

Trauma-Informed Spaces in Schools FAQ

Fairfax County Public Schools

What are trauma-informed spaces?

Trauma-informed spaces use design elements to prioritize the safety and inclusion of all individuals while minimizing potential stressors. Some spaces also include materials and activities to help students regulate challenging emotions. Schools can makeover all sorts of places, like classrooms, hallways, cafeterias, and even meeting rooms, to buffer stress and foster resilience. Here are some ways they might do it:

- **Reducing stressors:** This could mean having dimmer lights in some areas, or having quiet zones where people can take a break from loud noises.
- **Connecting to nature:** Schools might add plants to classrooms, play nature sounds during lunch, or create a garden area where students can relax.
- **Supporting self-regulation:** There might be comfortable chairs, fidgets or other activities that help promote self-regulation in the classroom if they're feeling overwhelmed.

How do schools plan trauma-informed spaces?

All schools have access to the Guidance for Creating Trauma-Informed Spaces planning tool and support from the Social and Emotional Learning Team (SEL) and Special Education teams to support planning for high quality spaces. The planning tool walks school teams through a variety of trauma-informed considerations for creating or adapting spaces. Schools consider important supporting details such as:

- What is the space for and how will it be used?
- What physical elements will be added or modified to support safety (i.e., lighting, organization, connection to nature)?
- How will students and staff learn how to use the space?
- What essential social and emotional learning skills might students need?

Schools must adhere to School Board policies that identify what equipment and furniture can be added safely in a school space. Trampolines and swings are examples of equipment that are not recommended within the instructional environment.

Are trauma-informed spaces for individuals or for a group?

Trauma-informed spaces are shared spaces, accessible to all as compared to planning for individual interventions for students. Spaces like a classroom space may contain self-regulation tools that may benefit your student. Trauma-informed spaces are tailored to meet the greater needs of the school community.

How might I advocate for my child's individual self-regulation and/or sensory needs?

If your student has an IEP or 504 plan, work with your case manager to consider what might be incorporated into the existing plan. Self-regulation and sensory needs can be supported by a teacher or other instructional staff member directly or through environmental supports, adaptations, and/or accommodations. *If your student has not been identified as a student with a disability, speak with your student's teacher or counselor about what options are currently available within your school.*

Some considerations might be:

- Environmental adaptations that promote student success (lighting, sounds, visual, seating)
- Access to structured, scheduled breaks
- Access to and choice of preferred sensory activities and structure (as appropriate within the instructional environment)
- Alternatives or processes to support students with changes in schedules or large group activities (e.g. cafeteria, assemblies)

TRAUMA-INFORMED SPACES

Trauma informed spaces promote safe, welcoming, and healing learning environments. Spaces should strive to uplift these elements but may serve different purposes. Here are some examples.

