

Handle With Care



Handle With Care (HWC) is a trauma-sensitive community response to support children's mental health and well-being following a traumatic event.

HWC promotes safe and supportive homes, schools and communities helping children impacted by any sort of traumatic event to *heal* and *thrive*. Through police-school-community partnerships children who are exposed to trauma receive appropriate interventions to help them achieve academically at their highest levels, despite whatever traumatic circumstances they may have endured.

Facts:

- Research now shows that trauma can undermine children's ability to learn, form relationships, and function appropriately in the classroom.
- Nationally, 60% of our children have been exposed to violence, crime, or abuse. Forty percent were direct victims of two or more violent acts.
- Repeated or prolonged exposure to violence and trauma seriously undermines children's ability to focus, behave appropriately, and learn in school; often leading to school failure, truancy, suspension or expulsion, dropping out or involvement in our juvenile justice system.

Handle With Care program supports children exposed to trauma and violence through improved communication and collaboration between law enforcement, schools/child care agencies and mental health providers, and connects families, schools and communities to mental health services.

Collaborative effort:

School and law enforcement partners continue to deepen their trauma sensitive training and develop best practices for helping to mitigate the negative effects experienced by children's exposure to trauma.

With these skillsets we are able to provide a level of safety and support, on-site at school, to help ease the student's emotional, physical and mental health.

Our definition of "traumatic event" is something that impacts the youth negatively and can range from having their beloved pet die or experiencing an immediate shift in living situation to more severe actions like car accidents, death of a loved one, or unfortunately, even drug or crime encounters.

How does it work?

The program is very simple: Law enforcement officers responding to a call are identifying children at the scene who have been exposed to trauma and initiate a flag of coordination to *Handle (this student) With Care* with the school.

The HWC notice is blind. Details are not provided. No information is given except for the child's name and these three words "handle with care". This HWC flag only identifies that an incident connected to your student occurred.

Schools have a pre-identified process to receive and disseminate the HWC notice through those in contact with the student. After being alerted, schools implement trauma sensitive training skills to shift into *Handle With Care* mode.

The "Handle With Care" Snapshot:

If a law enforcement officer encounters a child during a call, that child's name and three words, **HANDLE WITH CARE**, are forwarded to the school before the next day. The school implements individual, class, and whole school trauma-sensitive curricula so that identified children are "Handled With Care". If a child needs more intervention, on-site mental healthcare is available at the school.

Handle With Care

What do we do?

HWC will provide a safe zone for whatever extra care the child may need at school — from a space to shower/nap, or the chance to retake a test, experience general kindness, to accessing therapeutic sessions.

What not to do?

We do not ask the student about their experience. Our role is not to interview, quiz, or to gain information from the student. As a trauma sensitive school, we will implement interventions that will mitigate the negative effects of trauma on these children.

- School staff work to provide as much specialized care as possible for trauma-affected children, such as partnering them with a mentor or ensuring that they can make up missed homework.
- So, if the child acts out, the teacher has a heads up and might send for the student's counselor instead of sending them to the principal, or give the student extra time to do a project or postpone a test.
- When school interventions are not sufficient, therapists can provide services on site at the school (or refer to another provider) for children who may need supportive therapy.

Handle with Care benefits:

Teachers will be better able to address issues in the classroom. Mental Health providers and services will connect with children interacting in their school environments. Strong positive relationship with law enforcement.

HWC has become a magnet to assist agencies in working together, build community trust and most importantly help children struggling with the effects of trauma.

HWC is a great opportunity to work together to help all our children be safe and achieve at their highest levels despite whatever traumatic circumstances they may have endured.

Handle With Care of the North Central and North Quabbin region is a collaborative initiative that continues to deepen trauma sensitive and response practices within and across our local communities.



HWC Collaborative Partnership:

Ashburnham-Westminster School District	Ashburnham Police Department	Athol Police Department
Athol-Royalston School District	Gardner Police Department	Gardner Public Schools
Heywood Healthcare	Mahar Regional School District	Mount Wachusett Community
Narragansett Regional School District	Petersham Police Department	Phillipston Police Department
Templeton Police Department	Orange Police Department	Westminster Police Department

Worcester County District Attorney, Joseph Early's Office

For additional information contact HWC's Collaborative Liaison: Renee' Eldredge at Renee.Eldredge@heywood.org

Handle With Care

-caregiver flag-

If your child is coming to school after a difficult night, morning, or weekend please know we want school to be a safe and comforting place for them.

Have your child turn in this note to their teacher or to our front office team. Nothing will be said or asked.

The note will let us know that your child may need extra time or patience throughout the day.

