

2025



TRAUMA-INFORMED LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY

A Guide for Becoming a Trauma-Informed
Law Enforcement Agency

ResilientGEORGIA

Definition: What Does it Mean to be a Trauma-Informed Law Enforcement Agency?

Trauma is defined as any experience that is extremely frightening, harmful, or threatening, either emotionally, physically, or both.¹ Law enforcement officials respond to experiences like these daily. People's reactions to trauma can include emotional and physical distress. When officers respond to calls, they are often working with individuals impacted by trauma. Additionally, people who have experienced trauma are incredibly resilient, meaning they have developed skills to cope with life's challenges.

As law enforcement officers working within school settings, School Resource Officers (SROs) are key to fostering trauma-informed practices in schools by bridging the gap between public safety and youth support. Programs like the **Georgia Department of Education's Mental Health Awareness Training (MHAT)** equip SROs with the skills to recognize and address mental health challenges, helping to create safer, more supportive school environments. Tools such as the **School-Based Behavioral Health Toolkit** provide evidence-based strategies for addressing students' behavioral health needs, and partnerships with organizations like the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice emphasize collaborative, youth-focused approaches. Together, these efforts enable SROs to contribute meaningfully to the well-being and resilience of students through trauma-informed practices.

Being trauma-informed means recognizing and understanding the impact that trauma can have on individuals, including civilians, and law enforcement officers. Trauma-informed practices that prioritize compassion, empathy, and connection can help stop the cycle of trauma and move into post-traumatic growth. Police officers and school resource officers are in a unique position to effectively support communities that are highly impacted by trauma.²

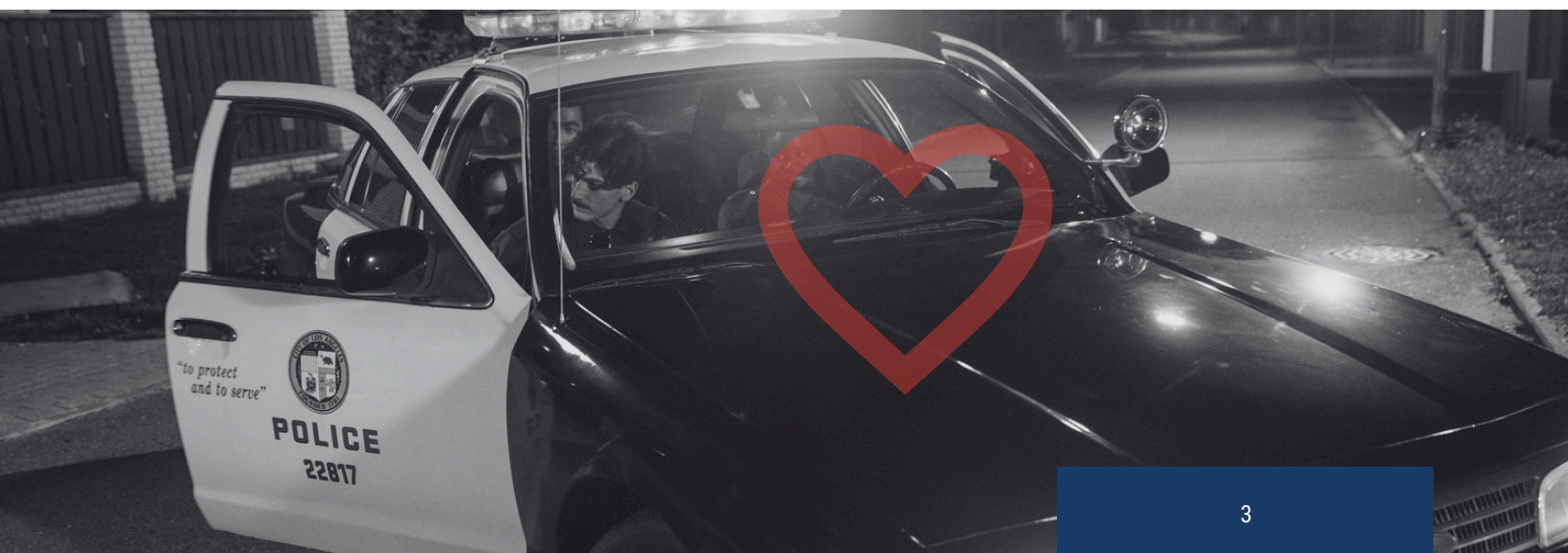


Why it Matters: Becoming Trauma-Informed

There is often a stigma in law enforcement that keeps them from discussing their personal experiences with trauma. But this high exposure to trauma in law enforcement work puts them at risk for developing symptoms of secondary trauma, a response people may feel after witnessing others' trauma.³ Secondary trauma is linked with professional burnout, mental health challenges, or even suicidal thoughts or behavior.⁴ These symptoms can interfere with officers' ability to function in their personal and professional relationships and life. Working with a trauma-informed lens offers ways that officers can successfully support themselves and their communities.

In addition to the negative mental health effects law enforcement officers face, the physical toll on their bodies can produce chronic health conditions like heart disease and high blood pressure that may manifest in symptoms such as fatigue, headaches, and poor sleep. Officers may develop coping mechanisms, such as substance abuse, which can exacerbate these health problems and increase the risk of suicide.⁵ The cumulative impact of occupational stress in law enforcement can significantly diminish quality of life and life expectancy if not addressed.

Therefore, it is crucial that law enforcement officers feel supported in their efforts to address secondary trauma. Trauma-informed professional development offers leaders new ways to address individual, organizational, and community concerns. Working with frameworks that promote awareness, peer support, and trust-based teamwork can increase wellbeing and healthy outcomes for the officer and the people they serve, in addition to interrupting the cycle of violence in communities. **This “Trauma-Informed Leadership” article** in Police Chief Magazine explains more about the important process of becoming a trauma-informed law enforcement department. We believe that engaging with the following resources will significantly support officers in their personal and professional worlds.



Examples of Trauma-Informed Programs and Initiatives

The Co-responder Program implements a team model as a collaborative approach to behavioral crisis response. This Georgia-based program pairs mental health professionals from Community Service Boards (CSB) with law enforcement to assist with de-escalation and jail diversion through mental health referrals. **Implementation of this program** was made possible by HB 1013, which provided funding for at least 5 new applications of the program, and **SB 403** which mandated that each CSB establish a co-responder program. **View Point Health**, the CSB serving Gwinnett, Newton, and Rockdale Counties, has partnered with police departments in cities of Conyers, Lawrenceville, Norcross, and Suwanee, and **Gwinnett County** to establish their co-responder programs.

Handle with Care (HWC), involves a **trauma-informed collaboration** between local law enforcement and schools. The program aims to provide in-school support for children who have witnessed a traumatic experience by notifying the child's school about the event. Trained school staff respond to the student's needs within the classroom, and additional on-site mental healthcare is available if needed. HWC is an effective, low-cost way to address the role of trauma in children's development and school performance. Visit **Salud America's site** to learn more about how to implement HWC in your community.

Savannah Police Department's Behavioral Health Unit is one example of how police departments can move towards trauma-informed service on an organizational level. Their program includes an "Enhanced Crisis Intervention Team, a Behavioral Health Response Team, and Service Coordination" designed to divert individuals from the criminal justice system towards services for behavioral health.



Training Resources



TRAUMA-AWARE

- **Connections Matter Georgia** provides training focused on community resilience, building social support systems, and interacting with traumatized populations. Connections Matter Georgia can help officers develop preventative practices in their work that consider behavioral responses to stress and trauma.



TRAUMA-SENSITIVE

- **The Community Resiliency Model (CRM)** offers tangible skills that officers can use to promote wellbeing and address the impact of secondary trauma for themselves and others. CRM promotes emotional intelligence, a key factor in both officers' job performance and personal wellbeing.
- **The Resilience Enhancement and Leadership Model (REALM)** training focuses on skills building in the three realms of resilience: personal, interpersonal, and organizational. The REALM training can help officers build skills of stress-management and grit, creating safety in interactions, and moving towards a trauma-informed system of law enforcement. Read more about REALM [here](#), or contact tara@coastalgaindicator.org for more information.



TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE

- **Compassionate Integrity Training** focuses on "the ability to live one's life in accordance with one's values with a recognition of common humanity, our basic orientation to kindness and reciprocity". It identifies individual and community values to teach skills of awareness and compassion that can be useful for law enforcement.
- **Crisis Intervention Training** offers guidelines for how officers can best respond to situations involving challenging behavior that feels threatening or even violent.
- **Self-Compassion for First Responders** builds personal skills to combat the impact of stress and challenges that law enforcement officers may face. To attend this training, please contact Vira Salzburn at vsalzburn@mediationsavannah.com.

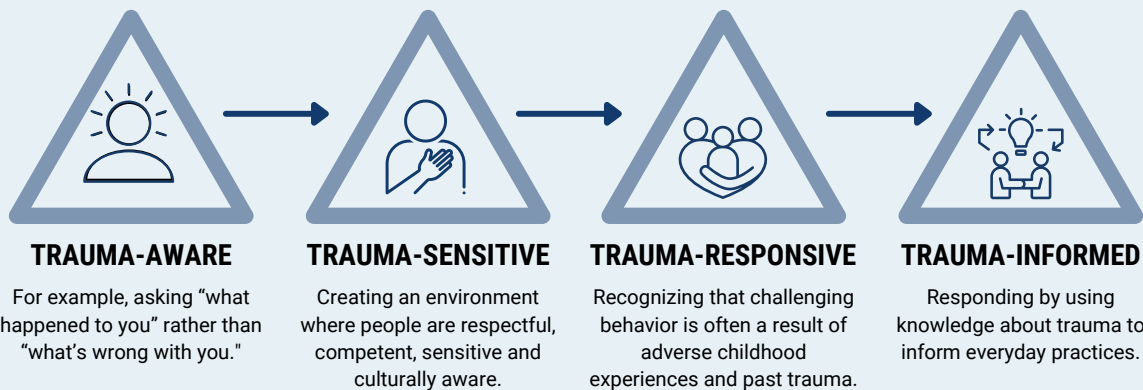


TRAUMA-INFORMED

- **The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP)** offers no cost training as well as an **online toolkit** for best practice strategies for working with children exposed to trauma. This training can help law enforcement find effective solutions for supporting this population.
- **Trauma Training for Criminal Justice Professionals** through **SAMHSA** teaches officers about how to develop responses to improve rehabilitation and recovery for individuals involved with the criminal justice system. It also equips participants to deliver effective training to others in their community.

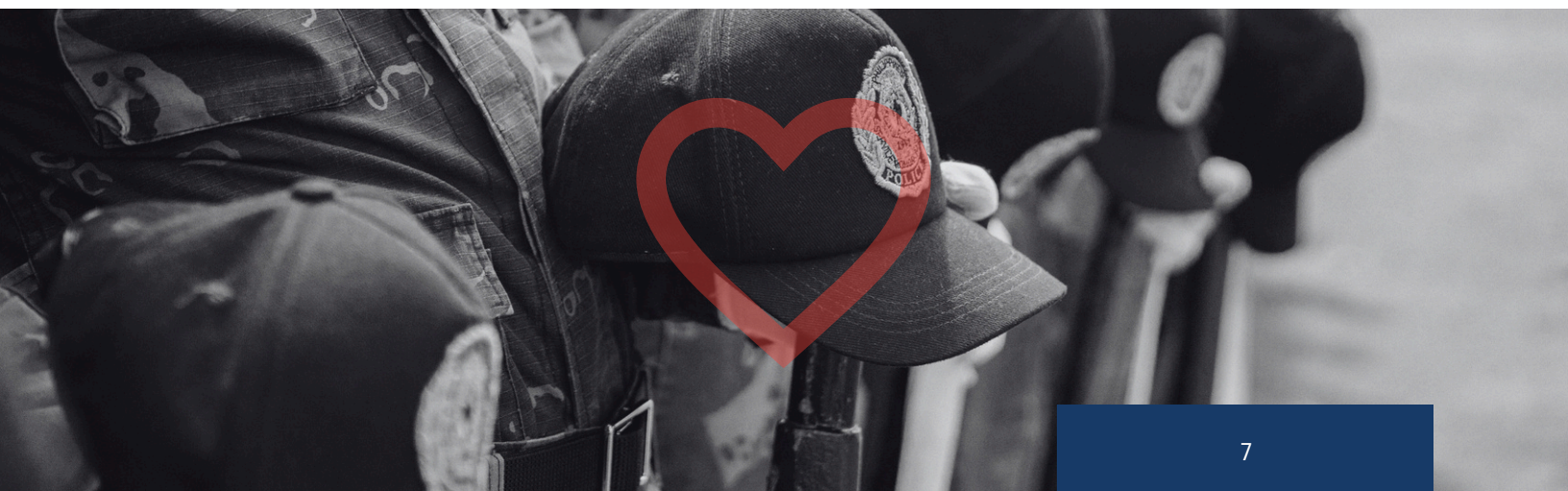
To learn more about sector-specific training resources, please visit the **Resilient Georgia Trauma-Informed Training Roadmap**.

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



Additional Support for Law Enforcement Officers

- Calling **988** connects individuals in crisis with trained counselors for immediate mental health and suicide prevention support, available 24/7. In Georgia, all calls, texts, and chats are managed by the Georgia Crisis and Access Line (GCAL). Healthcare workers can use this service to seek immediate support for themselves or to refer patients in need. For active crisis, visit **988 Lifeline**. For more information, visit **988 GA**.
- **Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHC)** 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.
- **Chris 180** provides trauma-informed counseling services at several sites in the Atlanta metro area.
- **Georgia Fraternal Order of Police** provides support that improves the working conditions of law enforcement officers. At their **Chaplain's Corner**, officers can connect with Senior Lodge Chaplain Donald MacDuffie who can provide specialized guidance, counseling and assistance.
- The **Office of Public Safety Support** provide resources of peer support and professional counseling to first responders. They also offer training for peer support counseling to public safety organizations such as law enforcement departments.
- The **Vicarious Trauma Toolkit** provide resources for victim services, emergency responders, and law enforcement to help organizations address the impact of vicarious trauma.



What can I do now? Next Steps

- Take a **training** to better understand the different ways trauma can manifest in behavior - such as tuning out, being easily startled, not complying with orders, or acting aggressively. In addition, officers can encourage family and others in your community to participate and learn more about the impact of this work.
- Explore collaborative programs like **Handle with Care** and the **Co-responder Program!**
- Promote the implementation of an organization-wide policy that prioritizes a trauma-informed approach to training. As a first step, the **Trauma-Informed Organizational Assessment** by the **National Child Traumatic Stress Network** can help organizations identify areas for improvement.
- **Consider** asking someone their story of what happened to them and respond with **empathy** to the difficulties they have encountered.

To learn more, access our references [here](#).



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

Questions or feedback?
Contact info@resilientga.org.

