

2025



# TRAUMA-INFORMED EARLY LEARNING

A Guide for Becoming a Trauma-Informed  
Early Childcare and Education Center

Resilient  GEORGIA

## How do Positive and Adverse Childhood Experiences Impact Early Childhood Development?

Children are incredibly resilient, and parents and caregivers can help infants and children build their resilience. **Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs)**—such as nurturing relationships, safe environments, and moments of belonging—can help buffer the effects of trauma and promote healthy development. In early childcare settings, strong, consistent relationships with caregivers and a sense of belonging can play a vital role in healing and building resilience. By intentionally fostering PCEs, early educators help create supportive environments where all children can feel safe, connected, and ready to learn.

**Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)** are stressful or traumatic events that occur before the age of 18 and can significantly affect a child's behavior, brain development, and ability to thrive in early care and education settings. In Georgia, three out of five people report experiencing at least one ACE. For young children, especially ages 0 to 5, trauma can appear as sleep disturbances, regression in developmental milestones, chronic sadness, clinginess, or emotional outbursts. These responses are tied to the brain's survival mechanisms, such as the fight-or-flight response, which can make it difficult for children to focus, follow directions, or regulate their emotions.



## What is Being “Trauma-Informed?”

Being **trauma-informed in early childhood care** means understanding how both **Positive** and **Adverse Childhood Experiences** can shape a child’s brain development, behavior, and mental health. Instead of asking “What’s wrong with this child?” trauma-informed care shifts the focus to “What happened to this child?” This approach helps create safe, nurturing environments that reduce the risk of re-traumatization and support children in building trust, emotional regulation, and healthy relationships.

Trauma can disrupt a young child’s ability to form secure attachments, regulate emotions, and meet developmental milestones. Research shows that high-quality early literacy environments (like book sharing, rich conversations, and storytelling) not only support school readiness but also promote healing. Literacy-rich interactions help children develop emotional vocabulary, build secure attachments with caregivers, and foster a sense of agency—key components in a trauma-informed care setting. Activities like shared reading and responsive dialogue help children regulate emotions, process experiences, and feel safe. That’s why it’s essential for early care professionals to prioritize mental health through prevention, early intervention, and strong caregiver-child connections.

A trauma-informed approach also supports the well-being of teachers and caregivers by connecting them to resources, reducing burnout, and improving staff retention. When educators are equipped with trauma-sensitive strategies, they are better prepared to manage challenging behaviors, build strong partnerships with families, and foster resilient classroom communities where everyone can thrive.

### ***Considerations for A Trauma-Informed Approach to Childcare and Early Education (CCEE) from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services***



This graphic outlines key strategies for building trauma-informed childcare and early education systems by supporting children, families, and providers through culturally responsive practices, workforce training, family engagement, and cross-sector partnerships. It emphasizes the importance of addressing trauma at all levels to promote healing, resilience, and fair access to support and outcomes.

## Examples of Trauma-Informed Programs & Initiatives

Georgia continues to make remarkable progress in advancing Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) efforts across the state. The **Georgia Dept of Early Care and Learning (DECAL)** supports IECMH with other state agencies and community organizations to create an **Early Childhood System of Care**. DECAL created a **task force** to support IECMH throughout the state and actively supports IECMH through resource sharing and development, trainings, and research. Additionally, the **Georgia Association for Infant Mental Health (GA-AIMH)** works to promote IECMH through awareness, workforce development, advocacy, and fostering cross-sector collaboration. **The Georgia Essentials for Childhood/Positive Childhood Alliance** works to build resilient communities by addressing and preventing adverse childhood experiences through communication, data collection, programs, and policy changes. **Georgia's Early Literacy Act** now requires providers to complete annual training on early literacy for 0–5 year-olds. By embedding early literacy into trauma-informed practices, early care providers can support children's cognitive, emotional, and relational recovery—setting the stage for lifelong learning and well-being.

**Georgia Home Visiting Program** at **UGA's Center for Family Research (CFR)** supports at-risk children from birth to five years and families in need of resources and support. The program uses a strengths-based, family-centered support strategy and helps strengthen parenting skills, promote child development and school readiness, and connect families to vital community resources. A trained certified home visitor works with a family either in the participant's home or virtually.

**Mindfulness Zones**, a program of **Loop it Up Savannah**, helps early learning staff support students in practicing techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, and reflection—promoting self-regulation, reducing stress, and enhancing focus and emotional well-being. Early Care Centers that are a part of the program develop dedicated spaces for young children to practice self-regulation and mindfulness with calming resources, teaching essential skills for managing emotions and solving problems. Resilient Georgia partnered with Loop It Up Savannah, **Chris 180**, and the **Department of Early Care and Learning** to develop **Resiliency Zone: A Guide for Infant and Early Care Settings**—a resource designed to help early learning centers across the state establish Mindfulness or Resiliency Zones. Both zones help create a safe, supportive learning environment by empowering children with developmentally appropriate tools to understand, express, and manage their emotions and behavior in healthy ways.



**The Basics** is an early childhood initiative that promotes five simple, science-based parenting practices to support brain development in children ages 0-5. These practices—like talking, reading, playing, and showing love—help build strong foundations for language, math, and social-emotional skills. The program equips parents and caregivers with easy, everyday ways to support their child’s healthy development from birth. Both the **Chattahoochee Valley region** and **Cobb Collaborative** are leading innovative early childhood initiatives through The Basics. In the Chattahoochee Valley, strategies focus on widespread caregiver support through Basics Insights text messaging, community-wide outreach, and organizational training—aimed at making early learning accessible for all. In Cobb County, efforts include The Basics Nature Trail, Family Reading Kits, and educational bus stop signage, as well as *Playground Paloozas*—a series of fun, parent-child events held at local parks and community spaces that bring The Basics to life through play.



# Training Resources for Nonprofits

Resilient Georgia offers a **training roadmap** to becoming trauma-informed for early childhood and education. The website includes trainings under the following sections – trauma aware, trauma sensitive, trauma responsive, and trauma informed. Below are trainings, resources, and educational materials for early education teachers, caregivers, and parents.



## TRAUMA-AWARE

- **Connections Matter Georgia** provides training designed to engage community members in fostering caring connections, improving resiliency, preventing childhood trauma, and supporting individuals affected by trauma. It is a collaboration between the Georgia Center for Child Advocacy and Prevent Child Abuse Georgia.
- **GSU Child Welfare Training Collaborative's Online Trauma/Brain 101** emphasizes child trauma, child traumatic stress, and their effects on children and youth and their brain development. Additionally, the university offers a **free webinar** on the foundations of infant and early childhood mental health.



## TRAUMA-SENSITIVE

- **ChildCare Aware of America** has a comprehensive resource guide for childcare providers and parents to help children cope with traumatic events or disasters. The guide includes specific tips for helping children cope with media coverage, healing after crisis, talking about violent events, and social emotional resources.
- **Positive Parenting Program: Positive Childhood Alliance Georgia** This bilingual website (English and Spanish) serves as a one-stop hub offering free parenting workshops, self-paced online courses, access to local evidence-based providers, and a library of easy-to-read articles based on Triple P's proven strategies for fostering positive relationships with children.
- **The Trauma Resource Institute's Community Resiliency Model (CRM)** equips school personnel with concrete strategies to address trauma and chronic stress, emphasizing the importance of restoring resilience through a skill-based approach. The model introduces a paradigm shift in understanding our responses to stress and trauma. CRM's six skills offer practical tools to regulate emotions during difficult times, empowering individuals to navigate challenges effectively.



### TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE

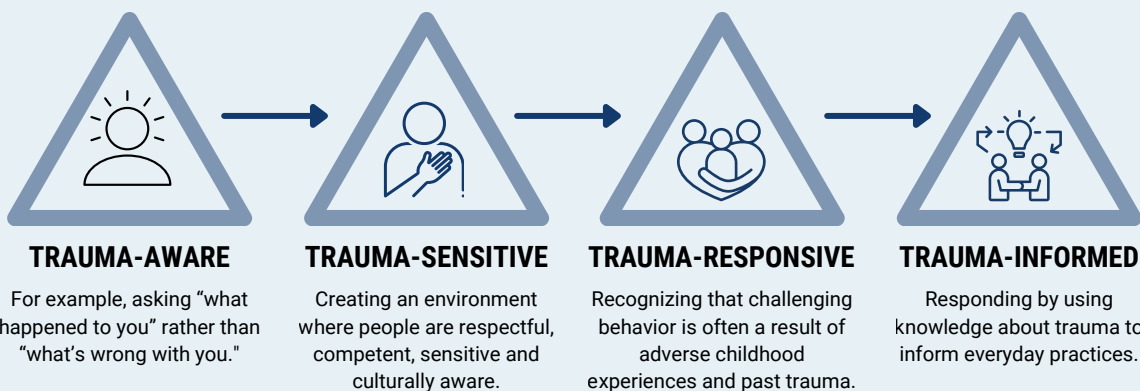
- **Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators** provides individuals working with children and early childhood education with information on trauma and its impact on young children.
- **Mindful Self-Compassion** integrates mindfulness and self-compassion skills, creating a powerful tool for increasing emotional resilience.
- **The Trauma Resource Institute's Trauma Resiliency Training** is designed to teach skills to individuals and clinicians helping children and adults with traumatic stress reactions.



### TRAUMA-INFORMED

- **Kaiser Permanente's Resilience in School Environments (RISE)** empowers schools to foster a safe and supportive learning environment by cultivating practices that strengthen the social and emotional health of both school staff and students.
- **Safe Spaces** offers a free online training for those working with children on how to recognize and respond to signs of trauma and stress. Modules are 2 hours and offered in both English and Spanish for different age groups.
- **Social, Emotional, and Ethical (SEE) Learning** provides a general orientation to SEE Learning for educators with the tools and resources they need to foster the development of emotional, social, and ethical intelligence for students and themselves.

*The trauma-informed approach is a continuum that progresses through stages. The stages of becoming trauma-informed are:*





## Additional Support for Early Care Providers

For those in crisis, **calling 988** will connect you with a trained counselor who can offer support and referral to appropriate resources.

**Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs)** in Georgia offer many types of behavioral health services, with a focus on providing 24-hour crisis care, evidence-based practices, care coordination with local primary care and hospital partners, and integration with physical health care.

**Community Service Boards (CSB)** also provide a large range of behavioral health services – from crisis stabilization and substance detoxification to counseling and peer support services.





## Resources for Early Care Providers

**Children’s Mental Health Week** is an annual week-long celebration in May hosted by the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL). During this annual celebration, DECAL hosts and promotes activities designed to help children develop social emotional skills.

**Georgia Infant-Toddler Coalition – GEEARS** is a state-wide collaborative formed of individuals and organizations to serve and elevate the needs and development of infants and toddlers. With two committees, the collaborative focuses on high-priority, time sensitive issues: Child Care Affordability Committee and the EI and Family Well-Being Committee. Explore various **resources**, **events**, and **research**.

**Georgia’s Social Emotional Early Development Strategies (SEEDS) for Success** supports increased social emotional development and reducing challenging behaviors in early childhood environments. SEEDS provides useful guides and resources for early childhood professionals and families of young children. Contact the SEEDS Helpline at **inclusion@dec.al.ga.gov** OR call 1-833-354-4357.

**Strong4 Life Raising Resilience** supplies parents and caregivers tips and resources to build resilience in children. The program has **resources** available for early care and education providers and **schools**.

**The Number Story initiative by American SPCC** helps parents and caregivers understand how their own early experiences—particularly Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)—can impact their parenting today. Through a free, science-based toolkit focused on children ages 0–5, it offers practical strategies to build resilience, reduce stress, and create nurturing environments that support healthy brain development.

**The Pyramid Model** from the National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations provides a guide for early childhood professionals to support young children’s resilience. The Pyramid model promotes social and emotional competence in young children and incorporating trauma-informed care for early childhood professionals.

**Zero to Three’s Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Resource Hub** offers evidence-based tools and guidance to support the emotional well-being of children from birth to age five. It includes trauma-informed, culturally responsive materials for caregivers and professionals to promote healthy development, strong relationships, and early intervention.

## What Can We Do Now?

1. For more information on training opportunities, explore the **Resilient Georgia Trauma-Informed Training Roadmap**.
2. Join the **GA-AIMH** among a community of multidisciplinary professionals studying and advocating for the field of Infant and Early Childhood Mental health.
3. Join upcoming trainings on traumatic stress and children hosted by the **National Child Traumatic Stress Network**, watch a webinar by the **National Child Care Association** on trauma informed care in the early childhood setting, or explore resources on trauma-informed care by the **Center on the Developing Child** at Harvard University.
4. Attend a **Community Resiliency Model Training** or sign up for the free, self-paced **Infant and Early Childhood Professional Development Course** offered through the **Center for Interrelational Science and Pediatrics**.





FOR MORE TRAUMA-INFORMED RESOURCES, VISIT [RESILIENTGA.ORG](https://resilientga.org)

Questions or feedback?  
Contact [info@resilientga.org](mailto:info@resilientga.org).

