



Overview

Children that are traumatized comprise a significant portion of our educational system. Trauma comes in many forms. According to the National Center for Child Traumatic Stress, childhood trauma may develop from exposure to natural disasters, domestic violence, automobile accidents, war trauma, terrorism, community and school violence, abuse, and bullying. Some may consider the number of students who experience trauma too minimal to be concerned, however, the rates are significant.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) reports that one out of every four children attending school has been, or will be, exposed to a traumatic event that can affect learning or school behavior. According to Ziegler (2012), it is estimated that each year, nearly 5,000,000 new children are traumatized and will develop potentially debilitating effects, including problems at school. "In fact," says Ziegler, "trauma may constitute the greatest cause of underachievement in schools." Underachievement comes in many forms. According to the NCTSN, students may suffer from:

- » Lower grade point averages
- » Higher school absence rates
- » Increased drop-out rates
- » Increased suspensions and expulsions
- » Decreased reading ability

Why do bullied, cyberbullied, and abused children have a harder time learning and achieving in school? According to multiple sources, including the report by the Kauffman Foundation, Set for Success, trauma impacts neural development in the brain and therefore, emotional and behavioral consequences are usually evident and school readiness and behavior are affected. Some of the indicators or consequential behaviors include:

- » Hypervigilance or always being on alert. Abused and bullied children may constantly be in fight or flight mode making it hard for them to relax and concentrate on schoolwork
- » Displaying aggression and social anxiety
- » Lacking behavioral self-regulation; expressing emotions and behaviors in ways that lack control
- » Displaying an inability to relate with others such as lacking trust and misreading others' intentions
- » Expecting the worst from all situations
- » Suffering from learning difficulties

There is additional research directly linking bullying and poor academic performance. Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, & Perry (2003) documented the relationship between peer harassment and academic achievement, specifically noting students who were harassed were more likely to be disconnected and miss school, resulting in poor academic outcomes. Gronna and Selvin (1999) analyzed achievement scores from 46 schools and found that after controlling for student characteristics, school safety was significantly related to math and reading standard scores among eighth graders.

However, additional research does suggest that high academic achievement is still possible in maltreated students despite abuse. Coohy, Renner, Hua, Zhang & Whitney (2011) determined that schools can increase academic achievement among maltreated children by incorporating prevention education and helping children increase their competency with daily living skills. According to one of the researchers, Stephen Whitney, Associate Professor in the Department of Educational, School, and Counseling Psychology, at the University of Missouri College of Education, "Teachers are the gatekeepers to reporting abuse, getting kids the help they need, and then providing crucial support in helping those kids overcome their past."



MBF Child Safety Matters™ and Academic Achievement

Research suggests that *MBF Child Safety Matters* should be a critical component of any school's comprehensive plan to provide a safer school environment, enhance academic performance, and prepare students from a young age to be successful in their academic endeavors.

The consistent and widespread implementation of a primary prevention program such as *MBF Child Safety Matters* supports positive social and academic outcomes for students, including less exposure to bullying and abuse, improved academic achievement, higher grade-point averages, lower drop out rates, and improved college enrollment/completion rates.

The added benefit to widespread implementation of a program, such as *MBF Child Safety Matters* in a community, is decreased spending by society on investigation, intervention, and treatment of child maltreatment. The US Centers for Disease Control estimates that the lifetime costs associated with just one year of reported child maltreatment cases are \$124 billion. Prevention is a much more cost-effective solution.

MBF Child Safety Matters also educates and empowers school faculty and personnel, parents and community members. This collaborative process is considered the best practice method for preventing bullying, cyberbullying, digital abuse, and maltreatment. It creates a safety net for children, a safer school environment, and opens the lines of communication between the home and school.

Curriculum Strategies

- » Raising awareness about safety concerns and issues facing students today
- » Educating school staff, parents and students about the dangers and risks of bullying, cyberbullying/digital abuse, and all types of child abuse and exploitation
- » Teaching school personnel the signs of abuse and reporting requirements
- » Teaching the signs of unsafe behaviors and situations
- » Creating a safe and supportive environment for students to seek help from safe adults
- » Teaching techniques and strategies for students to avoid and report unsafe situations
- » Providing resources to school personnel, parents, and students about where to find additional information and support

Conclusion

The *MBF Child Safety Matters* program is a comprehensive, research-based bullying, cyberbullying, child abuse, and digital abuse prevention program, and was developed using best practices for educating students to help the adults in their lives keep them safe. The outcomes support improved academic achievement for students, including improved grade-point averages, higher graduation rates and college enrollment/completion rates, improved social skills, and for schools and communities, better informed school staff, safer school environments, and overall decreased spending on maltreatment and trauma in children.

Every child deserves to be safe!

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Additional Abuse & Neglect Resources

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Additional Bullying Resources

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