Guide to TRAILS Trauma Supplemental Materials

While TRAILS Targeted Intervention groups primarily address depression, anxiety, and stress in students, many school professionals find that there is a need for education and skills for youth suffering from the impact of trauma in their lives. Cognitive behavioral therapy is an evidence-based treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and as such, many of the skills students learn in TRAILS groups are appropriate for use with students struggling with traumatic stress. While trauma is not a primary focus of the TRAILS program, to help meet the need for trauma support, TRAILS has developed two trauma-focused supplemental group session agendas and associated resources for grades 6-8 and 9-12 that can be integrated into the 7- or 10-session anxiety and depression skills-based group manuals.

Supplemental sessions for grades 6-8:
- Learning About Trauma
- Coping with the Effects of Trauma

Supplemental sessions for grades 9-12:
- Learning About Trauma
- Coping with the Effects of Trauma

What are the goals for the TRAILS Trauma Supplemental Sessions?
The goals of the two trauma sessions and supporting resources are to provide psychoeducation about trauma, to provide local and national resources and helplines, to help students learn and practice coping skills, and to help students identify and learn about resilience. To lead more in-depth CBT based groups for children who have experienced trauma and are suffering from symptoms of PTSD, please see What are some recommended programs for more in-depth, school-based support for students struggling with trauma?

How should TRAILS Trauma Supplemental Sessions be used?
It is recommended that these two sessions be led consecutively anytime after a group session on cognitive coping and coping thoughts has been completed. By this time, students will have learned some core CBT skills and developed group cohesion, allowing for a more comfortable discussion of sensitive subjects. For additional trauma resources that may be helpful for individual use with your students, see the TRAILS website.

What are some important considerations for leading trauma-focused sessions?
For the safety and well-being of your students, it is essential that you take time to become familiar with the session agendas and their associated resources, and read the important safety information below, prior to delivering a TRAILS Trauma Supplemental Group Session. It is always a priority to provide a safe environment for all group members.
Important Safety Tips:

**Give students voice, control, and choice over their level of participation.**

- Students should never be asked or expected to share personal information.
- Students should have the choice to opt out of any group. They should also have the option to leave the room if feeling overwhelmed. Let them know a leader will check in with them later.

**Gently redirect a student from sharing too much.**

- Remind students at the beginning of each group: “Please know you will not have to share your personal experiences in this group. If you feel like you need to talk to someone or you feel you are having a difficult time, please come talk to me so I/we can provide you with the support you need.”
- If a student starts sharing details, gently interject and provide re-direction: “Hey Julie, I’m going to jump in for a second. Thank you for sharing your story. Let’s try and share thoughts and feelings instead of the details of what happened while we are in group.”
- Follow up with students who want to share personal stories and assess whether the student needs other supportive services.

**Prioritize calm over content.**

- Pay attention to the climate of the group and continually assess whether students are calm and present.
- If students seem shut-down or zoned-out, do a fun icebreaker activity to raise their energy level. If they seem hyped-up or agitated, complete a relaxation or grounding exercise.
- It is more important for students to practice being calm and alert than to get through all the content.

**End each session with a grounding skill or relaxation exercise.**

- Be sure to leave at least 5 minutes at the end of group to complete an activity to help self-regulate. This can be one of the relaxation exercises or grounding skills referred to in the agendas.
- Do not send students who appear visibly upset or withdrawn back to class without checking in with them first.

**If delivering remotely,**

It is preferable to do these trauma group sessions in person so that you can carefully gauge students’ reactions and offer follow-up support as needed. However, since these lessons are about trauma psychoeducation and not trauma processing, they may be offered remotely if necessary. Some considerations for running TRAILS Trauma Supplemental Sessions virtually include:

- Be mindful of students who may be triggered simply by discussing trauma, and be prepared to virtually follow up and support them one-on-one as needed.
- Be mindful of who else is present in the student’s home during the session and whether the student has the necessary privacy and in-home support that they may need. Have the child name someone they can contact should they need support.
What are some recommended programs for more in-depth, school-based support for students struggling with trauma?

The following programs are evidence-based, school-based, cognitive-behavioral intervention programs designed specifically for students who have experienced trauma and are suffering from PTSD and related emotional or behavioral problems. School-based clinicians and counselors can receive free online training in these programs and download the accompanying manuals and resources at no cost. All programs use screening materials for determining student inclusion.

**Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS)** (most commonly used for grades 6-9 but can be used through grade 12):

- CBITS uses cognitive-behavioral techniques (e.g., psychoeducation, relaxation skills, challenging unhelpful thoughts, exposure for facing trauma-related fears, and social problem-solving) to reduce symptoms of PTSD, improve functioning, and build peer and caregiver support. Group members create a trauma narrative and process their trauma in individual sessions as well as in the group.
- The program consists of 10, 1-hour group sessions (in a group of 6-8 teens) as well as 1-3 individual sessions, 2 parent sessions, and a teacher education session.

**Bounce Back**, an adaptation of the CBITS model for elementary school students (grades K-5):

This group intervention teaches feelings identification, positive activities, and social support in addition to age-based CBT coping techniques, e.g., psychoeducation, courage thoughts, exposures (“I Can Do It Ladders”), and problem-solving.

Bounce Back includes 10 group sessions (in a group of 4-6 children), 1-3 group parent sessions, and 2-3 individual student sessions. The school clinician helps each child develop a trauma narrative and meets with the parent and child to share the child’s story.

**Support for Students Exposed to Trauma (SSET)** is a non-clinical adaptation of the CBITS Program for middle and early high school youth (ages 10-16):

- SSET was designed for implementation by teachers and school counselors who have backup from a clinician.
- SSET teaches many of the same cognitive and behavioral skills as CBITS, such as social problem-solving, psychoeducation, and relaxation.
- The program consists of 10 45-minute group sessions that include psychoeducation, relaxation, helpful thoughts, facing fears, developing a trauma narrative, and problem-solving.

Where should I go to learn more about trauma in youth?

- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) directs readers to The National Child Trauma Stress Network (NCTSN), a site that is replete with resources for school personnel. On the NCTSN schools pages, you will find school-focused videos, webinars, and factsheets, including a child trauma toolkit for educators. NCTSN has also developed a guide on trauma-informed school strategies during COVID-19.
- The University of Michigan School of Social Work Program Guide, Trauma Informed Practices and Programs for Schools (TIPPS), identifies 10 core pillars for trauma-informed schools and provides content, resources, and recommendations for each pillar.