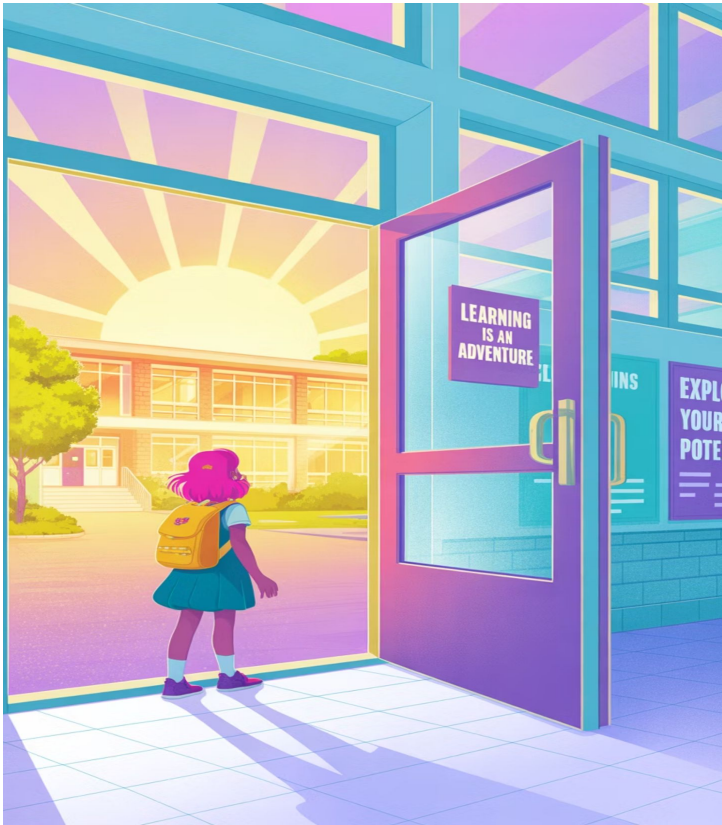




COALITION FOR
COMPASSIONATE
SCHOOLS



From Trauma-Informed to Healing-Focused Classrooms

Helping Students and Staff Grow

Through Challenges and Thrive Together

Avery Brewton, LCSW, RCP, RA

2025 ARMAPP Symposium

Breakout Session I

Little Rock, Arkansas

July 30, 2025

10:15a- 11:45a

- 10+ years supporting youth, families, and educators through educator coach & trauma-informed systems
- Licensed Clinical Social Worker + Crisis Recovery Specialist (post-Katrina, Haiti, Ferguson, MO)
- HBCU 1st-gen grad | Military family | Village-raised
- Mediator & Community Wellness Facilitator
- Healing Caregiver Ambassador and Recovery Life Coach with Black Women Do Heal Collective

Who Am I?



Avery Brewton, LCSW, RCP, RA (She/Her)
M.S.W Social Work & Disaster Mental Health
Director, Trauma Informed Schools Project

❖ Vision

- Flourishing school systems that are rooted in community, healing and human centered approaches.

❖ Mission

- Building the capacity of schools, students and parents to create transformational change in education through the adoption, implementation and sustainment of trauma-informed, healing-centered practices.

#30 Days Of SAM

"Move at the
speed of trust."

adrienne maree
brown

 **RVAP**
ADVOCACY SUPPORT INITIATIVE



Every one of us is a teacher
and a healer for others.

Frances Fuller



Learning Objectives

- Make sense of how trauma and stress impact the brain and why schools need co-regulating systems—not just strategies—to support emotional safety for students and staff.
- Hear directly from youth and peer support perspectives to better understand what makes a space feel safe, human, and worth showing up for—especially in the face of grief or disconnection.
- Identify at least one low-lift, healing-centered practice that can be used to restore calm, connection, or dignity in moments of stress—whether you're in a classroom, hallway, or support role.

Community Agreements

.....

- Be “whole body” present when things get difficult. “Tune in.”
- Speak your truth and respect the truth of others.
- Practice Mindful Listening.
“Notice the source and seeking”
- Practice being curious about assumptions, beliefs, and judgements.
- Respect the struggle. Value silence.
Appreciate each other.
- Keep stories sacred and share wisdom.

Check-in:

What did you
come here to
learn,
experience, or
share?



COALITION FOR
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Learning Objective #1

- Make sense of how trauma and stress impact the brain and why schools need co-regulating systems—not just strategies—to support emotional safety for students and staff.

Agenda

- Review key principles, theories and data around what makes a school trauma-informed and why it is important in New Orleans.
- Understand the neurobiological impacts of trauma and its impact on learning.

WHAT IS TRAUMA

The harmful interruption
of **safety, agency,
dignity, or belonging**

Overwhelms our ability
to **cope** with or **integrate**
our experience of
an event

Is embodied at multiple
levels: **individual,
collective, systemic,
intergenerational** and/
or historical

Can be **acute, chronic,
cumulative, complex**



A TRAUMA-INFORMED SCHOOL



Recognizes

Signs of trauma &
needs for support

Realizes

Prevalence &
impact of trauma

Responds

To promote individual &
collective healing

**Resists
Retraumatization**

By using trauma-informed
principles in the classroom, school
community & teacher supports

**What
is a
Trauma-
Informed
School?**

Trauma Exposure Among NOLA-Area Youth

> 90% NOLA youth experience community violence.

Homicide is the leading cause of death for children aged 1 – 14.

60% of New Orleans children show signs of PTSD—about **four times the national average**

33% of children in poverty

Developing a Trauma Lens



*How does
trauma
impact
learning?*



Our Lens for Student Behavior

Caleb is a student at your school. This morning during first period, his teacher, Ms. Jones, asked him turn in his assignment and Caleb refused to turn it in or participate in the lesson — for the second time this week. Ms. Jones loudly scolded him and took away his recess as a consequence. A short time later, Caleb's classmate accidentally bumped him in the hall on the way to lunch and Caleb responded by slapping him *hard* in the back of the head. Ms. Jones yelled at Caleb to stop playing on his way back into class. He started screaming and kicked over a chair before putting his head down on his desk. After a few minutes, Caleb was finally escorted from the classroom by an interventionist. He was brought to the dean's office and sent home for three days for his behavior.

- Where do you see fight / flight / freeze responses showing up in Caleb's behavior?
- Where do you see Caleb attempting to restore his own sense of safety, agency, dignity, and/or belonging with his actions?
- What could a more trauma-informed approach look like, based on our learning?



What Feels Threatening to the Brain in a Classroom?

Even common classroom experiences can trigger a stress response—especially for students carrying grief, trauma, or chronic stress.

- Sudden loud noises or yelling
- Unpredictable changes in routines or schedules
- Not understanding the task or expectations
- Being singled out or publicly corrected
- Experiences of peer conflict or rejection
- Personal frustration or shame

As the thinking brain becomes weak, students can have:

- Difficulty paying attention, problem solving, setting goals, taking perspective, retrieving prior learning
- Difficulty thinking clearly
- Difficulty storing, consolidating, and retrieving new information

Reimagining Behavior & Emotional Support

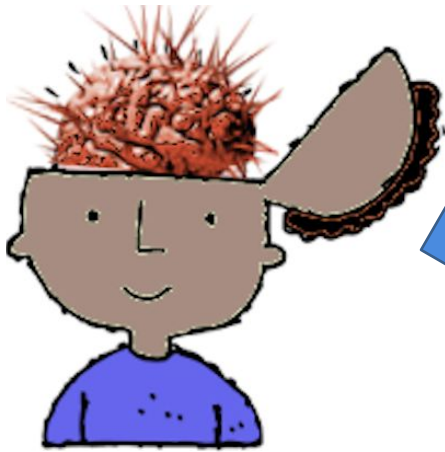
	Recognize Signs
Fight	• Easily frustrated, overwhelmed, or “set off” • Unpredictable emotional reactions • Difficulty calming themselves
Flight	• Physical withdrawal (head on desk, sleeping) • Fidgeting; Constantly asking to go to bathroom, leave the room • Leaving the room without warning • Hiding, wandering
Freeze	• Zoning out, daydreaming • Staring blankly • Constantly putting head down on desk • Doesn’t respond
Fawn	• People pleasing, overly affectionate, • Doing over and beyond what is necessary





Healing from Individual Trauma

We can go from this...



Emotional
Regulation



Supportive
Relationships



..to this!



Key Points



- The rider represents our rational/intentional mind.
- The Elephant represents our instinctive mind that reacts to danger, pain, & pleasure.
- The Path represents the common situations and environments that we navigate in our daily lives.

How Does Change Happen?

- Provide the rider clear and right-sized direction
- Honor the elephant with intention, emotional connection and grace
- Shape pathways to make change more likely by reducing obstacles, encourage new habits, create ease and flow

Practice Spotlight

Sample Classroom Flow

☀️ **Morning meeting/Do Now:**
Psychoeducation/Emotional check-ins

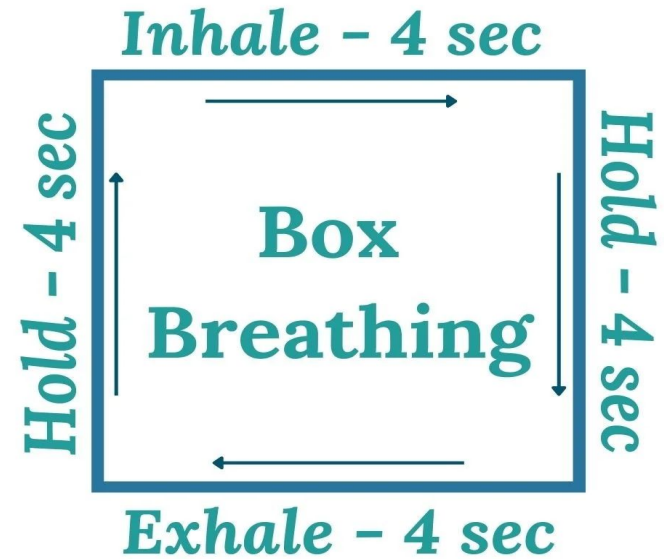
📖 **Mid-Teaching (Between Direct Instruction & Student Practice):** Mindful Reset

📦 **End of class period/block:** Gratitude

⏸️ **Transition:** Intentional movement

* Use various mindfulness or movement techniques as needed as a classroom management technique if the class gets off task*

The 2-Minute Reset



WWW.MINDFULLIVINGCOUNSELINGSERVICES.COM

Learning Objective #2

- Hear directly from youth and peer support perspectives to better understand what makes a space feel safe, human, and worth showing up for—especially in the face of grief or disconnection.

Agenda

- Introduce the Little ROCCs (youth-led participatory action research model) and their approach.
- Share direct quotes and priorities voiced by youth and peer mentors.
- Reflect on relational strategies and core human needs youth want adults to support.

Student Perspectives on What Safe and Supportive Feels Like

Understanding how students perceive safety and support in educational environments is crucial for creating spaces where learning can flourish.

These authentic student voices reveal what truly matters in building trust and comfort in the classroom.

What Do Students Need From Us?



Learn more about our Little ROCCs here

Who they are:

7th & 8th grade students using research to improve their schools.

What they believe:

Young people deserve voice, agency, and leadership in shaping school culture.

Why we're listening today:

Their PSA challenges adults to reflect on how tone, respect, and relationships shape student experience.



(We'll listen to the PSA now.)



Three Student Perspectives on What Safe and Supportive Feels Like...

In response to questions like:

**“What makes a teacher feel safe
to talk to?”**

**“What helps you calm down when
you're upset?”**

**“What makes a classroom feel
good to be in?”**

STRUCTURE (*Middle School*)

"She always made sure that we were straight – academic and behavior wise. You could tell she cared. She explained stuff, let us try, gave us instant feedback. She even checked on how we were doing in other classes too."

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT (*Middle School*)

"One time I was crying at my desk, and she came up, rubbed my back, and said, 'Is everything okay?' She let me talk to her and call my mom. Even if we had problems at home, she sat down and talked to us. That helped."

ENVIRONMENT (*Lower School*)

"She lets us sit on the carpet if we can't see, and it's comfy. We do group work, and we can go in the calm down corner or take a walk. She gives us chances, and not every teacher does. It's fun in her class."

Use A Trauma Lens for Student Behavior

We shift our perspective from

"What's wrong with this student?"
to

"I wonder what this student needs"
and

"What's possible for this student?"



Learning Objective #3

- Reflect on your role in creating a “village of care,” and identify one concrete way you can contribute to making school spaces more learner-ready and healing-centered.

Agenda

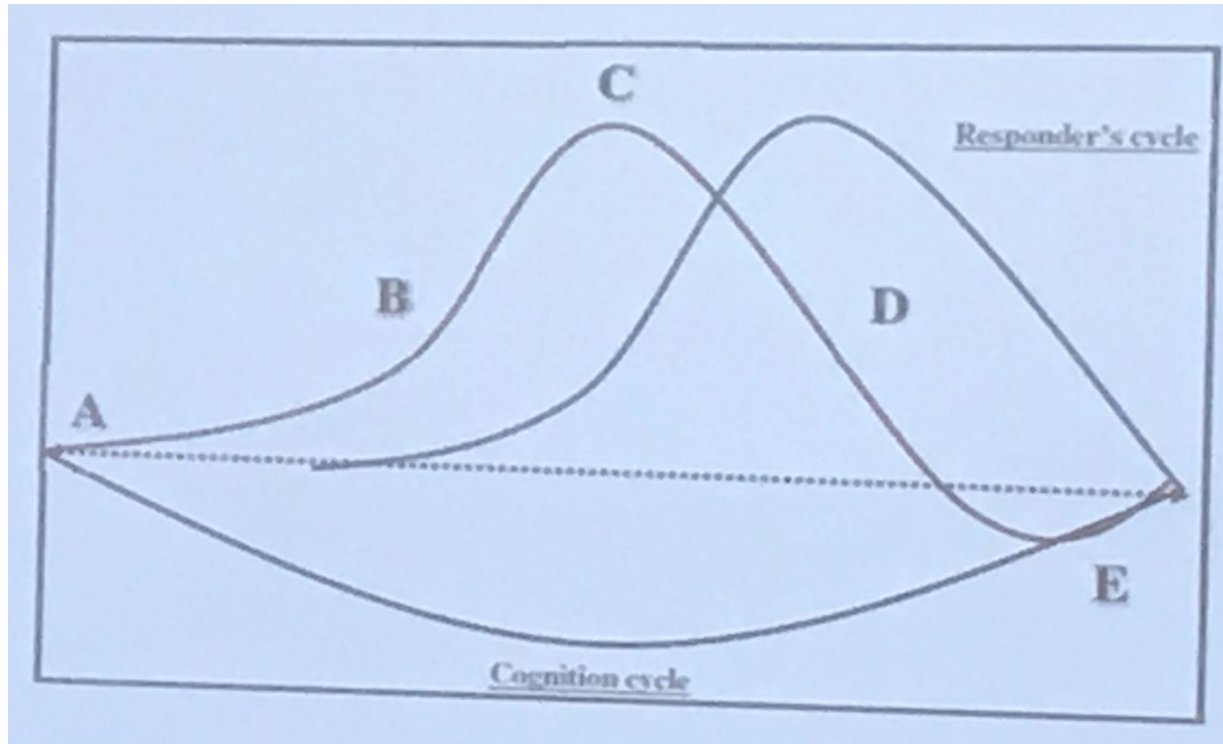
- Explore the emotional strain on staff and the concept of “The Responder Cycle.”
- Examine co-regulation and its role in interrupting escalation cycles.
- Identify your unique role in a trauma-informed ecosystem and reflect on your sphere of control and influence.

A Trauma Lens for Teachers' Experiences

What about Ms. Jones's experience?

The school Caleb attends and Ms. Jones' teaches at has experienced two lock-downs due to community violence in the past several months. Two of her students recently lost family members to community violence and upon their return to school have been physically lashing out at others. Ms. Jones wants to support these students but is already behind on her scope and sequence and worries if she takes time to focus on her classroom culture, her coach will be upset with her. When she moved forward with the most recent writing assignment in her curriculum it made her aware of the multiple traumas one of her top students has experienced and she has now found herself worrying about this student's safety as well as her own. She's been feeling distracted by these worries and thoughts when trying to plan her lessons so it is taking her much longer and she is staying up later, leaving her exhausted when she's in front of students. When Caleb began screaming, kicking chairs, and hiding under his desk, she was tired and this outburst caused her to sit down with her head in her hand for several minutes before yelling at him to stop and get out, which further escalated his behavior.

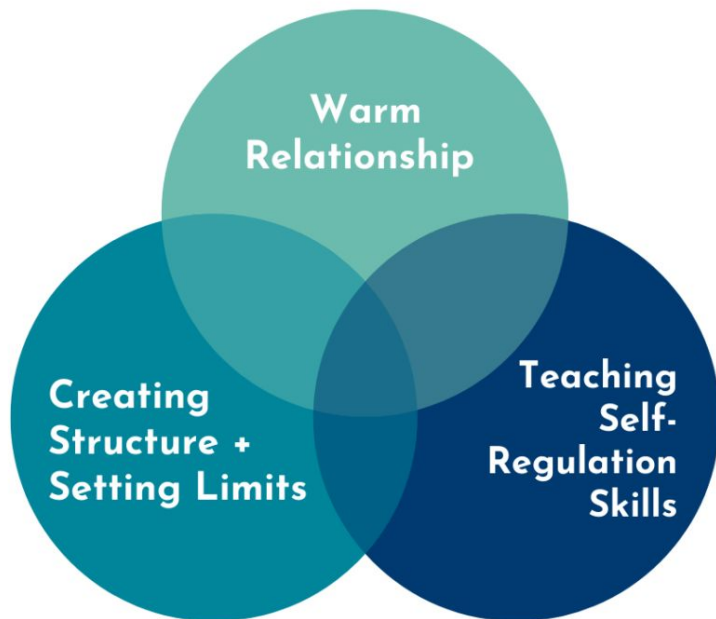
It's Not Just Students: The Responder Cycle



- Escalation can be contagious. When students escalate, adults can escalate too.
- Responders escalate on a delayed path meaning that as students are calming, the responder is just peaking.
- We must be responsive and self-aware of this to move into co-regulation and break the cycle.



3 pillars of co-regulation



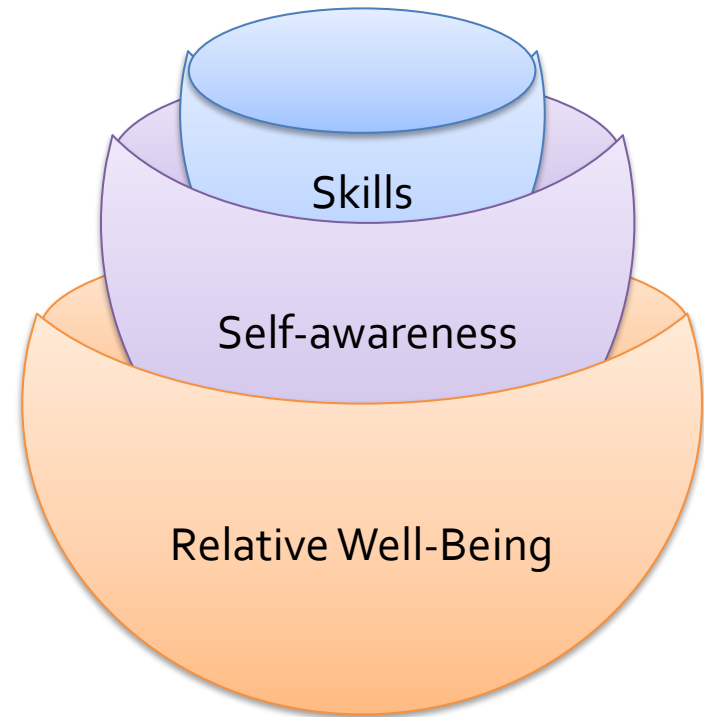
(Rosanbalm & Murray, 2017)

Co-Regulation

A **mutual act**, an exchange of calm between at least two people. Co-regulation involves teaching young people through empathy and modeling calmness in the face of stress.

The Three Bowls

- The top is not the most important
- Each bowl is contained within the larger bowl below it
- It cannot expand beyond the bounds of the bowl below it.





What is Collective Care?

- Collective care is a community's shared responsibility for the wellbeing of its members.
- Places the responsibility of care on the whole group rather than entirely on the individual (self-care).
- Recognizes that everyone has different needs and care looks different for each person.
- Focuses on building relationships and fostering a sense of belonging and mutual support.
- Collective care requires participation from all members to succeed.



Practice Spotlights:

Examples of Collective Care



- Establishing teaching teams & peer mentorship
 - ◆ Setting boundaries as a team
 - ◆ Team coverage for emergencies
 - ◆ Supports for new teachers
- Dedicated work-free zones to destress and have non-work conversations with peers

- Administration respecting teacher autonomy and professionalism
 - ◆ Meet with teachers regularly about their needs and listen
 - ◆ Make space for conversations about students without formal referrals and documentation
- Establishing community partnerships that provide discounts to education staff in the district based on staff needs and desires.



Learning Objective #4

- Identify at least one low-lift, healing-centered practice that can be used to restore calm, connection, or dignity in moments of stress—whether you're in a classroom, hallway, or support role.

Agenda

- Explore sample daily rhythms that embed emotional regulation and relational rituals.
- Learn low-lift strategies across three levels: personal, interpersonal, and environmental.
- Identify one practical strategy to bring back to your own role or setting.

Classrooms as the Heart of the School

*"The culture of the classroom...
becomes the culture of the school."*

When classrooms thrive, schools thrive. Every interaction shapes the emotional climate where learning happens—or doesn't.



Routines

- More reliable sense of structure
- Designed for time management and productivity

Examples of Routines:

- ❑ Do Nows/Exit Tickets
- ❑ Think-Pair-Shares
- ❑ Routines for material distribution/collection
- ❑ Classroom jobs

Rituals

- Common practice that is habitual.
- Focused on the process and emotional experience.

Examples of Rituals

- ❑ Greetings/Farewells at the door
- ❑ Shoutouts/Recognitions
- ❑ Community and Socratic Circles
- ❑ Breathwork and body scans
- ❑ Special Days/ Holidays



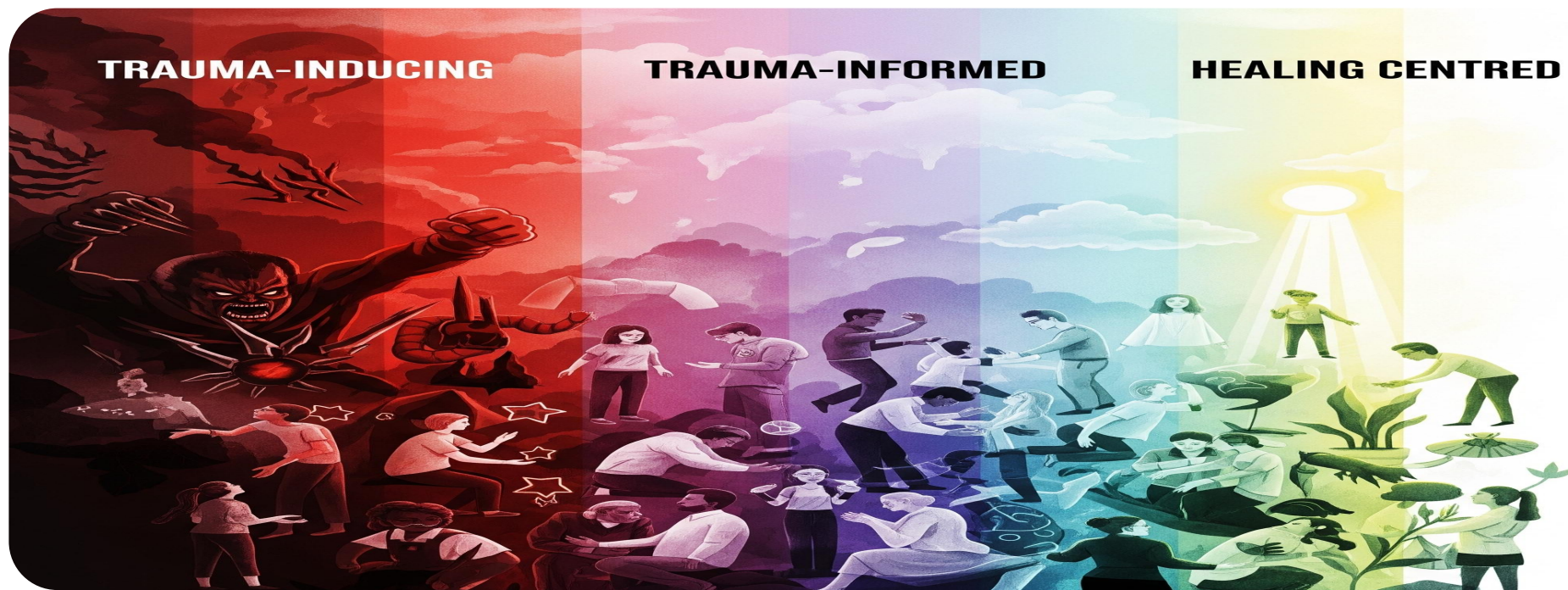
Classroom Transformation Over Time

1–2 Years: Emerging Awareness

- “We’re trying to be more trauma-informed... what does that mean again?”
- More staff are asking for tools to manage stress and de-escalate conflict
- Calm corners and restorative circles exist—but aren’t consistently used or understood

3–5 Years: Deepening Practice

- “We all play a role in co-regulation—students aren’t the only ones dysregulated.”
- Rituals, regulation spaces, and relational practices are part of the daily flow
- Conflict is reframed as opportunity, and repair is modeled—not just expected



Key Takeaways

- Start with Yourself
- Safety Before Strategy
- This is a Journey, Not a Checklist
- Build the Village
- Listen to Lived Experience
- Protect What Matters
- Small Shifts, Big Impact



Go to [Menti.com](https://www.menti.com)
Code: 5705 8576

Drop It in the Pot:
Final Reflection & Raffle!

**What's one insight,
idea, or intention
you're carrying with
you from today?**

Drop it in the menti pot!
We'll choose a couple of folks at
random for a prize.
✨ Must be present to win.

Thank you & Keep in Touch!

Follow us on social media, sign up for our newsletter, view our impact report, or visit Coalition Member websites all from the link/code below!



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