**Manchester Vocational and Learning Academy
Trauma Informed Approaches Statement**

At Manchester Vocational and Learning Academy, we understand that our students have experienced a range of experiences and challenges. Some students will have experiences negative life events that have caused trauma and emotional distress.

We pride ourselves in being a compassionate, empathetic school with a strong ‘family style’ ethos. We are committed to supporting every student, whatever their background, experiences or challenges.

For many of our students, we will know the details of the trauma that they have experienced, but for some this might remain hidden. We make no assumptions about our students’ lives, but we believe that by building trust, we are better placed to serve the needs of each individual student who comes to our school. We believe that the best way to build this trust is by providing strong pastoral care and offering an educational experience that is underpinned by strong relationships throughout the school.

As a result of this, we have implemented this trauma informed approaches statement. We expect all staff and adults supporting our school to be aware of trauma informed approaches and act in a way that is sensitive to our students’ needs.

This statement should be read in conjunction with the school’s Behaviour Policy.

**Identifying trauma**

Trauma can be defined using seven generalised dimensions, according to [Wilson & Sigman, Preventing PTSD in Trauma Survivors, 2000:](https://search.proquest.com/openview/ca0d772506100ec4d1158e91b8776000/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=1818298)

* Threat to life
* Severe physical harm or injury
* Receipt of intentional injury or harm
* Exposure to violence or the loss of a loved one
* Learning of violence to a loved one
* Exposure to a noxious agent
* Causing death or severe harm to another

Traumatic events are external, but they quickly become incorporated into the mind and the body. Psychological trauma is characterised by feelings of:

* Intense fear
* Helplessness
* Loss of control
* Threat of death

**Children and trauma**

Children are more vulnerable to the stress of trauma. Their responses to trauma are complex and are different from those of adults. Children’s traumatising experiences can compromise all areas of childhood development, including: identity, cognitive processing, ability to manage behaviour, tolerance, moral development, ability to trust self and others.

Children who have experienced trauma will develop “survivor behaviours” and these behaviours help the child to survive extreme psychological stress in a hostile environment. Examples of this can be fighting, running away, substance abuse, shutting down, self-harm, eating disorders, etc.

In a non-threatening environment, the children will exhibit these behaviours to deal with their ‘uncomfortableness’ and anxiety – to these children even a nurturing environment is threatening.

The field of education cannot ignore the issue of traumatic stress if schools are to meet the expectations of parents and the wider community. As [Barbara Oehlberg](http://www.traumainformedcareproject.org/resources/WhySchoolsNeedToBeTraumaInformed%282%29.pdf) (2008) says:

*“At a time when schools and teachers are exceedingly stressed and stretched, becoming trauma informed may seem an ambitious and challenging strategy. However, the rewards for everyone involved are real and energising.”*

**A whole school approach**

A child, in order to feel safe at school, needs to know that they can approach any member of staff and receive the same response. The response needs to be agreed upon by all staff, practiced, and with an accepted process when things don’t go the way we hope. For example:

* Assuming complexity, approaching with empathy
* Commitment to building trust and relationships. We can never stop working on this. For students and families living with prior and ongoing trauma, each day can bring a new struggle, and school can provide a sanctuary
* Connecting with the whole family
* Behaviour as a symptom of the problem, not the problem. This is not to say that violence or breaches of safety do not incur serious consequences, but that the consequences include a depth of investigation and a great deal of support
* Support children to build the skills that are a struggle for them, and include them in the process
* Connection with external agencies, because school can’t do it all!

*“There is no more effective neurobiological intervention than a safe relationship, the relationship works to bring the brain back into regulation.”* (Bruce Perry, PhD, MD, researcher and child psychiatrist)

**Strategies for working with children impacted by trauma**

* Clarify your role with the student
* Establish yourself as a safe individual
* Create an environment of respect
* Give the student opportunities to make choices
* Talk about safety and what steps you will take to help the student be and feel safe
* Connect the student to the appropriate resources and people
* Slow yourself down: talk slower, use a lower pitch for your voice, don’t use complex sentences, don’t use lots of body movements.
* Offer self-calming techniques, such as mindfulness, grounding, tracking, positive memories
* Teach positive self-talk to students and practice it before you need it.
* Use music, exercise, movement, stretching and incorporate more opportunities for humour and laughter in the curriculum (laughter reduces the traumatic response in the brain).

**Behavioural strategies for trauma impacted students**

* Have a predictable environment with clear expectations for behaviour and have structure during the class day – try not to deviate from it often.
* Establish a quiet, safe place in the classroom (or a bespoke wellbeing, refocus room) for students to go when they are feeling overwhelmed – it should be a comfortable space away from others, with comfortable furniture. This space should have some sensory materials for students, have pleasant colours, pictures of nature, etc. that students can focus on when emotionally dysregulated.
* Practice active listening with students and demonstrate empathy, 10:1 (Ratio of positive to negative statements for traumatised children) active ignoring of negative behaviour, consistent expectations and behaviour plans that are based on rewards systems, not punishment and collaborative problem-solving with students.
* Think of ways to reach out to parents/caregivers that involves them in the educational process, deepen your understanding about the community the student lives in and available resources for the student and family.

**Self-care to prevent secondary trauma**

Secondary traumatic stress is the emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the first-hand trauma experiences of another. Its symptoms mimic those of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Working with traumatised students can be overwhelming so managing personal and professional stress is vital:

* Recognise that change happens very slowly
* Know that you may never see the outcomes of your efforts
* Trust that our simple compassionate gestures are important elements of helping young people in healing and surviving
* Knowing your limits
* Improving your understanding of trauma and secondary trauma
* Taking a time out
* Seeking support from co-workers, family, friends
* Seeking professional counselling if needed

**Continuing Professional Development (CPD)**

There are multiple sources of information available to support staff in understanding and implementing trauma informed approaches. We will ensure that our staff are kept up to date through:

* Online training courses
* Face to face CPD
* Updates from SLT
* Books and academic journals

**Summary**

* Relationships and feeling safe are the first step to a young person managing their trauma
* Not every strategy will work for every child tailor your approach to each student
* Students who have experiences trauma still need clear boundaries and routines
* Students need a safe space and trusted adults in order to regulate their emotions
* Self-care and recognising your limitations is vital when working with young people who have experienced trauma