

# TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES DURING COVID-19

By April Gonzalez

*"This is going to be our Pearl Harbor moment, our 9/11 moment."*  
Surgeon General Jerome Adams  
April 5, 2020

Earlier this week Surgeon General Adams poignantly expressed what leaders in healthcare are saying – that we may be in the midst of or quickly approaching the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. From the Spanish Flu pandemic in 1918 and other crises in American history, we know that we will surely experience lasting social, emotional and financial impacts from this novel coronavirus.

In the news, there is already evidence of repercussions. There are reports of [Anti-Asian bias and harassment](#) a result of Coronavirus rumors and stigmatization. There are reports that [African-Americans](#) and [low-income families](#) are more vulnerable. There are reports that [students, especially teenagers](#), are experiencing the loss of rituals and rites of passage. There is no question that the outbreak of COVID-19 is a traumatic event in our lives.

Educators are increasingly aware of [trauma-informed teaching strategies](#) as we recognize that traumatic experiences in the lives of our students can have a harmful impact on their ability to feel safe. This can result in feelings and behaviors that disrupt a child's ability to learn. As students adapt to a "new norm" of learning from a distance, there are additional complexities and challenges. Although this generation of students is comfortable with using technology, they may not have the self-regulation skills or experience to be able to manage their learning online. They are learning in a more isolated setting with many potential sources of distraction. Competing with students' ability to focus are fears about their safety and well-being, and this is amplified for low-income students who are more likely not to have access to adequate nutrition, healthcare, and the resources they need to fully participate in distance learning.

As the virus peaks and its impact ripples more widely in our communities, the likelihood is strong that our students will experience additional stress. They may encounter illness and death among family and friends, family financial distress, and fear. We have yet to see the full impact of this traumatic event on our students and communities, so we need to prepare to support them.

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The [Spire Leadership Group](#) is an education-focused consulting firm based in Philadelphia. Spire Leadership is led by founder and president Tim Matheney, who previously served as a high school principal, the New Jersey Department of Education's Chief Intervention Officer, and the founding Executive Director of the Philadelphia Academy of School Leaders. Spire's team includes Consulting Associate April Gonzalez, a veteran principal, assistant principal, and curriculum supervisor. For more information on Spire Leadership, please email Tim ([tim@spireleadershipgroup.com](mailto:tim@spireleadershipgroup.com)), call 732-309-2296 or visit [spireleadershipgroup.com](http://spireleadershipgroup.com).

COVID-19 ADVISORY

APRIL 10, 2020



The [Spire Leadership Group](#) is sharing COVID-19 bulletins for K-12 educators throughout the coronavirus pandemic. If this advisory was forwarded to you, and you wish to receive it in your inbox, **please email the word "SUBSCRIBE"** to [tim@spireleadershipgroup.com](mailto:tim@spireleadershipgroup.com).

This document is intended to provide resources to school, district, and charter network leaders during the COVID-19 outbreak. For authoritative information on COVID-19, consult information from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and your state health department.

## RESOURCES FOR TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACHES

**National Child Traumatic Stress Network**  
[Resources](#)

**SanctuaryWeb**  
[Videos and Media](#)

**Center for Partnership Studies**  
[Resources and Videos](#)

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Recent publications provide insights on what educators can do to address the social and emotional needs of students during the COVID-19 outbreak while teaching them from a distance. [The National Child Traumatic Stress Coalition](#) recommends [approaches that include:](#)

- Establishing routines;
- Communicating clearly;
- Placing a focus on relationships over compliance; and
- Working to instill a sense of safety, connectedness, and hope.

Alex Shevrin Venet, a college instructor and consultant who focuses on trauma-informed teaching, similarly [describes the need for predictability, flexibility, connection, and empowerment in distance learning.](#)

The common themes are clear: meeting students where they are and maintaining and building relationships with students and their families. At a time when *social distancing* is the norm, informed educators can find ways, from a distance, for *social connecting* to ease students' fears and help them to feel safe.

## CHILDREN AND TRAUMA: RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

Even prior to COVID-19, **more than two thirds** of children reported having experienced at least one traumatic event by 16 years of age. **13.4%** of those children had developed some posttraumatic stress symptoms.

**More than one in five children** reported having experienced at least two [adverse childhood experiences](#) (ACEs). ACEs include experiences – such as a parent's death or being a victim of violence – that can lead to trauma and toxic stress and impact children's development and well-being.

ACEs affect students **across all family income levels**. However, **58 percent** of U.S. children with ACEs live in low-income homes (less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level).

Sources:

[Traumatic Events and Posttraumatic Stress in Childhood](#)

[Profile on Adverse Childhood Experiences](#)

## SPIRE LEADERSHIP RESOURCES

The Spire Leadership Group is publishing free resources for educators and parents during the COVID-19 pandemic. Follow the links to our two most recent resource documents:



[Supporting Children During the Trauma of COVID-19](#): This document lists a variety of resources supporting children during the trauma of COVID-19.



[Supporting Children with Disabilities](#): This document provides a list of websites with resources for parents and teachers of children with disabilities.