

INFO-BRIEF: A School Success Framework

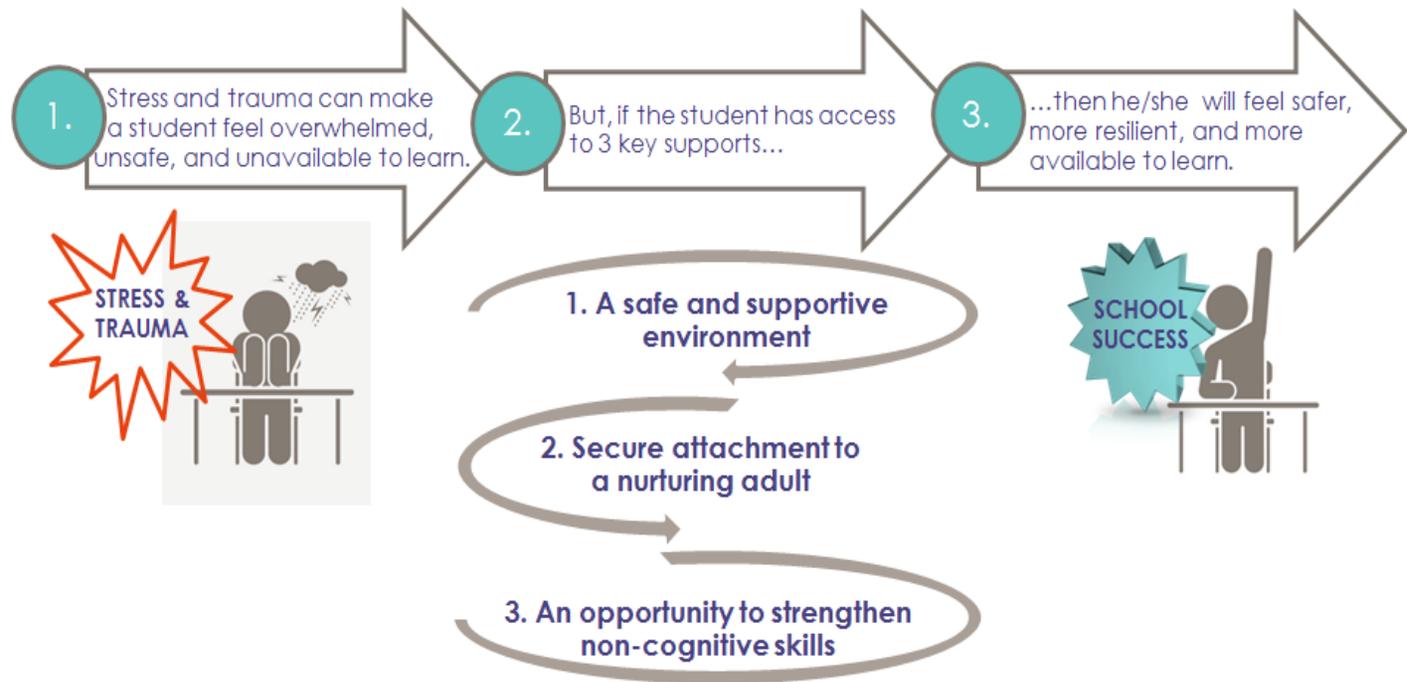
Meeting the Unique Learning Needs of Students Exposed to Trauma

Traumatic experiences (including homelessness) can cause students to feel so vulnerable, unsafe, and/or distracted in the classroom that they are often unavailable to learn. While there is no “magic bullet” solution for helping students in temporary housing to be successful academically, there are specific trauma-sensitive strategies that will improve a child’s self-confidence, resiliency, sense of safety, and ultimately, his/her academic achievement.

NYS-TEACHS has developed a School Success Framework that is rooted in trauma-sensitive strategies.

The framework includes three essential elements:

- Creating a safe and supportive environment
- Fostering secure attachments to a nurturing adult
- The opportunity to strengthen non-cognitive skills



A very brief overview of the three elements is as follows:

Creating a safe and supportive environment: It is important to clarify that creating a safe and supportive environment refers to more than physical safety. It also includes both social and emotional safety. Students need to know that they will be listened to, protected, and taken seriously. A school should strive to provide “*structure and limits that provide a sense of safety through predictable patterns and respectful relationships, with adults in charge who convey confidence – through tone of voice, demeanor, a calm presence during transitions, and in other subtle and overt ways – that they will maintain each student’s feeling of safety in the school.*”¹

Fostering secure attachments to nurturing adults: Throughout childhood and adolescence, children benefit tremendously from the secure attachments they have with adults. In many cases, the adult is a parent or caregiver, but it doesn’t necessarily have to be. A student can also form a secure attachment to an adult in his/her school. Healthy attachments are critical to success in life and in school because they help children learn to²:

- Regulate emotions and self-soothe
- Develop trust in others
- Explore their environment freely
- Understand themselves and others
- Understand that they can have an impact on their world

The opportunity to strengthen non-cognitive skills: Non-cognitive skills are critical to the success of a student. They are foundational to a student’s ability to engage, concentrate, and participate, which in turn leads to academic success (*i.e. cognitive or hard skills*).³ If a student does not have the skills to process and cope with significant social and/or emotional barriers, those barriers can easily manifest into challenging behavior at school and stop classroom learning in its tracks. The strengthening of non-cognitive skills (*i.e. social-emotional skills*) refers to:

- Self-management
- Self-soothing
- Resiliency
- Healthy relationship skills
- Social awareness

Detailed strategies for implementing each of the three elements of the School Success Framework can be found in the [School Success Framework Introductory Toolkit](#) or summarized in the [Matrix of School Success Framework Strategies](#).

¹“*Helping Traumatized Children Learn (Vol. 2): Creating and Advocating for Trauma-Sensitive Schools*”; Trauma and Learning Policy Institute in collaboration with Massachusetts Advocates For Children; Pg. 21

²National Center on Family Homelessness: Ellen Bassuk M.D., Kristine Konnath LISSW, Katherine Volk M.A. (2006): *Understanding Traumatic Stress in Children*.

³ Nagaoka, Jenny, et al. Voices in Urban Education (2013): *Readiness for College: The Role of Non-cognitive Factors and Context*