquiry-based process** delivered by the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (TPLI). Their combined student population was approximately 1,800 students.

**Process:** The project was implemented in two phases.

1. The first phase involved a steering committee of educators and administrators reviewing current school policies and practices through a trauma-informed lens, guided by *"trauma-sensitive vision questions"*.
2. The second phase involved participatory planning where participants used guiding questions to shape the implementation of the action plan, focusing on professional development and necessary resources.



A collaboration of  
Massachusetts Advocates for Children  
and Harvard Law School

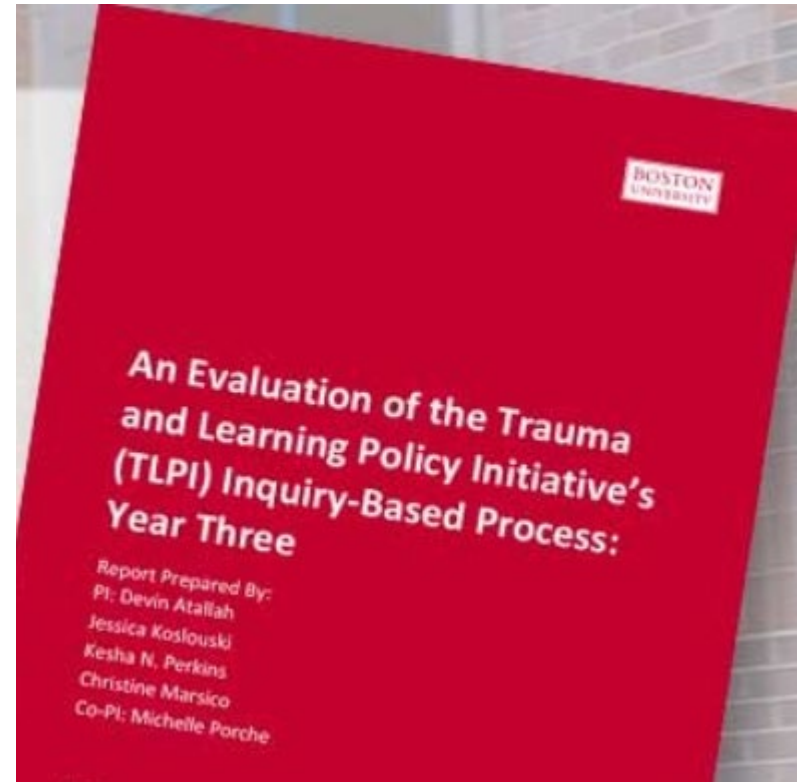
# The Case of Ash Elementary, Birch Elementary, and Cedar Academy

## ❑ Student Outcomes

- ✓ Improvements in Self -Concept, Resilience, Sense of Belonging
- ✓ Strengthened Mental Health
- ✓ Improved Academic Achievements and School Climate

## ❑ Systemic and Faculty Outcomes

- ✓ Increased Faculty Empowerment and Collaboration
- ✓ Integration of Whole -Child Approaches
- ✓ Affirmation of Cultural Identities
- ✓ Shift to Restorative Discipline Strategies
- ✓ Improved Teacher Competence/Job Satisfaction



Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative

# The Case of Southern California Title 1 Public Elementary School

- **Context:** This case involved a three-year implementation of trauma-informed practices initiated by the principal at a California public elementary school.
- **Process:** Staff and educators engaged in ongoing professional development (PD), including biannual training on trauma's effects on learning, trauma triggers, and strategies for student self-regulation. Additionally, staff participated in a student leadership and coaching program based on Stephen Covey's 7 Habits of Happy Kids, and regular workshops prioritized educator well-being through resilience-building and self-care practices.



# The Case of Southern California Title 1 Public Elementary School

## Outcomes:

- ✓ Increased student test scores
  - ✓ Improved self-regulation
  - ✓ Greater student self-confidence and advocacy
  - ✓ Strengthened student-student and student-teacher relationships.
- Findings stressed the critical role of **professional development** in transforming adult mindsets and the necessity of **community outreach** for long-term gains.



# The Case of Bayor Charter School (BCS)

**Context:** BCS was a high-need K-8 charter school in an urban Midwest setting that implemented a three-year pilot trauma-informed change program.

**Process:** The administration secured multiple grants to fund initiatives, including:

1. Identifying systemic needs
2. Establishing collaborative structures such as a resilience team and an equity team composed of multidisciplinary professionals
3. Strengthening school counseling services (aligned with the ASCA national model)
4. Hiring additional support staff (counselor and social worker)
5. Creating a student and community health center
6. Investing in faculty professional development on topics like de-escalation and mindfulness.



# The Case of Bayor Charter School (BCS)

## Outcomes:

- ✓ Out-of-school suspensions declined by 76%
- ✓ Discipline referrals dropped by 26%. Faculty also reported **increased job satisfaction** (with 86% expressing confidence in integrating social-emotional learning)
- ✓ **Improved faculty retention rates** suggested the overall school culture had strengthened due to the interventions.



# Case Study Conclusions

1. School-Wide Approach
2. Universal and Targeted Interventions
3. Holistic Delivery (social-emotional, cognitive, and behavioural)
4. Community Connections
5. Staff and Faculty Teamwork and Shared Accountability
6. Ongoing Professional Learning

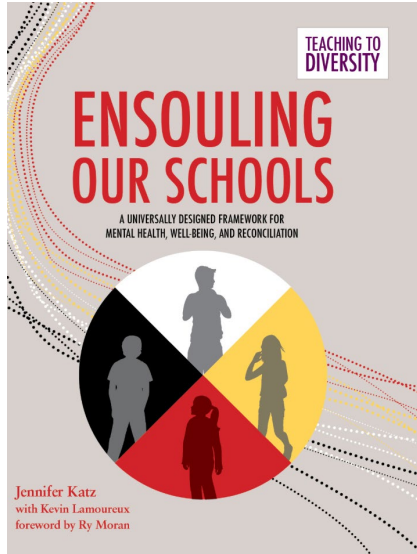


# Case Study Implications

1. Resources, resources, resources
2. Professional Learning
  1. Professional Learning Communities
  2. Appreciative Inquiry
3. Systemic Interventions
  1. Circle of Care
  2. Multi-Tiered Systems of Support
  3. Positive Psychological Interventions
4. Leadership & Decision-Making
  1. Distributed Leadership
  2. Team-Oriented Processes
  3. Shared Accountability



# Resource - Ensouling Our Schools



- Proposes a whole-school framework grounded in Indigenous teachings and the Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning to support the mental, spiritual, and emotional health of both students and staff.
- Offers practical unit plans and strategies for integrating inclusive education and reconciliation into the school environment, emphasizing both teacher and student well-being.



Chapter 7

Addressing Mental-Health Needs  
with All Students



# Resource - Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning

- Comprehensive, evidence-based curriculum for social, emotional, and ethical learning that advances SEL through the science of compassion; CASEL-recognized for high-quality programming
- Offers free curriculum, facilitator training, and an international learning community to help schools cultivate empathy, resilience, and positive relationships across diverse age groups.
- <https://seelearning.emory.edu/en/home>

SEE Learning has been recognized as an evidence-based program that has demonstrated impacts on social and emotional development, motivation, and classroom climate. Specifically:

- Studies have demonstrated increases in students' perspective-taking and empathic concern.
- Studies have shown that SEE Learning mitigates the typical decreases in perspective-taking and empathic concern observed during the school year, especially during end-of-year exam periods.
- Studies have highlighted the value SEE Learning brings to classrooms during periods of extreme social unrest, such as war and social violence.
- Studies have shown high levels of teacher engagement, acceptability, and personal growth during the implementation of SEE Learning.
- Studies have demonstrated the positive impact of SEE Learning on fostering classroom cultures of kindness and support worldwide.



# Resource – School Mental Health Ontario

- Centralized site offering evidence-informed mental health resources, lesson guides, and training tailored for educators, students, parents, administrators, and school mental health professionals.
- Focuses on building mentally healthy school environments and supporting student well-being through practical tools, literacy courses, and tiered strategies for schools.
- <https://smho-smso.ca/>

Together, we can support the mental health of every student

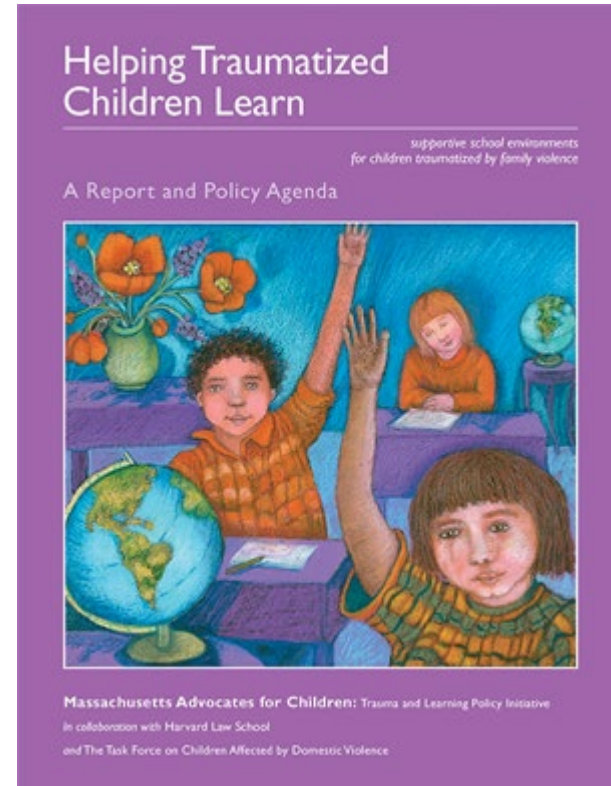


**School  
Mental Health  
Ontario**

**Santé mentale  
en milieu scolaire  
Ontario**

# Resource – Trauma Sensitive Schools

- Resource hub for implementing trauma-sensitive practices that support safe, inclusive learning environments for all students
- Offers practical guides, discussion videos, and professional development materials to help educators understand trauma's educational impact.
- <https://traumasensitiveschools.org/>



# Trauma -Informed School Counselling

1. Self-Care
2. Leadership
3. Helping Conversations  
(Empathy, Goal Finding,  
Strategy Building)
4. Trauma-Informed Praxis
  1. Solution-Focused Brief Therapy  
(SFBT)
  2. Mindfulness-Based Approaches  
(DBT, ACT)



# 1. Self-Care

Prioritize your mental health and wellbeing

- Mindset, activities, relationships
- Integration of personal and professional worlds

Avoid Compassion Fatigue!



	URGENT	NOT URGENT
IMPORTANT	<b>DO</b> <i>Do it now.</i> Write article for today.	<b>DECIDE</b> <i>Schedule a time to do it.</i> Exercising. Calling family and friends. Researching articles. Long-term biz strategy.
NOT IMPORTANT	<b>DELEGATE</b> <i>Who can do it for you?</i> Scheduling interviews. Booking flights. Approving comments. Answering certain emails. Sharing articles.	<b>DELETE</b> <i>Eliminate it.</i> Watching television. Checking social media. Sorting through junk mail.

Whatever floats your boat!

"What is important is seldom urgent and what is urgent is seldom important."  
-Dwight Eisenhower, 34th President of the United States

## 2. Leadership Ethics & Counselling

- **Distributed Leadership (DL)**

(Leemans, 2017; Harris & Spillane, 2008; Gronn, 2008)

- **Authentic Leadership (AL)**

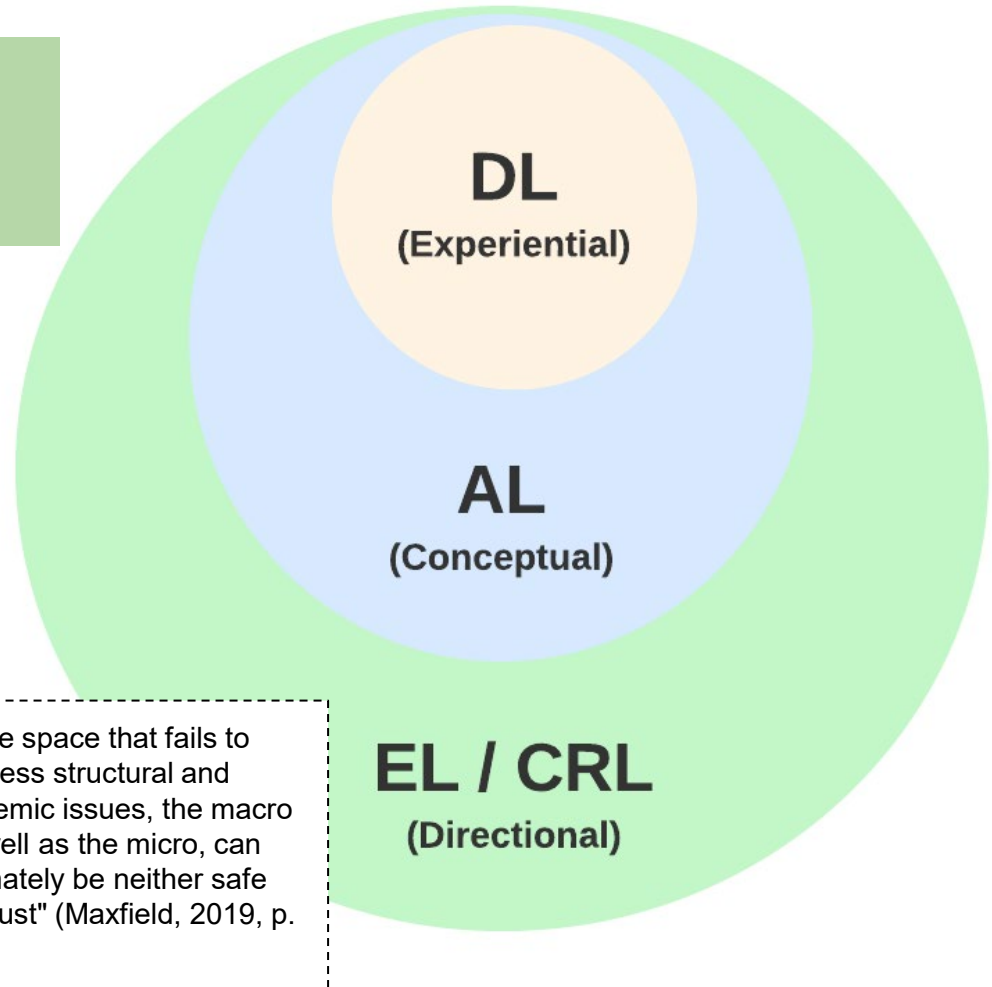
(Duignan, 2014; Northouse, 2022; Seligman, 2018)

- **Culturally-Responsive Leadership (CRL)**

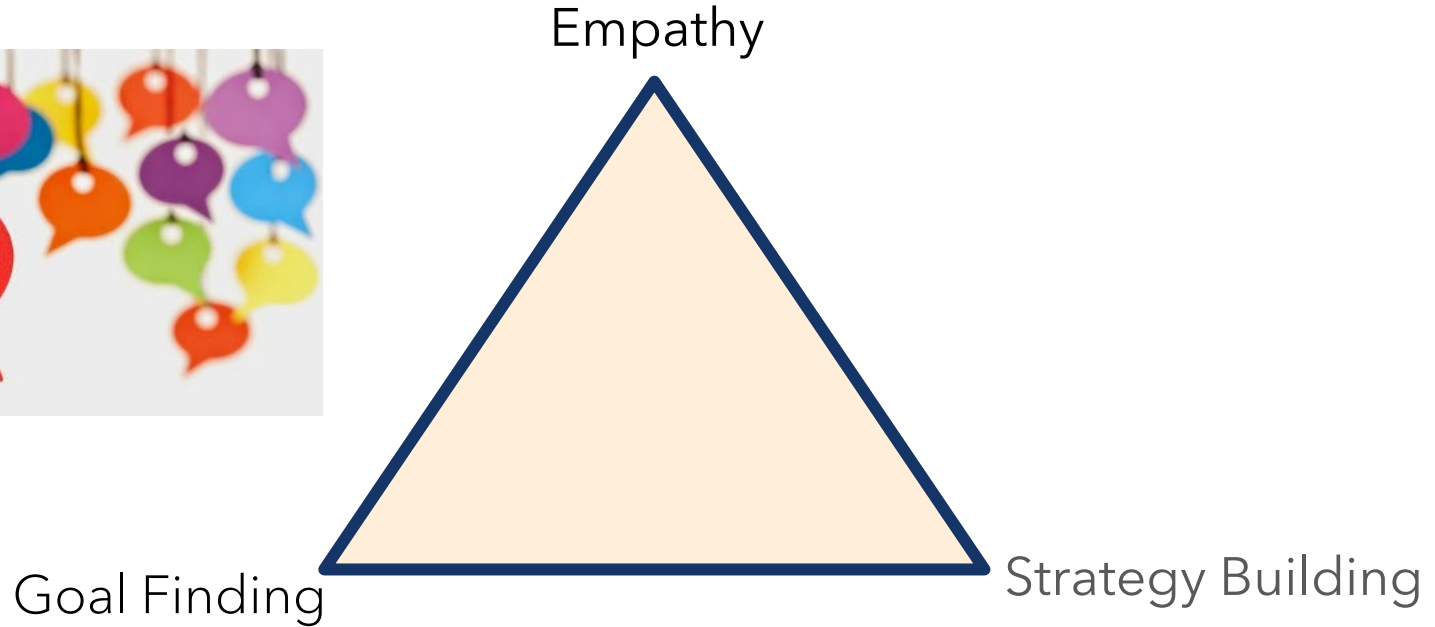
(Khalifa et al., 2016; Banwo et al., 2021; Shah, 2021; Dugan & Safir, 2021)

- **Ethical Leadership (EL)**

(Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016)



# 3. Helping Conversations



\*Non-Expert Stance (The client leads the discussion)

# 4. Solution -Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT)

SFBT – Founded by Insoo Kim Berg & Steve DeShazer

- **Stance**

- Solution-Focused (Not problem oriented)
- Brief (no requirement for client continuation)
- Non-Expert Stance (The client leads the discussion)
- Least-Invasive Approach (risk of re-traumatization low)

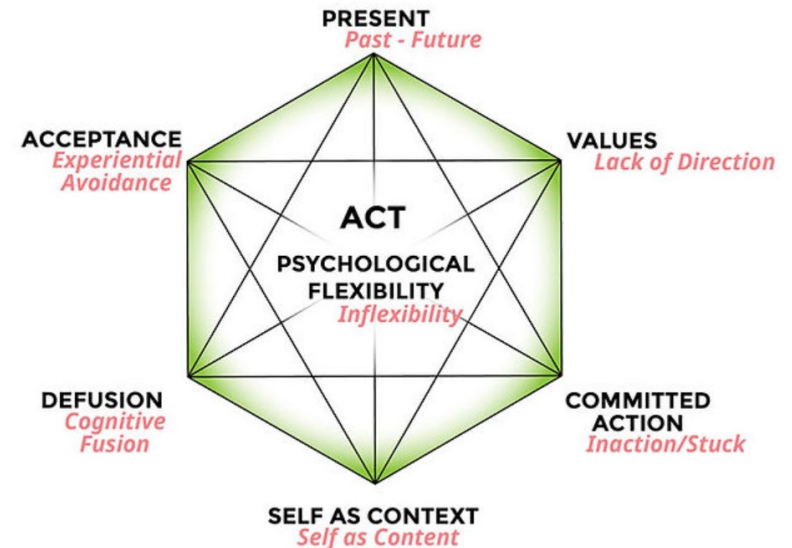
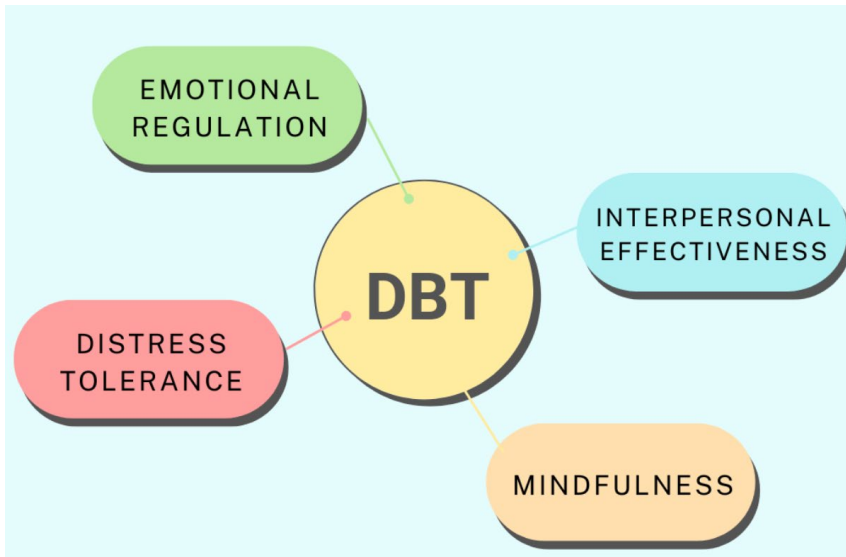
- **Tools**

- Questions elicit positive states, traits, resources from the client
  - **S**caling
  - **C**oping
  - **O**bjective
  - **R**elationships
  - **E**xceptions
- Miracle Question – Imagine that the problem doesn't exist. What are you doing instead?



# 5. Mindfulness -Based Approaches (ACT, DBT)

- Mindfulness-Based Approaches (ACT, DBT)
  - Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)
  - Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (Linehan)



# Resources

## 1. Trauma Sensitive Schools

**Topic:** Trauma-Informed School Frameworks  
Practical guides, PD materials, and tools for creating safe, inclusive learning environments.

 <https://traumasensitiveschools.org/>

## 2. School Mental Health Ontario

**Topic:** Mental Health & Wellbeing in Schools  
Evidence-informed resources for educators, students, and families to support mentally healthy school environments.

 <https://smho-smso.ca/>



# Resources

## 3. SEE Learning - Emory University

**Topic:** Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning


Free curriculum and training focused on compassion-based SEL, recognized by CASEL.

 <https://seelearning.emory.edu/en/home>

## 4. Ensouling Our Schools - Jennifer Katz & Kevin Lamoureux

**Topic:** Indigenous-Informed Whole-School Framework

Integrates UDL and Indigenous teachings to support student and staff wellbeing.

 Available via <https://www.portageandmainpress.com/Books/E/Ensouling-Our-Schools>

## 5. SAMHSA - Trauma-Informed Approach Framework

**Topic:** Organizational Change & Mental Health

Outlines the "4 Rs" (Realize, Recognize, Respond, Resist) and principles for trauma-informed systems.

 <https://www.samhsa.gov/trauma-violence/types>



# Resources

## 6. Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) Resources

**Topic:** Counselling Tools & Helping Conversations

Tools like scaling, coping, and the miracle question to support student agency and resilience.

 <https://www.sfbta.org/>

## 7. Mindfulness-Based Approaches (ACT & DBT)

**Topic:** Self-Regulation & Mental Health Interventions

Evidence-based practices for emotional regulation and trauma recovery.

 <https://contextualscience.org/act>

 <https://behavioraltech.org/resources/faqs/dialectical-behavior-therapy-dbt/>

