



# Trauma- Informed Design Workbook

VERSION 3.1

*bassetti* /  
architects



Architects  
of Achievement



The TID Checklist outlines best practices to help shape learning environments that support students and teachers who have experienced trauma. Pre-pandemic over two thirds of children reported at least one traumatic event by age 16. Post pandemic trauma statistics soared.

To address the pervasive impact of trauma in our schools we present this checklist as a tool to assist designers, educators, and administrators gain knowledge and actionable ideas.

Strategies for dealing with trauma continue to be emergent. This TID Checklist is a start. An open-source compilation of ideas, patterns, and provocations, it is meant to be shared, modified, and revised for specific learning communities. Hopefully it will promote creative thinking and dialogue to embed trauma-informed concepts into new and existing buildings and classrooms. Now more than ever, trauma-informed design (TID) can help heal and empower our students and our schools.

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# 1

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Guiding Principles are big-picture ideas or goals that frame projects and help prioritize decision making. Different projects invariably have different Guiding Principles. The following list is a compilation of Guiding Principles we often encounter in our projects. Inclusion of Trauma Informed Design ideas within the overarching concepts that shape a project ensures that guiding principles are more fully integrated into school designs.

## Safe and Secure

Welcoming

Highly visible

Home base



ABOVE: ARBOR HEIGHTS  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL / BASSETTI  
ARCHITECTS. Jeff Amram

LEFT: RAISBECK AVIATION HIGH  
SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS.  
Ben Benschneider



ABOVE: TIGARD HIGH SCHOOL / BASSETTI  
ARCHITECTS. Jeff Amram

LEFT: ROMP / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Kip Beelman

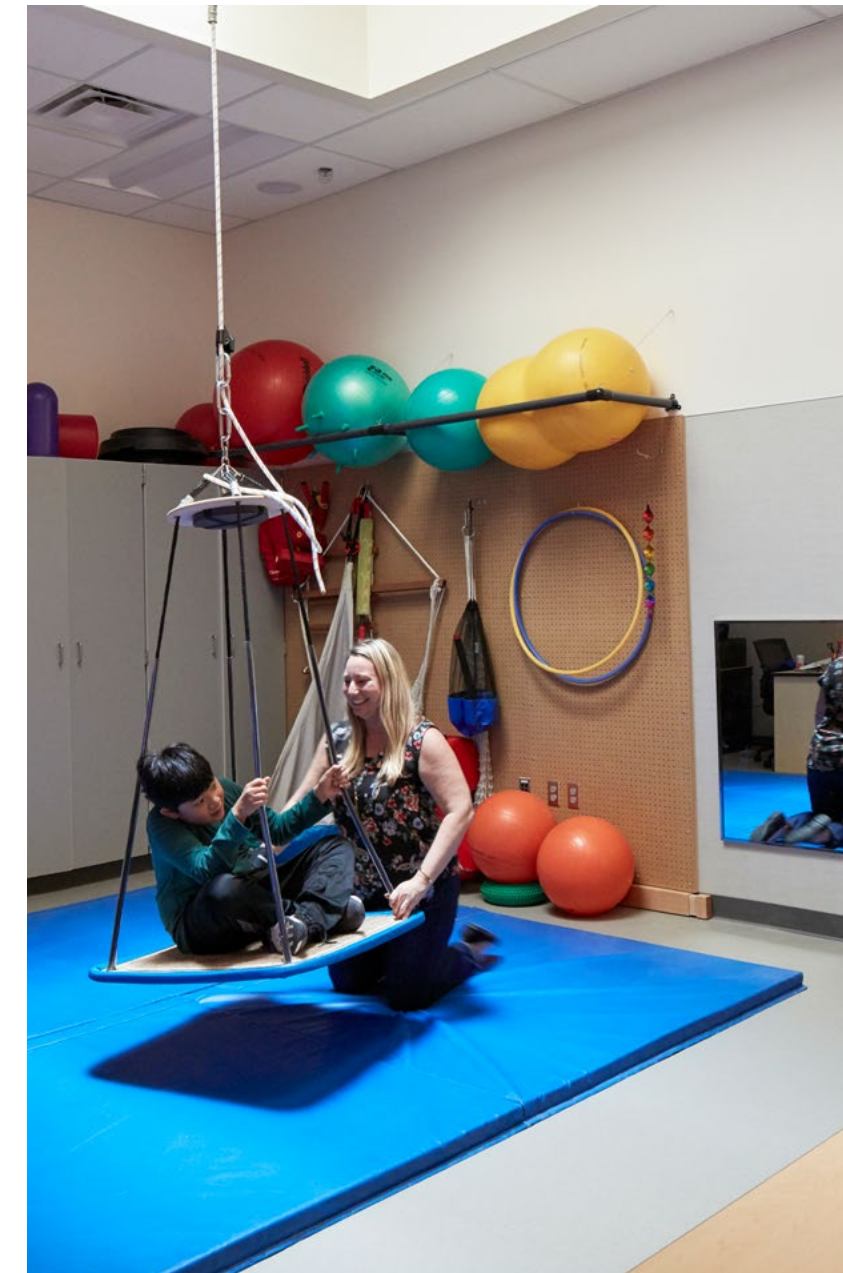
RIGHT: COUGAR RIDGE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL /  
BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Moris Moreno

## Personalized

Trustworthy, transparent

Empowering to student and  
community voices

Cultural, gender support



## Collaborative

Provides peer support

Mutuality



ABOVE: THE EVERGREEN SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Jeff Amram

LEFT: TODD BEAMER HIGH SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Art Grice



## Learning Focused

What does the brain research say?

- + Body regulatory network shuts down higher brain functions if stressed
  - Sequence of engagement
    - › Regulatory system balanced (not stressed)
    - › Connect emotionally (listened to, respected)
    - › Reasoning engaged (higher brain functions – language, history, morals)

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Jerry Wang / Unsplash

## Flexible and Adaptable

Options for choice

Agency

Varied spaces



ABOVE: LYNNWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Stuart Isett

LEFT: MOUNTLAKE TERRACE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Stuart Isett



## Community Connected

Culture

Identity

History

Social justice

Environmental justice

Sustainability



SHOREWOOD HIGH SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Jeff Amram







# 2

## SURVIVAL BASICS

Survival Basics are the fundamental needs that must be addressed so children are ready to learn.

## Shelter

### Provide the basics

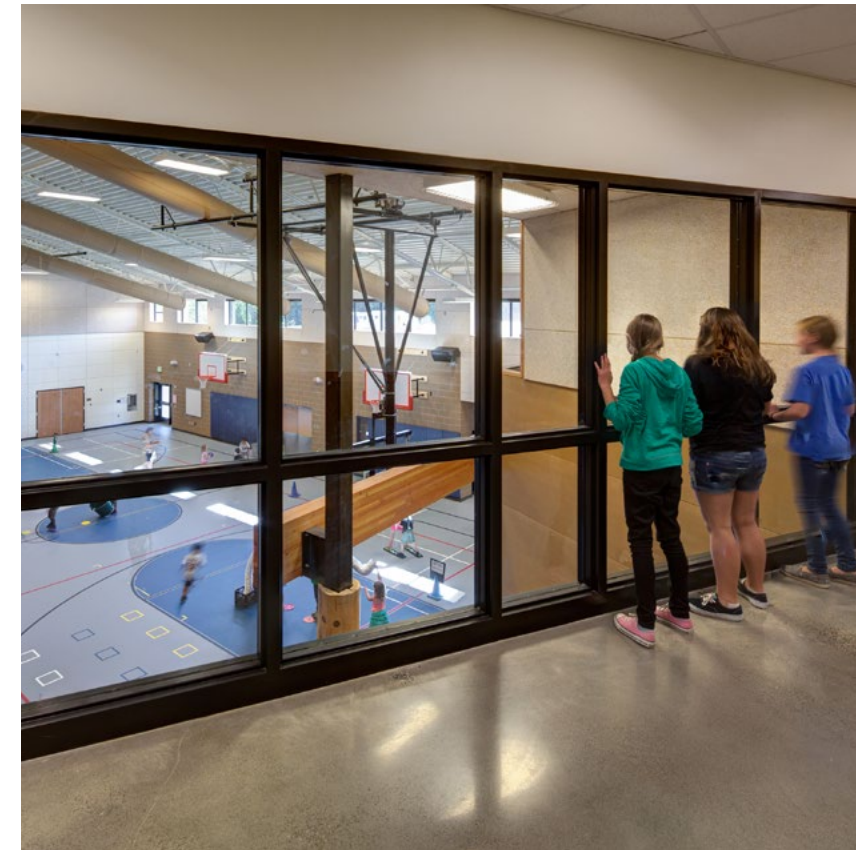
- + Warm, safe, & dry
  - Create comfortable spaces

### Create layers of Shelter

- + A variety of shelter types
  - A den could provide a protected space
  - Floor cushions on a rug could provide a comforting oasis
  - Sensory toys
  - Thera-bands
  - Fidget toys



ST. THOMAS SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. John Edwards



ABOVE: BUD HAWK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Jeff Amram

RIGHT: KLAHOWYA SECONDARY SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Moris Moreno



## Safety

### Allow for hypervigilance

- + Traumatized children
  - Monitor for perceived threats
- + Have a need for protection

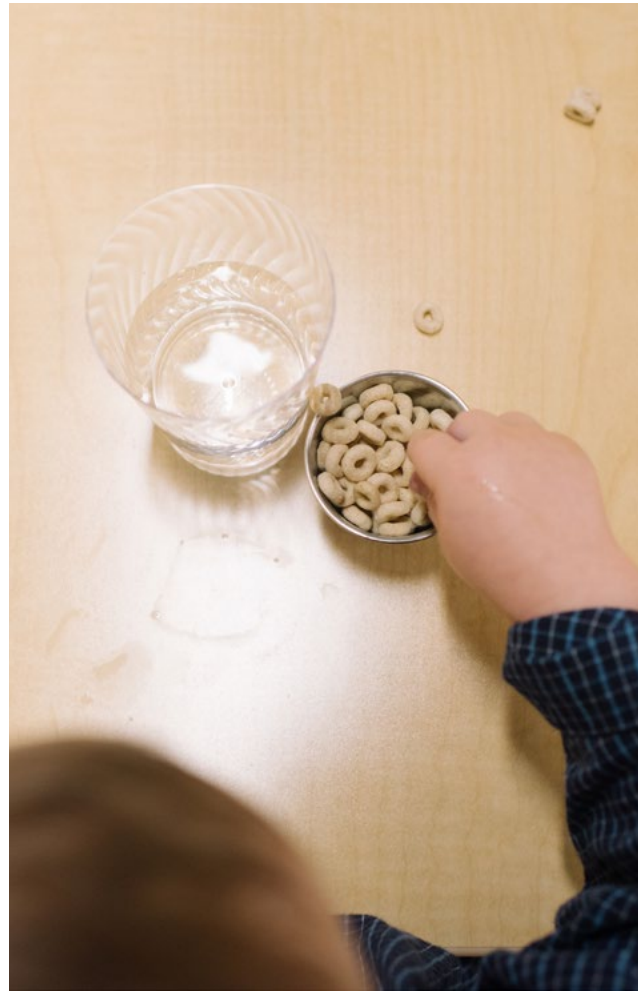
### Understand levels of trust

- + Realize that for some, trusting others can feel dangerous
- + Monitoring for one's safety can be physically/emotionally demanding and exhausting

## Food Security

### Present opportunities for food availability

- + Food and drink in learning areas
- + Morning, noon, after school availability



ABOVE: ROMP / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Kip Beelman  
LEFT: UNITED WAY.



ABOVE: SHOREWOOD HIGH SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Jeff Amram

BELOW: ROMP / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Kip Beelman

RIGHT: HAND WASHING. Fran Jacquier



## Homelessness

### Address hygiene

- + Shower facilities

### Provide for Hunger

- + A kitchenette for warm meals
- + A pantry for provisions

### Care for clothing / possessions

- + Laundry facilities for student use
- + Lockers or closets to store belongings

### Sleep

- + A safe space to nap





# 3

## OVERARCHING DESIGN CHARACTERISTICS

Overarching Design Characteristics provide patterns that support Trauma Informed Design. This is an evolving list that has been compiled from research, observations, and input from educators experienced in dealing with trauma. The list is intended to be used to spur creative thinking about designing for kids dealing with trauma; to remind us of critical issues impacting traumatic stress; and to help us critique our designs in the hope of developing more comprehensive solutions.

## Personalization

Human scaled

Less institutional - more personal

Personal space

- + Don't overcrowd with furniture
- + Navigate without touching others



TOP: ARBOR HEIGHTS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS, Jeff Amram

RIGHT: MOUNTLAKE TERRACE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS, Jeff Amram

LEFT: ARBOR HEIGHTS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS, Jeff Amram



ABOVE: ARBOR HEIGHTS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS, Jeff Amram

RIGHT: STEWART MIDDLE SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS, Jeff Amram



## Thoughtful Transparency

Visibility from space to space

See who's coming and going

Balance transparency with areas of refuge

- + Avoid being in a fishbowl

## Flexibility

Multiple ways of using space

Equitable use by all

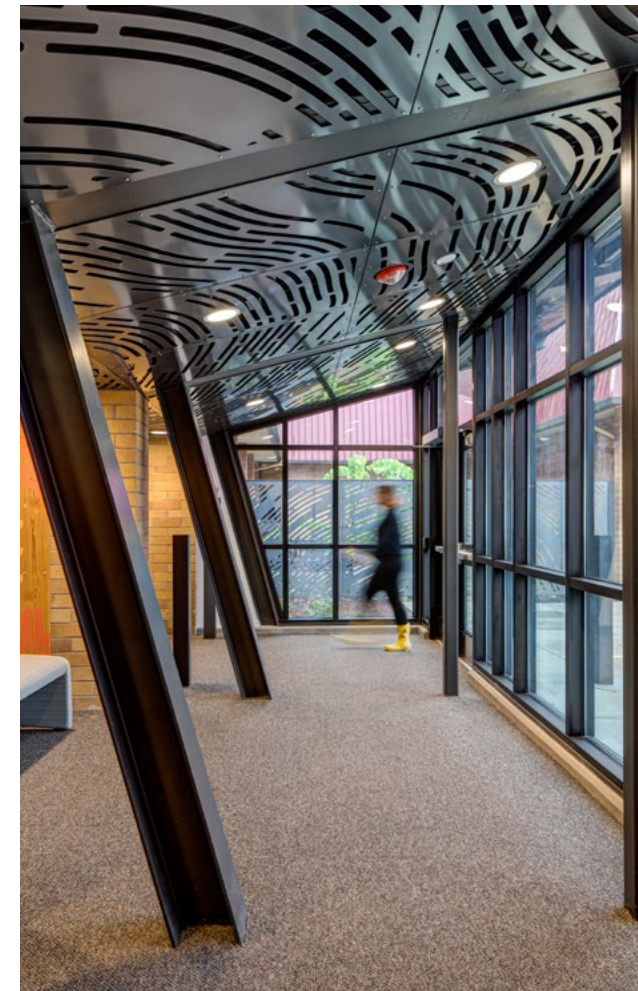
Adjusts for specific needs of kids

Choice

+ Seating/table types, locations, noise levels, light levels, group or solo



LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Ben Benschneider



ABOVE: FIVE OAKS MIDDLE SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Jeff Amram

RIGHT: SPRUCE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Moris Moreno



## Safe and Secure

Trustworthy, transparent

Empowerment, voice

Cultural, gender support

Biophilic design

## Optimal Light

### Excellent daylight in learning areas

- + Areas of lower light levels

### Artificial light

- + High quality, warm values, task lighting
- + Controllable light
  - Dimmers, sensors
- + Sensory triggers to be avoided
  - Harsh, flickering, buzzing lights
  - Visual complexity – distracting patterns on walls and floors



NATRONA COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL /  
BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Jeff Amram

## Acoustics

### Balanced Acoustics

- + Minimize unnecessary and overwhelming ambient noise
- + Sudden or steady noise can be stressful

### Sound Absorption

- + Tiled and/or portable carpets are a great alternative in that they can be replaced and cleaned as needed to eliminate pathogens and dust.

### Variable sound options

- + Music, calming sounds – water, birds



NATRONA COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL /  
BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Jeff Amram







## Furniture

### Uncluttered

- + Don't overcrowd with furniture or visual stimulation
- + Ensure adequate space for navigation

### Separate chair and table options

- + Flexibility
- + Wheels on tables, chairs – quiet and movable
- + Choice – seating and table types
- + Location, noise level, group or solo
- + Socialization options
  - Seating to face away from or into walls
- + Soft finishes
- + Peace corner
  - Focus, quiet, calm

### Materiality

- + Durable, easy to clean

COUGAR RIDGE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS.  
Moris Moreno



ABOVE: TUALATIN HIGH SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Jeff Amram  
RIGHT: ST. THOMAS SCHOOL GYM / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Moris Moreno



## Toilet Rooms

### Toileting approach

- + Provide passive supervision to mitigate bullying
- + All-gender vs binary
- + Traumatized kids need security
- + Consider lockable stalls for privacy vs. concerns for suicide, drugs, sex

### Needs of homeless kids

- + Shower, locker, laundry, place to sleep/nap

# Biophilia

## Connection to nature

- + Outdoor connections can enhance emotional, problem-solving, critical thinking, and constructive abilities

## Outdoor learning

- + Outdoor learning spaces create additional space to learn
  - Create sensory patterns in natural environment
  - Use organic, naturalistic design
  - Use place-based, vernacular design



TOP RIGHT: ST THOMAS SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Moris Moreno

BOTTOM RIGHT: FIVE OAKS MIDDLE SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Jeff Amram

LEFT: KLAHOWYA SECONDARY SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Moris Moreno



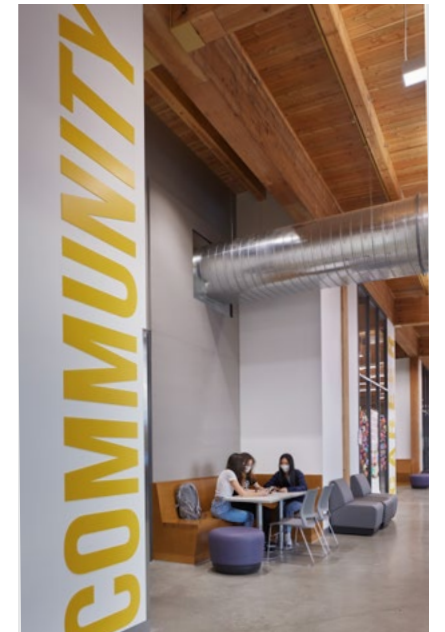
# Areas of Refuge

## Need to recenter and de-stress

- + Provide varied approved, passively or actively supervised spaces for kids experiencing stress to find refuge
  - Areas of refuge within or adjacent to large gathering areas
  - Quiet outdoor space within sight lines of outdoor learning spaces or administrators
  - Edges, nooks or balconies for retreat or passive observation
  - Flexible soft seating, study niches or counters that face a wall and do not call attention to the need for retreat

RIGHT: HIGHLINE HIGH SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Benjamin Benschneider

BELOW: JACKSON PARK (BUD HAWK) ELEMENTARY SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Jeff Amram



## Need to be sheltered from a large group

- + Consider supervised options in place of attendance at whole school assemblies
- + Consider multiples spaces and options when trusted adults are unavailable and refuge is needed







# 4

## SPACES WITHIN A SCHOOL

This section explores spaces and groups of spaces within an educational environment where aspects of the overarching design characteristics might be applied.

LYNNWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Jeff Amram



## Learning Spaces

### CLUSTERS OF LEARNING

#### Enhance personalization

- + Human scale
- + Home base - known well

#### Balance social spaces and private spaces

- + See the door(s), window(s)
- + See who is coming and going
- + More than only seeing a whiteboard



ABOVE: RAISBECK AVIATION HIGH SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Ben Benschneider

RIGHT: TRUMAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Ben Benschneider



TRUMAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL / BASSETTI  
ARCHITECTS. Ben Benschneider



## Learning Spaces

### LAYERS OF SPACE

Address the Needs of the student - isolation vs inclusion

- + Home base - personalized, retreat, study, focus
- + Small group space (2-6 students)
  - One-on-one classrooms
  - Collaborate, group projects
- + Students known well by the teacher
  - Medium group space (6-15 students)
- + Adaptable to small group collaboration
  - Group instruction, project-based learning
  - Safe edges, peace corners, nooks
    - › Large group spaces (+15 students)
  - Prospect and refuge
  - Safe edges, nooks
    - › Outward bound to nature
- + Connection to outdoors, electives, CTE, PE, music, art
- + Consider student well-being and foster relationships



ABOVE: FIVE OAKS MIDDLE SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Jeff Amram

RIGHT: ROSE HILL MIDDLE SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Jeff Amram



KLAHOWYA SECONDARY SCHOOL / BASSETTI  
ARCHITECTS. Moris Moreno



## Learning Spaces

### OUTDOOR LEARNING SPACES

#### Enhance connections to nature

- + Calm, center, de-stress
- + Breathe – oxygenate the brain – enhance learning and focus
- + Encourage problem solving skills, critical thinking, constructive abilities
- + Enhance emotional clarity
- + Promote healing, recovery

#### Support refuge

- + Varied approved, passively or actively supervised spaces for students experiencing stress
  - Edges, benches, slopes
  - Grove and garden

#### Support learning activities

- + STEAM, reading, poetry, drama, debate, movement

#### Support exploratory learning

- + On-site
  - Natural areas, local ecosystems, water story, garden, orchard, arboretum
- + Off-site
  - Neighborhood, town, city, parks, ecosystems

#### Encourage play

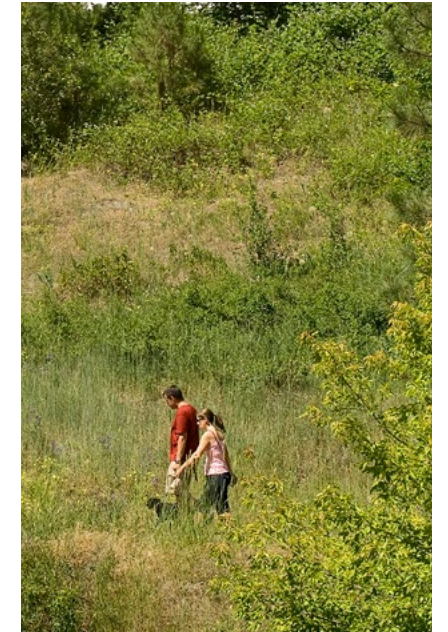
- + Active play
- + Passive play
- + Small/Medium/Large

#### Support fitness

- + Organized and personal
- + Track, field, court, course
- + Fitness circuit, climbing, obstacles

#### Support social gathering

- + Small/Medium/Large/Extra Large
- + Areas that support small trusted group – friend(s), mentor



RIGHT: BARN BEACH RESERVE /  
BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Jeff Beck

BELOW: THE EVERGREEN SCHOOL /  
BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Jeff Amram





RAISBECK AVIATION HIGH SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Ben Benschneider



## Circulation Spaces

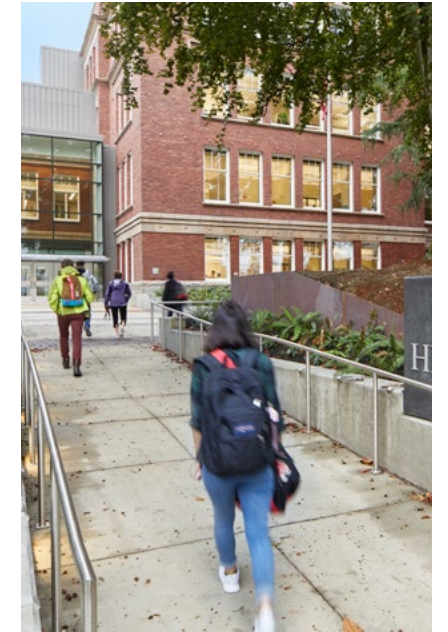
### CONNECTED SPACE

#### Design the entry sequence

- + What is the exterior approach
- + Landscape/biophilia, security, welcome visibility, engagement, shelter, protected place, scale
- + Vestibule
  - Shelter, warmth, visibility
- + Lobby
  - Welcome (students, parent/caregivers, community partners)
    - › Information, support
    - › Avoid punitive sounding messages
  - Support 'Can do' vs 'can't do'
    - › Safety and security, visibility

#### Design with intention

- + Clarity, visibility, thoughtful transparency
- + Avoid sharp corners, surprises
- + Minimal barriers
- + No dead ends
- + Consistency, predictability
- + Clear consistent signage
- + Gracious circulation space, avoid touching, and interfering with personal space



RIGHT: LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Ben Benschneider

BELOW: TRUMAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Ben Benschneider



## Professional Work Areas

TEACHER / STAFF TRAINING

Create space for ongoing professional development regarding trauma informed teaching

- + Restorative practices
- + Relax, re-focus, biophilic connections



FEDERAL WAY PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
SUPPORT SERVICES CENTER AND  
CENTRAL KITCHEN/ BASSETTI  
ARCHITECTS. Jeff Amram



ABOVE: ST. THOMAS SCHOOL /  
BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Moris  
Moreno

RIGHT: TUALATIN HIGH SCHOOL /  
BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Jeff Amram



Offer passive supervision

- + Adults nearby who have eyes on students, safety, comfort, known adults

Design planning, collaboration, counseling spaces

- + Adults model collaboration
- + Coordinate with parents, caregivers, counselors, social workers, etc.

Greet guests and caregivers

- + Graciously greet those who serve and care about students

## Community Spaces

COMMUNITY ROOM, CLOSETS, KITCHENS

Provide space for restorative practices to support families and students

- + Family rooms
  - Welcoming, highly visible
  - A place to meet, work, consult
- + Multi-purpose rooms
  - Conferencing - large and small
  - Kitchen(s)
  - Office(s)
- + Make it the nexus of community services, connections, communication
  - Healthcare
  - Counseling
  - Social services
  - Homelessness services
  - Food pantry
  - Clothes closet
- + Create places of refuge
  - Caring adults



ABOVE: SHOREWOOD HIGH SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Jeff Amram

RIGHT: TRUMAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS. Ben Benschneider



SHOREWOOD HIGH SCHOOL / BASSETTI ARCHITECTS.  
Jeff Amram







## QUESTIONS TO ASK AS YOU EXPLORE TRAUMA INFORMED DESIGN

How are you currently using your learning environments to buffer toxic stress?

What are barriers you may have to creating trauma informed spaces?

Where can you get the most bang for your buck?



## CONCLUSION

Educators have faced the impacts of trauma on children often since the inception of organized schooling. Students who experience traumatic events face challenges regulating their emotions and have difficulty with attention, learning, and memory.

A growing understanding of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) has helped educators deal more effectively with the impacts of family violence, abuse, divorce, poverty, bullying, racism, and a host of other stressors. The COVID-19 pandemic added yet another layer of toxic stress. Its impacts on marginalized populations, such as people living in poverty, refugees, BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities, has been particularly severe.

We hope this TID Checklist assists educators, administrators, architects, designers, and managers develop actionable ideas to help shape learning environments that positively respond to the challenges of trauma affected youth.

The importance of discussing, debating, and applying the ideas in this open-source list is critical, particularly as we emerge from a global pandemic. We hope you find it useful and welcome your feedback and ideas by writing us at [media@bassettiarch.com](mailto:media@bassettiarch.com).



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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