

Trauma & Society Policy Brief:

A psychoeducational course for schools, residential, and community settings

The problem is well-understood: trauma impacts adolescent physical health, psychological and social well-being, and life outcomes. Every adolescent deserves a strong start to early adulthood, but trauma can make this a difficult time to endure. Some students do not know how to navigate trauma, how to help their peers cope, or what role they can play in providing trauma informed care.

Developed by the non-profit Growing Forward Together, Trauma and Society (T&S) is an innovative trauma-specific program that serves both as a psychoeducational intervention and as a standards-aligned social studies course. It can serve any student who identifies as having experienced a traumatic event/circumstance or who is interested in trauma-informed care career exploration. T&S is a textbook and educational program delivered to students individually, in small groups, or classroom settings by a tutor or teacher with consultation from a clinical partner. This policy brief outlines how T&S fits into the Trauma Informed Care (TIC) system to serve as a Tier II-targeted program that provides students with the knowledge and skills to manage trauma effects themselves and with others.

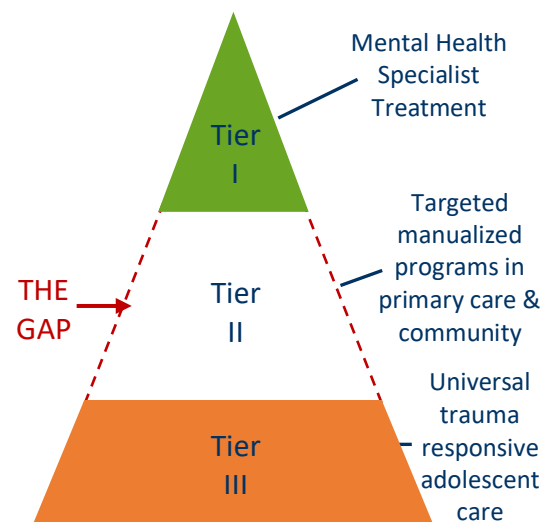
Targeted trauma interventions that tailor to adolescent needs are courses that match current high school students to trained educators who instruct on individual coping mechanisms and societal solutions. By connecting adolescents early on to resources and information, trauma-specific interventions are a way to heal past traumas and educate for the future.

Addressing trauma-related unmet needs is a mandate backed by 27 federal agencies. Specialist intervention is scarce. A universal trauma-informed approach is not enough for students struggling alone with traumatic experiences and their aftermath. Targeted interventions, such as the T&S course fill the critical gap. A school-based course advances equity because it can reach students from all backgrounds and reward them with academic credit.

“The text sounds like the authors were speaking or having a conversation with me, so I was very engaged.”
-Student

“The kind, personal welcome with learning track options, clear boundaries, contract, and exit plan flawlessly sets the tone for the entire learning experience.”
-Student

T&S Fills a Crucial Gap in the Trauma Informed Care System



- 60% - 70% of youth in the U.S. are exposed to a potentially traumatic event.
- The overall PTSD rate among adolescents who have experienced at least one traumatic event is 15.9%.
- Minority populations in the U.S., such as youth who are BIPOC or LGBTQ+, or have experienced homelessness, immigration, refugee status, incarceration, and more have a PTSD rate near 30%.
- Secondary problems that occur if PTSD is unaddressed include depression, anxiety, substance use, violence and revictimization as well as despair, self-harm, and loss of life trajectory.



The T&S course enhances the likelihood of attaining the 8 positive life outcomes for emerging adults:

1. Educational attainment
2. Gainful activity
3. Desistance from criminal activity
4. Interpersonal functioning
5. Responsible sex and parenting
6. Residential independence
7. Mental health
8. Abstaining from substance use

Schools, community organizations, and institutions can **address two specific needs** to support students and their trauma related needs during adolescence:

1. Provide advanced trauma training to teachers and other youth-serving staff:

Ensure an accessible and trained professional that provides support and guidance throughout the duration of the course. Teachers and tutors educate students about trauma coping mechanisms and career exploration that adolescents can utilize to achieve the eight life outcomes in the future.

2. Placing an outstanding tool into the hands of students and adolescents:

Provide students with a course textbook that allows them to address trauma individually and through a human rights perspective with coordinating social studies lessons, content-based questions, and assignments.

Recommendations:

1. **Further local and state-wide implementation:**
 - a. T&S is **ready to be offered as a social studies elective course** in educational institutions. Further implementation and evaluation of the textbook and course is crucial to its expansion and evolution.
 - b. T&S is **ready to be implemented in community and residential settings.**
 - c. Connections with **school districts and state institutions** (e.g., State Department of Education) are essential to expanding T&S. Additional partnerships with T&S will promote trauma-informed care, expand career exploration, and support more students in navigating unique experiences with trauma.
2. **Strengthen funding:**
 - a. Funds in the form of **reimbursements or payments** to schools, community and residential organizations that are equipped to deliver T&S would expand trauma intervention for students.
 - b. Many schools have **little to no career exploration for students** to enroll in, especially in social studies courses and systemically disadvantaged areas. Funding for the T&S course and textbook would allow adolescents to recognize the significance of TIC and how they can deliver it professionally in society.

Funding for pilot projects and effectiveness research is needed now. In the future, funding to support access to the curriculum and devoting one teacher's time to this elective course will be all that is needed to reach as many as 30 students. This frontline program supports students to use adaptive coping, stay on track with their life

"The beauty of T&S is that it is NOT a clinical approach but an educational one."
-Professor of Social Work

"This has potential to be an amazing adjunct to high school student's curriculum."
-A Health Educator

"The first thing that comes to mind for me as a middle-aged person is: I wish this was available for me when I was in high school."
-Adult Stakeholder