

**Prevention
Practitioners
Network**

Prevention through Education

*A Practice Guide for the US Prevention
Practitioners Network*

ISD

Powering solutions
to extremism
and polarisation



ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

About this Practice Guide

THE US PREVENTION PRACTITIONERS NETWORK

Since September 2020, [the McCain Institute](#), with support from [the Institute for Strategic Dialogue](#) (ISD) and a steering committee of violence prevention and social safety experts, have been developing and engaging a [US practitioners network](#) for individuals working in **targeted violence and terrorism prevention (TVTP)**. The aim of this is not only to connect practitioners across the US with one another, but also to build their capacity and the efficacy of their programs through a series of workshops that cover both theoretical and practical elements of delivering prevention and intervention initiatives, and through providing information packs and practice guides in supplement to these workshops.

For more information about the Network or to access past information packs and practice guides, visit [the McCain Institute's website](#).

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This document is one in a series of practice guides that ISD and the McCain Institute are producing for this emerging Prevention Practitioners Network. It is a resource for existing and prospective network members that deliver (or seek to deliver) TVTP interventions. This particular guide supplements the third symposium that was delivered for the emerging Network, and focuses on the role of educators in prevention.

How does this differ from the read-ahead materials prepared in advance of the workshops?

The read-ahead materials provided to participants prior to each workshop and symposium are entry-level resources that provide context and background on a given topic, helping participants prepare for the workshop and identify potential questions for discussion. Read-ahead materials are prepared and provided for every workshop and symposium. You can access past read ahead-materials [here](#).

The practice guides, on the other hand, combine the contents of the read-ahead materials with insights from the workshops to provide both a conceptual overview of and practice tips for the given topic, which Network members can refer to in their work.

Practice guides will be provided to Network members every few months. The first practice guide covers [multi-disciplinary staffing considerations in interventions to prevent targeted violence and terrorism](#), the second provides an overview of [key legal considerations for TVTP interventions](#), the third looks at the [targeted violence threat landscape](#) in the US, the fourth provides tips for [integrating behavioral assessment and management](#).

For any inquiries, please contact [the McCain Institute](#) or [ISD](#).



Background - why the topic of prevention through education?

In 2015, the UN released its Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, which emphasizes the role of education in preventing violence, and encourages UN member states to "invest in education," and "implement education programs that promote 'global citizenship'." This focus on education, and the Plan's general emphasis on the importance of a whole-of-society response to targeted violence, marked a broader shift in international approaches to countering terrorism and targeted violence from a heavily-securitized focus to a softer one centered on multi-disciplinary resilience-building against and addressing the root causes of hate, polarization and targeted violence.

Educators play a vital role in this whole-of-society approach, by virtue of their direct and daily interface with young people, who are in formative periods of their lives when they form perceptions around their own identity and the identity of others, and are generally easily influenced by the social and environmental inputs they are exposed to.



The term "educators" is used in this practice guide to refer to all school staff that hold a teaching, coaching (e.g., sports coaches, school club leaders) or similar position.

WHAT CAN EDUCATORS ACTUALLY DO?



Reinforce pro-social values and facilitate an inclusive classroom environment: with their daily interaction with children, and the position

of "influence" they may hold over their students, educators are well-placed to reinforce positive values such as respect for human rights and appreciation for cultural similarities and differences. Educators can also create environments that foster inclusion and connectivity, which mitigate against feelings of non-belonging and social exclusion, both of which may make a young person more susceptible to harmful narratives and behaviors.



Identify concerning behaviors and responding accordingly: with the right support and training, teachers and school staff more widely can be

empowered to identify concerning behaviors and respond accordingly, facilitating the necessary support for the child by referring them to the appropriate services and thus mitigating against escalations in concerning behavior (e.g., to violence). Educators can also directly support behavioral assessment and management (should a child's behavior require this) by providing relevant practitioners - a youth or social worker, for example - insight into the child's behavior in a school setting, their academic strengths and potential areas for concern, whether that's truancy or their engagement with peers.



Provide trauma-informed teaching and care:

educators are also in position to identify signs of trauma amongst their students. Trauma-informed

teaching can help children who are experiencing or have experienced trauma feel safe in schools, connected to their peers and build positive relationships that can mitigate against the long-term harms of trauma, including social anxiety, general feelings of fear and insecurity, and self-enforced isolation from friends and others.



Create a safe space in which to discuss difficult topics, like identity-based hate and

discrimination: educators that are sensitized to issues of identity-based hate and bias, like racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, antisemitism, Islamophobia, and others, can provide their students with a forum in which to discuss this, particularly the impact it has on society and on targeted individuals.



Teach students about digital literacy and digital citizenship: educators can provide young people with practical guidance on how to recognize

and report online hate crimes, how to stay safe online, how to fact-check sources and good cybersecurity practice more broadly. Strong digital media skills can build a child's resilience against disinformation, conspiracy theories, extremist recruitment and other mal-intended behavior online.

Chapter 1 - Trauma-Informed Teaching

Across the TVTP landscape, there is increased understanding of the importance of being trauma-aware in preventing and responding to targeted violence. Referred to as "trauma-informed care," this ultimately ["requires that service systems \(e.g., mental health, social services, education, law enforcement\) recognize and respond to the impact of traumatic stress on those who have contact with these systems, including children, caregivers, and service providers themselves."](#)

Trauma-informed approaches to TVTP therefore:

- Recognize that trauma impacts individuals in different ways, and understands there is flexibility and adaptability required to accommodate the specific needs and "triggers" of traumatized individuals
- Understand that traumatized individuals may not proactively seek professional support to deal with their trauma, or may not recognize that what they're experiencing is trauma in the first place
- Realize that an individual's trauma may be exacerbated in environments where there is a lack of understanding or accommodation of the impacts of their trauma on their social, mental and emotional well-being

This chapter explores what trauma-informed teaching might look like, the role that this plays in prevention, and provides tips and practice examples to inspire educators.

UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA - KEY DEFINITIONS:

- **Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE):** ACEs refer to ["potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood"](#), and can range from experiencing or witnessing abuse to being in a home environment where someone - a parent/guardian or sibling, for example - struggles with substance abuse or suicide ideation. According to a [survey](#) by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), 61% of respondents across 25 states reported experienced an ACE by the time they were 18, with about 17% reporting they experienced at least four.
- **Trauma:** refers to the ["physical, cognitive and emotional response"](#) to an event, series of events or set of circumstances that make the individual(s) concerned feel unsafe, physically, emotionally and/or mentally threatened or otherwise causes them injury (referred to in this information pack as "traumatic events"). There are [different types](#) of trauma:
 - **Acute Trauma:** refers to trauma that results from a single event. This may result from an accident or near-accident, (sexual) assault, a natural disaster, among others.
 - **Chronic Trauma:** exposure to prolonged traumatic events. Examples include domestic abuse, bullying, and serious illness.

- **Complex Trauma:** complex trauma involves exposure to multiple, varied traumatic events that are usually interpersonal, where a child, for example, is regularly and directly harmed by another person. This can lead to serious long-term attachment issues and thus impact a child's social and general development.
- **Historical Trauma:** sometimes referred to as "collective trauma," historical trauma results from traumatic experiences "that are shared by a group of people within a society." Examples include genocide, war, systematic oppression and economic depression.
- **Inter-Generational Trauma:** when trauma affects or is passed down to subsequent generations. This is sometimes referred to as "multigenerational" or "transgenerational" trauma. Inter-generational trauma can refer to collective or historical trauma that is felt by generations subsequent to those that directly experienced the traumatic event(s), or can refer to trauma that is passed down from a caregiver to a child, for example.
- **Vicarious Trauma:** also known as secondary trauma, this refers to the traumatization of those who are working with individuals that have trauma. This may include social workers, targeted violence intervention providers more broadly, teachers and others.
- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):** refers to an anxiety disorder that can result from living through or witnessing traumatic events. Symptoms include re-experiencing the trauma, usually in the form of flashbacks, painful memories or nightmares, being triggered and reminded of the traumatic event(s) by different sensory inputs, hypervigilance, lack of sleep, among others.

THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA:

The impact of trauma manifests in different ways and is unique per individual. What is universal, however, is that its impact cannot be understated: whether it is acute, chronic or complex, unaddressed trauma can significantly impede on a person's social and cognitive ability, and can have long-term consequences that affect their interactions with others, themselves and with their environment. The impacts that trauma can have may include:

- **Cognitive:** a traumatized person may struggle with basic cognitive functions. They may find it hard to pay attention, retain information, organize themselves, be able to prioritize and manage time, among others.

In **children**, this may result in poor academic performance, truancy and general behavioral issues, as well as a lack of communication and other life skills. Trauma may impact other types of **childhood development**, including physical and emotional.

- **Emotional / Mental Health:** traumatized individuals may struggle to regulate their emotions, feeling high levels of emotional distress, fear and insecurity. This may make them hypervigilant, mentally exhausting them and making them unable to fulfill their basic needs. Some individuals may resort to self-harm or develop other mental health concerns, like eating disorders, as a way to express and manage difficult emotions.

In **children**, poor coping mechanisms that can develop in response to emotional impacts of trauma can make them vulnerable - in the immediate and long-term - to other types of mental ill-health (e.g., anxiety disorders, eating disorders), addiction and general irritability.

- **Interpersonal:** individuals that have experienced trauma may struggle to form positive relationships with others.

In **children** that have witnessed or experienced abuse at the hands of an adult, the consequent trauma may make them distrustful of other adults and perceive all adults as threats to their safety and security. This can, in turn, impede on their social and cognitive development, given the importance of adult role models and socializing more broadly in teaching children interpersonal and other soft skills.

- **Social:** similar to the interpersonal consequences, traumatized individuals may struggle in social situations, choosing to isolate themselves in order to avoid these altogether. This ostracism makes them vulnerable to being exploited by others, and may exacerbate their other trauma symptoms given the lack of exposure to mitigating influences, such as positive role models and healthy peer networks.

In **children**, there is particular concern that such ostracism can severely impede their overall social development. They may start to associate most, if not all, social interaction with negative emotions, and thus struggle to learn how to build relationships and healthily interact with others.



Unfortunately, trauma in children is not uncommon, with some 61% of respondents to a survey by the Center for Disease Control reporting that they had experienced a potentially traumatic event (or an "adverse childhood experience") by the age of 18, with 17% reporting they had experienced at least four such events.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT FOR TVTP?

While trauma alone does not cause radicalization to violence, and trauma history should never be considered in isolation when considering an individual's "risk" of radicalization, trauma is increasingly understood to be a common experience of many (not all) individuals that have joined harmful movements.

For example, in some cases, the above-mentioned impacts of trauma can reduce an individual's resilience to and critical thinking of extremist propaganda. Scapegoating, for example, is a core component of extremist propaganda, in which specific communities (e.g., "out-groups") are blamed for an in-group's (real or perceived) grievances. This may resonate with traumatized individuals, who might be looking - often subconsciously - for a way to explain their circumstances. Traumatized individuals that have isolated themselves also lack the healthy peer networks that can serve as a protective factor against radicalization, for example.

Trauma ultimately has implications for radicalization: it can reduce an individual's resilience to harmful narratives, and the impacts of trauma can be exploited by mal-intended actors for radicalization and

recruitment purposes. TVTP practitioners should therefore be trauma-aware, and build an understanding of how to deliver services that are trauma-informed.



TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE - PRACTICE TIPS FOR EDUCATORS

Recognizing that trauma is complex and has multi-faceted impacts that differ from individual to individual,

1. Learn to recognize concerning behaviors that might suggest a child is traumatized. These may include, among others:

- Isolating themselves from others
- Hypervigilance, especially in social situations, or lethargy
- Increased thinking about death and safety. This may be expressed in different ways, including verbally or visually through drawings, among others. This ties in with the concept of "[leakage](#)", which is when "a student intentionally or unintentionally reveals clues to feelings, thoughts, fantasies, attitudes, or intentions that signal an impending act. These clues can take the form of subtle threats, boasts, innuendos, predictions, or ultimatums." They can be conveyed in numerous forms (e.g., stories, diaries, journals, essays, poems, manifestos, letters, songs, drawings, and videos)
- General irritability, being quick to anger and seemingly unable to process or regulate strong emotions

2. You may also be able to identify trauma by paying attention to the following factors, These may be exacerbated - or indeed caused - by trauma:

- Coping skills - is the child able to express their feelings in a healthy way? Unhealthy coping mechanisms manifest in a range of ways, ranging from (violent) outbursts to completely shutting down, eating disorders, self-harm, suicidality, and substance abuse.
- Personal relationships - Does the child succeed or struggle with forming relationships? What do their friend/peer groups look like? What do you know of their family situation? Do they have positive relationships, as far as you are aware? Do they have good role models and/or a consistent and healthy social circle?
- Attendance - Is there a history of truancy? Are there notable unexplained absences? What does overall school attendance look like? While in the classroom, are they engaged?
- Academic and extracurricular interests - Is the child engaged in the classroom (in either educational or social activities), or do they seem completely checked out? Have they shown interest in curricular or extracurricular activities?

3. **Create an inclusive class environment where everyone is encouraged to share and contribute to the class culture. This can help mitigate traumatic impacts - for example, social isolation - by helping students feel connected to and appreciated by their peers and educator(s). Beyond helping students with trauma, it encourages and sets positive examples of empathy and global citizenship.**

[Educational displacement](#), or the notion that a student feels unheard, invisible or otherwise neglected in classroom and other school settings, can create an emotional and cognitive vacuum that students may seek to fill elsewhere. With the digital nativity of today's younger generations, and the aptness with which mal-intended actors are able to spread hateful and otherwise dangerous propaganda online, there is risk of that vacuum being filled by such harmful content and narratives.

While educational displacement can be due, in part, to structural problems (e.g., poor, one-sided or discriminatory educational curricula), educators can play a vital role in helping students feel included and empowered. Encouraging children to share, and prompting quieter or otherwise less engaged students to get involved, are but a few tactics for building an inclusive educational setting. Highlighting shared interests amongst children, for example, can create feelings of connectedness and empathy, both of which can serve as protective factors against radicalization and other harms. Other ways to foster inclusive classroom environments include, but are not limited to:

- **Gently praise students for sharing their perspectives and asking questions** - positive reinforcement as such may encourage quieter students to speak up;
- **Normalize and encourage students to express their feelings:** consider starting or ending your class with a well-being check-in, for example. This doesn't necessarily need to be verbal - you can use arts and other creative approaches and prompts to gauge how your students are feeling. If you are considered by a particular student's response, consider speaking to them privately once the class has finished, or checking in with other school officials they are exposed to to see if they have noticed anything of concern;
- **Use inclusive language** - even small shifts in language can make a big difference. For example, instead of saying "Christmas holiday," use "winter break." To take this further, invest in educating your students about different religious and cultural holidays. Consider inviting colleagues or community leaders that observe different holidays to your classroom to share what such observation entails. In addition to the inclusion and global citizenship this fosters, it will help students of different faith or cultural backgrounds feel empowered and comfortable to express their beliefs. Similarly, acknowledge and mark international days / months, like Black History Month and Pride Month. This can go beyond verbal recognition: consider displaying photos and other visuals to commemorate key historical figures and events that advanced human rights or otherwise encouraged inclusion.

Consider having a bulletin where you mark different international days, religious and cultural holidays and events, students birthdays, etc. This will give them important exposure to different beliefs and practices and - through recognizing diverse backgrounds - can help students (particularly from minority communities) feel appreciated.

4. Teach soft skills around communication, empathy, leadership, teamwork, critical-thinking.

By setting examples of empathy and promoting a collaborative school environment, teachers, sports coaches, school counselors and others can make students feel listened to and empowered.

5. Create a "safe zone" where students that feel socially or emotionally overwhelmed can go to take a break from activities.

Students with trauma may feel triggered by specific activities and social interactions. By creating a "safe zone" inside the classroom that they and other students can go to should they feel overwhelmed, educators are essentially showing their students that their feelings - triggers and otherwise - are understood.

If a student requires the "safe zone," be sure to ask them privately why this was the case. By encouraging students to speak with you about why they felt overwhelmed, you are also teaching them healthy emotional regulation. What they ultimately learn is that they can remove themselves from overwhelming situations and discuss why with others without shame. Discussing this with their teacher can be particularly impactful, with educators able to serve as role models with the ability to have profound, positive influence over their students.

Further, this can also help educators learn how else they may need to adapt their teaching approaches, and whether any students (for example, those that frequently require the "safe zone") may require additional support (e.g., from the school counselor).

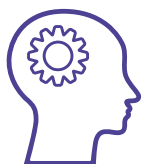
6. Where there are changes to a class structure or teaching routine, notify your students in advance, if possible.

Students with an intensive trauma history may feel triggered by sudden changes in routine and/or environment. As much as possible, notify students well in advance if there are planned changes to a schedule, staff or other aspects of the school setting. If you, for example, plan to be absent, tell your students in advance so they can prepare emotionally. As noted, children with trauma can struggle to build relationships: they may therefore be particularly affected by the sudden absence of adults (e.g., their teacher, counselor and other school staff they have significant exposure to) that they have come to trust and see as role models.



Chapter 2 - Critical Thinking

Besides serving as positive role models and making students - whether they have a trauma history or not - feel safe, heard and appreciated, educators can teach students critical thinking skills that buffer their resilience against violent narratives. This chapter explores two important components of critical thinking: digital citizenship and media literacy.



DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

According to a [study](#) by Common Sense Media, between 2019 and 2021, daily screen time amongst children aged eight to 12 increased by more than five hours, and by seven hours for children aged 13 to 18. Further, nearly 20% of respondents aged eight to 12 reported using social media everyday, [despite the minimum age of use for many platforms being 13](#). Although this is due, in part, to COVID-19 restrictions requiring children to look online for their social needs (and, of course, for their education), it reflects a longer-lasting trend: between 2015 and 2019, for example, there was an 11% increase in daily screen time amongst 13 to 18-year-olds. While the digital technology era has undoubtedly brought with it significant benefits, enabling us to access an unfathomable library of knowledge and connect with others around the world at the click of a button, there are also significant dangers posed by the digital world. Harmful content ranging from child pornography, glorification of self-harm, animal abuse, terrorist and other violence remains available, despite progressions with content moderation, and the increased pressure placed on technology companies to ensure the safety of the users of their platforms. Internet users may also be subject to cyber attacks, such as hackings and phishing scams.

Despite these threats, and the digital nativity of today's youth, education curricula have not adapted to instill good digital hygiene and safety practices from a young age. Regardless, even without formal inclusion in curricula, educators can incorporate **digital citizenship training** into their existing lesson plans.

Digital citizenship "refers to the ability to engage positively, critically and competently in the digital environment, drawing on the skills of effective communication and creation, to practice forms of social participation that are respectful of human rights and dignity through the responsible use of technology."

Among others, digital citizenship training promotes the application online of the same critical thinking and interpersonal skills individuals would practice offline (for example, encouraging individuals to think critically of how they interact with strangers, and to understand that the perceived "anonymity" of being behind a screen is no excuse for speaking unkindly to others).

Through incorporating digital citizenship practices into their teaching, educators also provide their students with the tools and vocabulary for identifying and speaking up when they are exposed to harmful content online. Pages 11 to 14 outline key concepts that educators can raise awareness about for this purpose.



MEDIA LITERACY

Beyond their apt use of social media, extremist and other mal-intended actors are adept at manipulating and distributing information to radicalize, recruit and mobilize others to their cause(s). The prevalence amongst extremist movements of conspiracy theories like the "New World Order" and "The Great Replacement," and the rapid rise of QAnon, are but a few stark examples of how foundational disinformation and conspiracies have become to the extremist and terrorist threat landscapes. False information also has proven potential to lead to offline violence, with numerous acts of terrorism attributed, at least in part, to theories like "The Great Replacement." This situation is exacerbated by the availability of related messaging online, with social media and other digital platforms unable to keep up with the coded and "softer" language used to spread related narratives.



In summary:

Digital citizenship refers to critical, safe and healthy digital practice.

Media literacy refers to the ability to consume, analyze and respond to (online and offline) information critically and constructively.

Media literacy is another crucial skill that educators can help their students build, and which will strengthen their resilience against harmful narratives and conspiracies. It ultimately refers to the ability to consume and process information critically and responsibly, recognizing, for example, that information may be presented as factual when it is not, and that bias and the specific motivation behind which a piece of content is produced will affect the amount and manner with which information in that piece of content is presented. It ties in with digital citizenship in that being media literate can help students identify and navigate information manipulation and the sheer breadth and accessibility of information online. While media literacy translates offline as well, this guide focuses on digital media literacy, given that most children, and indeed adults, rely on online platforms and sources for daily news and other information.



KEY CONCEPTS

To help educators broach media literacy and digital citizenship with their students, this section runs through several key concepts that students should be made aware of to safely navigate the online world. These are informed by existing resources for teachers, including comprehensive guides and curricula that teachers can follow to teach media literacy and digital citizenship, examples of which are listed in Appendix One.

CHECKING SOURCES AND GOING BEYOND THE HEADLINE

One of the most important skills that educators can reinforce in the classroom is checking sources. This is a skill students need to develop anyway to complete assignments, but is also vital to help students identify whether a piece of content they are exposed to is reputable or not. Key concepts to cover include:

- [Biased writing](#) - "when an author shows favoritism or prejudice towards a particular opinion, instead of being fair and balanced." This can be positive or negative, and is usually recognizable by black-and-white framing of the given topic.
- [Bias by omission](#) - where certain stories or perspectives are ignored in favor of those that fit the author's bias.
- [Opinion vs. fact](#) - understanding that some authors may present their opinion as fact, or may "blur the line between fact and opinion to make their argument more convincing."
- Clickbait - where a headline or thumbnail uses sensational (and often misleading) language to attract readers to click onto the accompanying link.
- [Sensationalism](#) - where language is used to evoke an emotional response (usually negative), for example outrage, distress, shock.

Beyond making them aware of the above concepts, encourage students to ask themselves the following questions to help them get into the habit of consuming content critically and responsibly.

- What information has been presented? Is there anything obvious missing? Encourage students to relay the information they have consumed aloud - this may help them learn to identify whether they need more information to be able to present a comprehensive picture of the given topic.
- What is the objective of this piece of information? Is the author trying to sway the reader in a specific direction? Is there sensational language? Are there obvious stereotypes, for example about an ethnic and/or religious group?

UNDERSTANDING FILTER BUBBLES AND ECHO CHAMBERS

Filter bubbles occur when ["users are suggested content based on previous internet habits and interactions."](#) In time, users may be exposed only to content that aligns with their viewpoint and interests, isolating them from different perspectives and topics.

Echo chambers are similar, but refer specifically to digital spaces where internet users are subject only to content that reinforces their ideas and beliefs, and where there are limited to no differing perspectives presented. The danger of both lies in their simplification of complex topics and events. Filter bubbles and echo chambers can cause a lack of socialization with opinions that might differ from an individual's own, which may make them less empathetic or open to such opinions when they do eventually come across them. To broach this with your students, consider posing and hosting a facilitated discussion around the following questions:

- What happens if the information we receive comes from one place only?
- How can we get a fuller understanding of a given topic? What obstacles might prevent us from obtaining a fuller understanding?
- What echo chambers are you part of? How do you know these are echo chambers?
- What do you think you can do to step out of these echo chambers?

MISINFORMATION, DISINFORMATION AND CONSPIRACY THEORIES

The terms "**misinformation**" and "**disinformation**" have come to the forefront of public safety and public health discussions since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, in light of thousands of (fringe) outlets, social media influencers and other profiles sharing false claims about the origins of the virus, measures to protect against contracting the virus, and the purpose of vaccinations. The [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) outlines the severe consequences of this "[infodemic](#)" of false claims and misleading information, including, but not limited to, individuals acting on unevidenced claims and thus unknowingly placing their lives and the lives of others at risk; mistrust in health authorities, which in turn undermines the public health response; longer or more intense outbreaks of the virus as a result of people being overwhelmed with information and thus being unsure about how to protect their health and the health of their dependents. Disinformation surrounding the pandemic has also fueled hate, polarization and extremism through debunked claims that accuse certain communities of "creating" the virus or making the pandemic worse.

The rapid spread of disinformation through social media - whether through dedicated campaigns and accounts, algorithms or "influencers" - is of particular concern to parents, guardians and educators given children in the US are more likely to get their news from social media than directly from news outlets. As avid social media users that are still developing the cognitive, emotional and practical skills to distinguish between real and fake news, original and manipulated content (e.g., photos and videos), and reputable vs. irresponsible sources, the potential impact of disinformation (and other online harms) is particularly poignant.

By teaching critical-thinking skills, raising awareness and giving practical tips for identifying fake news, educators can help reduce the impact of disinformation on their students.

Key concepts for educators to be aware of include:

- **Misinformation:** Information that is false, but the person who disseminates it may believe it is true.
- **Disinformation:** Information that is false and deliberately shared to cause harm or to influence.
- **Conspiracy Theories:** A type of mis/disinformation, conspiracy theories seek to explain a phenomenon by invoking a sinister plot orchestrated by powerful actors. Adherents to conspiracies usually see themselves as an "initiated few" who have access to hidden or "secret" knowledge.

To teach critical and responsible consumption of information, educators should go beyond explaining what misinformation etc. is, and should also explore with their students why it is produced. This can help students identify and navigate false information they are exposed to. Prompt students to consider whether there are financial incentives, personal or other reasons (e.g., political) that might have prompted the author to create disinformative content, and/or other users to disseminate it.



TIPS FOR INSTILLING CRITICAL INFORMATION CONSUMPTION AMONGST STUDENTS:

- Prompt students to check the URLs of content they consume - websites that share harmful content or are otherwise not credible may contain spelling mistakes or have unusual endings, for example;
 - This may be the case throughout the website or article/piece of content - spelling mistakes and significant errors with grammar would have been corrected by most reputable media outlets before publication.
- Ask students to consider the overall tone and language used - is it sensational? Is the language used emotional and hyperbolic? This may indicate the author hopes to sway their readers to align with their beliefs. If the piece of content is presented as news (e.g., in its visual format), this is particularly problematic, as it can give off a sense of legitimacy to an otherwise biased piece of writing.
- Remind students to check any sources that are cited - are these well-known, credible sources? Are statistics, images and other statements referenced? A trustworthy piece of content will include references for most, if not all claims and images it includes.
- Teach children how to respond - if they have doubts about a piece of content that they are exposed to in the classroom, encourage them to raise it with you. Depending on the age of your students, make them aware of how they themselves can respond in a safe and responsible manner, including by reporting suspicious content to website or platform administrators, and violent or threatening content to the police or a third-party reporting service. Students should never share content they suspect or know to be false information with other peers, nor should they attempt to engage with the authors of such content. This can subject them to harassment and other harms.

Reinforce constructive responses to harmful content through visuals and other types of messaging - consider including posters and flyers in your classroom that tell students how to respond should they come across false and other harmful content online, for example.

Chapter 3 - Other Considerations

Chapters one and two provide examples of how educators can help prevent targeted violence and terrorism through trauma-informed care and teaching soft and practical skills for safe digital practice and information consumption. This chapter explores how education institutions (e.g., through school boards and management) can support their educators with the above, and with ensuring the appropriate frameworks are in place should there be concerns about a particular student that warrant an intervention beyond what their teacher is qualified to provide.

1. Offer creative (e.g., performing or visual arts), sports-based and other extra-curricular activities:

After school programs and clubs are a great way to keep children engaged in safe and fun activities. Team-based activities can help build pro-social skills, team-oriented and strategic thinking, and develop positive social networks outside of the classroom environment. Club leads, sports coaches and other staff involved can also serve as positive role models for the children they oversee, setting examples of inclusion by ensuring all participating students are given opportunity to learn the skills being taught as part of that activity, for example.

2. Create a one-to-one mentoring program between educators and students:

Mentoring can help give children positive role models, build positive relationships, develop social skills and positive aspirations. Mentoring can be particularly helpful for students who are (or feel they are) falling behind the rest of their peers, and for students with trauma that have otherwise withdrawn from social interaction.

3. Build the capacity of teachers to broach difficult topics like identity-based hate:

School boards and management can help facilitate training for teachers on how to broach topics like identity-based hate. Alternatively, relevant cross-grade school staff (e.g., principals, counselors) can facilitate the distribution of relevant resources amongst school staff through, for example, a monthly newsletter or regularly convening staff to discuss challenges with addressing this topic. Many organizations that are expert in targeted violence already have comprehensive and accessible resources that teachers can use to learn more about these phenomena. Examples include the [Anti-Defamation League](#) (ADL), [Southern Poverty Law Center](#), (SPLC), [Polarization and Extremism Research Innovation Lab](#) (PERIL), among others.

4. Raise awareness about existing capacities within the school for behavioral assessment and management, and/or external services where teachers can refer children they are concerned about:

Schools should also make sure their staff know the services they can leverage both internally and externally to support students they are concerned about. Some schools might have a behavioral intervention team based in the school and made up of different [school-based](#) professionals, others might rely on local community-based teams. Knowing exactly who to contact, how and when will help ensure students get the support they need in a timely and efficient manner.



SPOTLIGHT: RESOURCES AND PRACTICE EXAMPLES

[Be Internet Awesome](#), *Global* -

Be Internet Awesome is an education project by Google that teaches children how to stay safe online. The project collates resources and has its own curriculum that educators can download to broach these lessons in classrooms. It includes:

- **For teachers:** Teachers can download a curriculum (including lesson plans and activities) to guide how they address online safety with their students.
- **For parents:** Be Internet Awesome also offers resources for parents, which cover the fundamentals of online safety and encourage the family to pledge to safe digital practice.
- **For students:** The resources for teachers and parents are supplemented by a game, designed for children, wherein they learn how to apply the digital safety training they receive.

[Extreme Dialogue](#), *Global* -

Extreme Dialogue provides resources for educators to broach the topic of extremism with their students. It is centered around human stories, and entails videos that feature former extremists and family members of those that have been lost to extremist groups. Facilitator guides are available to help educators navigate student-led conversations about the videos.

[Fall-Hamilton Elementary School](#), *Nashville* -

Fall-Hamilton Elementary School takes a "whole school" approach to providing trauma-informed teaching. This [includes](#):

- focusing on building positive and constructive relationships between different "members" of the school (staff-student, staff-staff, mentor-mentee, student-student)
- incorporating social and emotional learning
- employing a full-time trauma-informed practitioner
- the establishment of "peace corners" in every room, where children can go if they feel overwhelmed or otherwise need space from their peers
- identification and additional, catered support for individuals who need extra assistance
- a tap-in/tap-out system for teachers, where teachers can call on their peers when they need to step back from their classroom / students due to feeling overwhelmed, thus mitigating against phenomena like vicarious trauma

HEARTS, San Francisco -

HEARTS is also a "whole school" approach to addressing trauma ["at the student level, staff level and student organizational level."](#) HEARTS is dedicated to building the capacity of schools in trauma-informed educational practice. This includes the establishment of a of a multi-tiered system of support that includes:

- primary prevention, where school staff are trained on "trauma-informed, socially-just and anti-racist" practices, restorative practice, how to address vicarious trauma and staff burnout, among others;
- early/secondary intervention, where designated "care teams" provide trauma-informed support for "at-risk" students;
- intensive/tertiary intervention, which includes crisis management and trauma-informed psychosocial care for specific students.

One Trusted Adult, US -

One Trusted Adult ["offers research-based programs and professional development opportunities that teach the fundamentals needed to build strong connections and healthy boundaries with young people."](#)

Programs and resources are offered for parents, guardians, educators and other professionals, as well as youth. These cover topics ranging from:

- How to build trust with young people (e.g., what makes a trusted adult)
- "Universal youth needs"
- Safeguarding
- Setting and maintaining boundaries
- Responding to difficult questions
- Receiving and giving feedback
- How to mentor

Reimagining Resilience, US -

Reimagining Resilience is an online training program primarily for educators, building their capacity to nurture inclusive classroom environments and build resilience amongst their students. It is founded on the belief that educational displacement, where students feel unheard, invisible or otherwise neglected in school settings, may reduce an individual's resilience to harmful narratives. The program is categorized into ten parts, each designed to strengthen core protective factors like social connectedness, and ["non-violent problem solving."](#)

Appendix A - Further Reading Recommendations

Databases and Educator Guides

- [Be Internet Awesome](#)
by Google
- [Be Internet Citizens](#)
by YouTube and ISD
- [Database of media literacy resources for educators](#)
by the Media Literacy Clearing House
- [Digital Citizenship: Programming Toolkit](#)
by ISD
- [Digital Matters](#)
by Internet Matters
- [Digital Resource Center](#)
by the Center for News Literacy
- [Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers](#)
by UNESCO
- [Programs for Educators, Professionals and Youth](#)
by One Trusted Adult
- [Resources for Educators and Librarians](#)
by Media Literacy Now
- [Young Digital Leaders](#)
by Google.org and ISD

Early Childhood and Inter-Generational Trauma

- [Fast Facts: Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences](#)
by the Center for Disease Control (CDC)
- [What is a Traumatic Event?](#)
by the CDC
- [6 Guiding Principles to a Trauma-Informed Approach](#)
by the CDC



- [Trauma Types](#)
by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)
- [Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators](#)
by the NCTSN
- [Interrupting the inter-generational trauma of family violence](#)
by Judith McMullen for the Marquette University Law School
- [What is Trauma-Informed Teaching?](#)
by Crisis Prevention Institute
- [Trauma-Informed Teaching Strategies](#)
by ASCD
- [Supporting Brain Development in Traumatized Children and Youth](#)
by the Child Welfare Information Gateway
- [Hidden burdens: A review of intergenerational, historical and complex trauma, implications for indigenous families](#)
by Linda O'Neill, Tina Fraser, Andrew Kitchenmann, Verna McDonald for the Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma

Prevention through Education

- [Preventing Violent Extremism in Schools](#)
by the FBI's Office of Partner Engagement
- [A Teacher's Guide on the Prevention of Violent Extremism](#)
by UNESCO
- [A Comprehensive School Safety Framework](#)
by NIJ
- [Understanding School Violence](#), [School-Based Violence Prevention](#) and [Technical Packages for Violence Prevention](#)
by the CDC
- [School-Based Violence Prevention: A Practical Handbook](#)
by the World Health Organization
- [Foundational Elements of School Safety](#)
by the World Health Organization



Other

- [Resilient Educator](#)
- [Edutopia](#)
- [Child Mind Institute](#)
- [The School Shooter: a threat perspective assessment](#)
by the FBI
- [Protective Factors](#)
by FRIENDS
- [Protective Factors](#)
by the CDC
- [Risk and Protective Factors](#)
by the CDC
- [Mentoring & Youth Violence Prevention](#)
by Mentoring

