



# North Central & North Quabbin Massachusetts HWC Collaborative





# Handle With Care

- Is a trauma-sensitive community response to support children exposed to trauma and violence through improved communication and collaboration between law enforcement, schools/child care agencies and mental health providers.
- Identified children receive appropriate interventions so they can succeed in school to the best of their ability.
- Research shows that trauma can undermine children's ability to learn, form relationships and function appropriately in the classroom.





# Brief History of Handle With Care

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## Who Created HWC?

In 2012 Handle with Care was created in a subcommittee of the West Virginia Children's Justice Task Force in Partnership with the US Attorneys Office for the Southern District of West Virginia as part of a Defending Childhood Initiative

- 2009 Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Survey
- 2010 The Attorney General Eric Holder launched the DCI
- 2011 WV CITF & U.S. Attorney's Office formed a committee
- 2012 Developed the HWC Program
- 2013 Piloted the HWC Program
- 2015 WV State Police launched HWC statewide
- 2018 HWC Stakeholder meeting in all 55 counties
- 2021 HWC in over 40 states

## HWC in Other States

Handle with care MI  
Handle with care MD  
Handle with care MA  
Handle with care FL  
Handle with care OH  
Handle with care DE  
Handle with care OK  
Handle with care MN  
TN Handle with care



## The Problem

Students may experience trauma or violence as a result of their exposure at home or in the community, including emergencies and/or accidents with responder presence. These interactions are known as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

These students have increased risk for negative outcomes such as poor academic performance, dropping out of school, and delinquency.

### ABUSE



Physical



Emotional



Sexual

### NEGLECT



Physical



Emotional

### HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION



Mental Illness



Incarcerated Relative



Mother treated violently



Substance Abuse



Divorce



# What could happen? *School the Next Day*



Child's behavior

Child's feelings, fears,  
thoughts, expectations  
& beliefs

## THE STUDENT

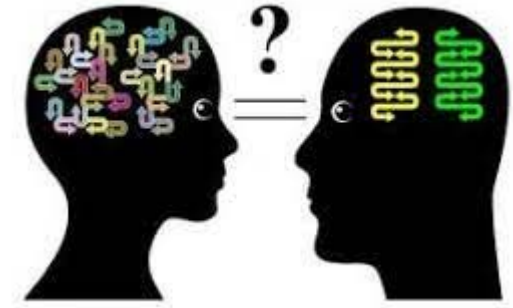
- \* I don't have my homework.
- \* I'm worried about my mom/dad.
- \* I forgot to study for this test!
- \* I'm so tired... hungry.
- \* My stomach aches.
- \* Just staring off into space.
- \* Short tempered or acting out.

## THE TEACHERS & STAFF

- \* Pay attention!
- \* Why didn't you study for this test?!
- \* Why can't you stay awake, pay attention!
- \* No snacking allowed in class.
- \* Detention for "bad" behaviors or forced separation from classmates.
- \* What's wrong with you?



# Results of Misunderstanding



## ADULTS CAN:

- Unintentionally distance themselves from students.
- Misunderstand traumatic symptoms as character flaws.
- Misperceive students as lazy.
- Impose punitive responses.

## IMPACT ON STUDENTS:

- Decreased motivation and engagement in learning
- Poor grades and MCAS scores
- Poor relationships
- Truancy and dropping out
- Suspension/expulsion
- Juvenile justice system



## The Solution

Improved cross-agency communication among first responder organizations and schools can help increase supports for students experiencing trauma.

Increased use of trauma sensitive strategies by educators and school leaders will improve educational & life outcomes for students experiencing trauma resulting from Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).



All children  
should feel  
safe to learn.

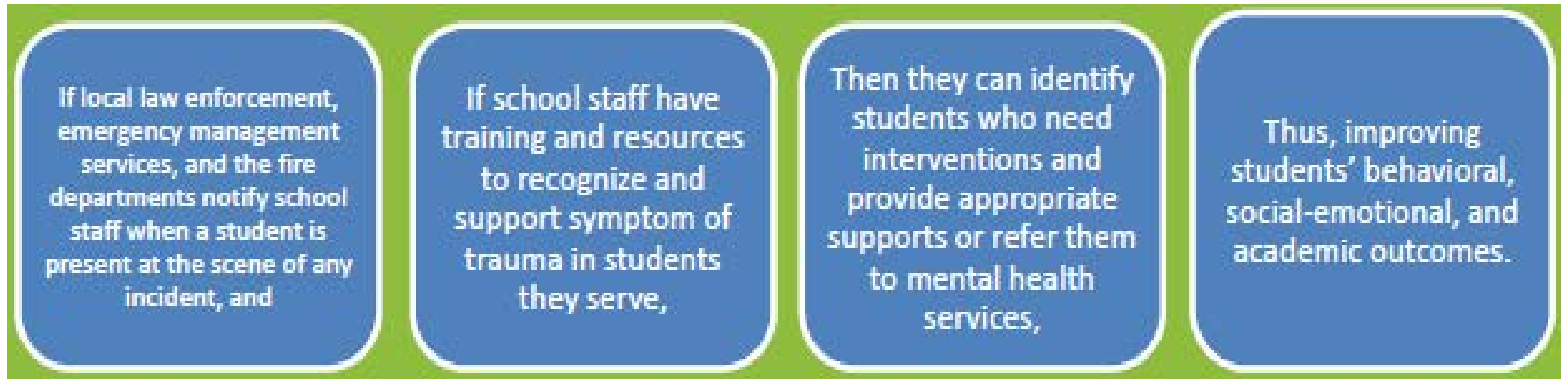
Success in  
school =  
success in life!







## The Handle With Care continuum:



Law Enforcement \* School \* Community  
Building relationships to help children thrive.







## Introducing Handle With Care (HWC)

HWC is a school-community response to help ensure that children exposed to trauma in their home, school, or community receive appropriate support to help them achieve emotionally and academically.

### Before HWC

First responders would file a mandated report for children that met the reporting criteria.

If children did not meet the *victimization criteria*, they were not identified or provided additional services.

### Now with HWC Intervention:

- All children at the scene are identified.
- The school is provided a HWC notification.
- Trauma informed practices are heightened at the school.
- Flagged student(s) are simply “handled with care”.



# When does the HWC notice get sent?

**The first responder will issue the HWC notice for:**

- A child that was exposed to crime, violence, accident, medical emergency or abuse.
- If they think “Should I send a Handle With Care notice?” we encourage that they SHOULD!
- Send one on every child, it’s not our place to judge what is traumatizing to a child.





When a child is exposed to violence or trauma and returns to school it is **important** for them to feel safe and supported.

### The “Handle With Care” Snapshot:

If a law enforcement officer encounters a child during a call, that child’s name and three words: **“HANDLE WITH CARE”**

are forwarded to the school before the next day.

The school implements individual, class, and whole school trauma-sensitive curricula so that identified children are “Handled With Care”.

If a child needs more intervention, on-site mental healthcare is available at the school.





# What Happens At School?

## SCHOOLS WILL IMPLEMENT TIC PRACTICES:



Do's



Don'ts

## WHAT NOT TO DO AT SCHOOL?

HWC will provide a safe zone for whatever extra care the child may need at school from:

a space to rest and regroup

the chance to retake/postpone a test

experience general kindness, to  
accessing therapeutic sessions.

We do not ask the student about their experience.

Our role is not to interview, quiz, or to gain information from the student.

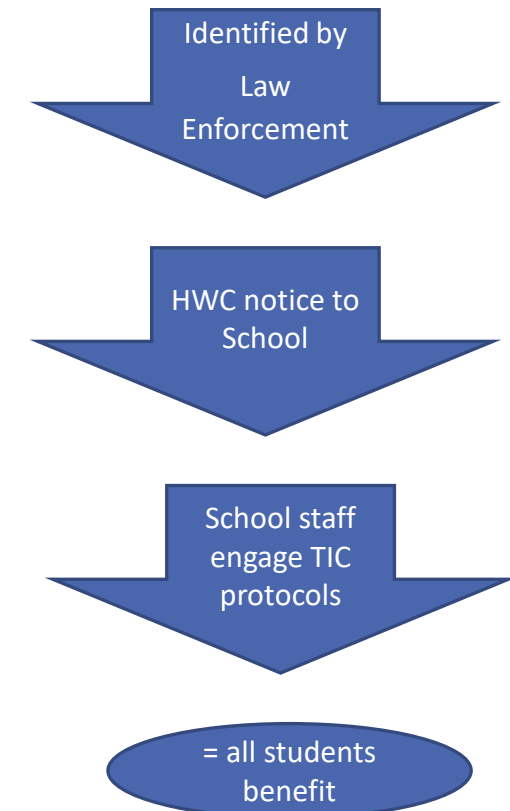
Implementing punishments that will aggravate the negative effects of trauma on these children.





# Handle With Care (HWC) Notice

- **It is only 3 words: Handle With Care**
- Details given: child's name, age and school attending.
- It does not violate confidentiality.
- Ideally notice arrives to school before the next day.
- Need to know basis, only.
- May include other childcare service agencies.
- Does not set expectation for school staff to approach the student.
- Only heightens whole-school approach around Trauma Informed Care (TIC) protocols.



## LOCAL STATISTICS

HWC Referrals as of August 2022:  
271 students

### HWC Notifications:

19-20 school year - 79 students  
20-21 school year - 86 students  
21-22 school year – 106 students



Original HWC Team, from left to right:  
*Selena Johnson, HWC Heywood Healthcare; Mark Pellegrino, Superintendent of Gardner Public Schools & Lt Nicholas Maroni, HWC Project Manager*



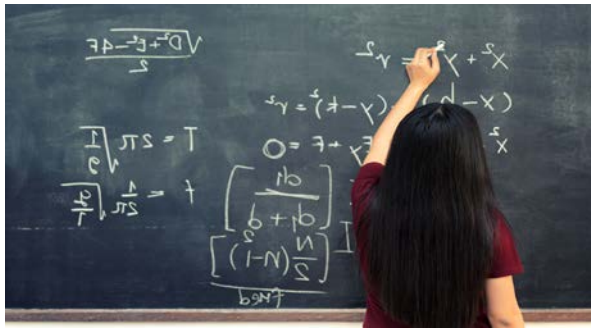
"Between 2019 – 2022 HWC has helped local area Police Departments and Greater Gardner Public Schools to support over 270+ youth that have experienced a traumatic event."

-Renee Eldredge, HWC Collaborative Liaison & Community Healthworker





# The Importance of Trauma Sensitive Schools & Agencies



Schools provide possibilities for traumatized children to forge relationships with caring adults, and learn in a supportive, predictable, and safe environment.

A respectful and safe environment where children can build positive relationships with adults & peers, learn to manage their emotions, behavioral responses, and find academic success.





# Partner Spotlight



*Shown Left: Dr. Elizabeth Zielinski, Mahar Superintendent of Schools along with two Mahar students*



*Shown Above: Ashburnham and Westminster Administration, Staff and Police Departments*



*Shown Above:  
Ashely Niggel, NRSD  
Assistant Pupil  
Personnel Director and  
Christopher Casavant,  
Superintendent of  
Schools*





# HWC in summary



- \* Identifies kids most at risk
- \* Provides educators with a “heads up”
- \* Connects children with accessible mental health services if needed
- \* Strengthens and improves relationships in the community
- \* Improving academic, social-emotional and behavioral outcomes for kids

## NEXT STEPS:

- \* HWC notification to early education centers
- \* HWC identification by other 1<sup>st</sup> responders such as hospitals Emergency Departments
- \* Continued training on ACEs and TIC with any/all HWC partners
- \* HWC presentations with local area colleges to promote trauma informed care curriculum for early education, police academy and nursing programs
- \* Facilitate collaboration and communication between HWC partners



Handle With Care of the North Central and North Quabbin region is a collaborative initiative that continues to deepen trauma sensitive and response practices within and across our local communities.

**For additional information contact HWC's Collaborative Liaison, Renee' Eldredge**  
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HWC Collaborative Partnership of North Central & NorthQuabbin - MASS

Ashburnham-Westminster Schools

Athol-Royalston Schools

Boys & Girls Club Locations:

Gardner Public Schools

Mahar Regional Schools

Heywood Healthcare

Narragansett Regional School

North Quabbin Community Coalition

Winchendon Public Schools

Worcester County DA, Joseph Early's Office

Ashburnham/Westminster Police

Athol Police Department

Gardner, Fitchburg, Leominster

Gardner Police Department

Orange / Petersham Police

Mount Wachusett Community

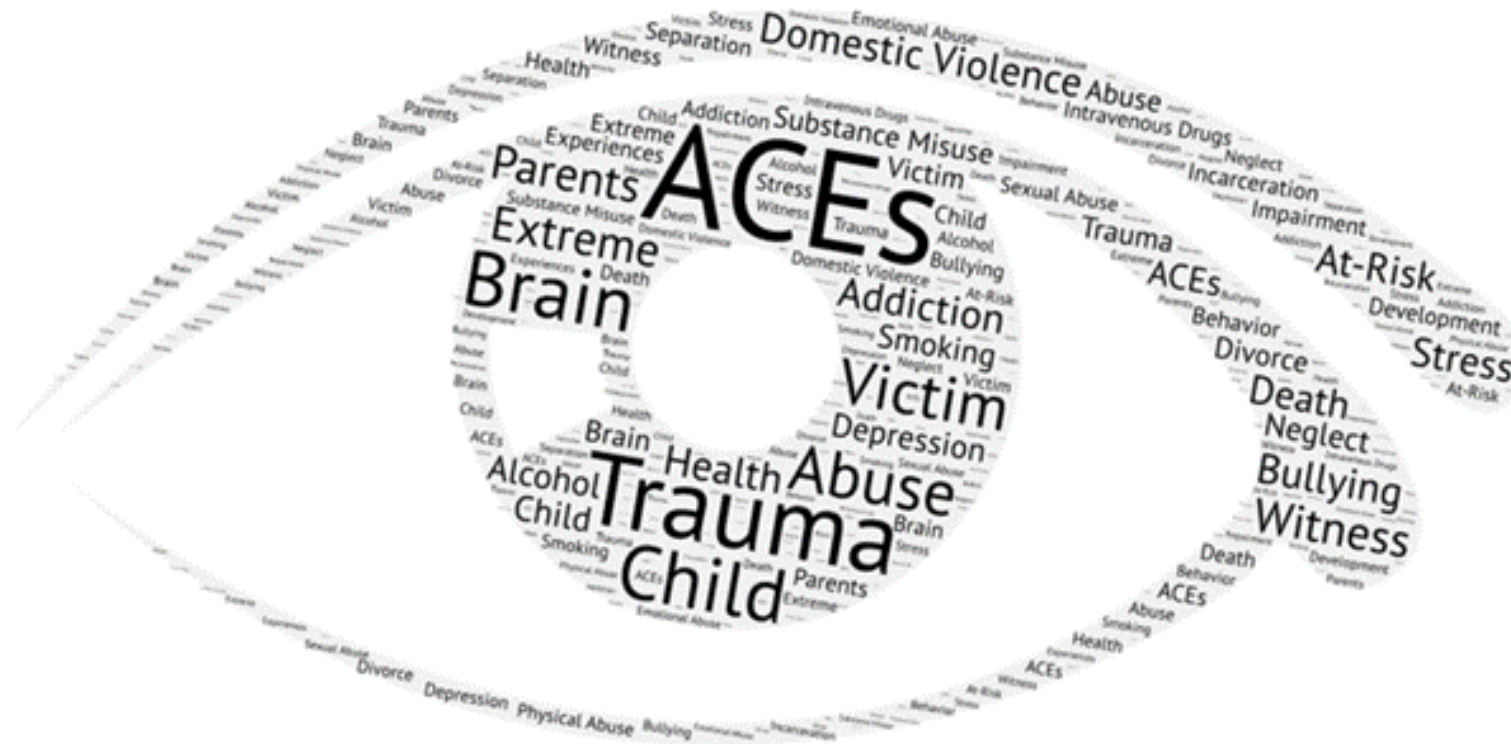
Phillipston / Templeton Police

MOC Early Education Program

Winchendon Police Department

Royalston Police Department





### **Resources material credits:**

- National Child Traumatic Stress Network
- LUK Trauma for Schools overview
- Edward Jacoubs, MSW – Incorporating ACEs
- DA Early's Safe School Summit 11/19/21
- Handle With Care West Virginia

