Tool for Analyzing COVID-19 Pandemic Response and Recovery Policy
Through the Lens of Trauma Science and Practice

Purpose of this Tool
Use this tool to apply a trauma lens to enacted laws and policies and in the development of new laws and policies.

Introduction
The global COVID-19 pandemic is a traumatic event. Every person in America, at every age, has experienced a disruption to normal life as the crisis impacts them as individuals, their homelives, worklives, and their communities.

As policymakers at all levels of government take action in response to this crisis, it is vital that trauma-science is applied. The required pace of this response may mean that policies passed in the early days are not trauma-informed. However, moving forward, policymakers must use a trauma-science lens.

In any case, advocates who know the science can both evaluate new laws and policies, and inform future drafts. Using this tool, policymakers and advocates can collaboratively develop policy proposals that are informed by trauma science. Retrospectively, these guidelines can also be used when analyzing laws or policies that have been put into place to ensure their implementation adheres to trauma science.

Background
The COVID-19 pandemic is deeply impacting our country and dramatically increasing exposure to adversity and trauma at the same time that people are disconnected from support networks, such as school, church, or social organizations. Already we are seeing documented spikes in serious child abuse cases, domestic violence incidents and food insecurity. An article in The Atlantic, The Kids Aren't Alright, articulates the trauma that children are experiencing and will continue to experience. In these early days, congressional, state, and local leaders have correctly and necessarily focused on the immediate health and economic impacts of COVID-19. Going forward, through both immediate response and long-term recovery, it is essential that there are efforts, programs, approaches, and public financing dedicated to supporting families and communities to limit adversity during the crisis and addressing the impacts of the increased trauma exposure many people and communities are experiencing now to mitigate the intergenerational negative consequences.

We must all work to ensure that our nation's recovery from COVID-19 is one of resilience and restoration in response to grief and adversity on a scale unknown to modern times.

Tools
The *Principles, Framework and Steps* listed below are each tools that you can use to analyze existing laws or policies to identify how they may be useful in advancing a trauma-informed approach, program or practice. They can also be useful in developing ideas for proposed policies and solutions.

Principles for COVID-19 Pandemic Response and Recovery Policy
When drafting policy proposals or analyzing new laws and policies passed to support COVID response and recovery, check to see if these principles are adhered to. As you analyze, ask the questions, "Does this new law or drafted policy proposal adhere to the following principles? If not, can I offer a solution, amended language, idea for implementation, or something else that brings the new law/drafted policy into full alignment with these principles?"

1. Recognize that COVID-19 is a traumatic event that is affecting a critical stage of lifelong human development for children and youth.
2. Use a multi-generational approach to mitigate the adversities caused by the pandemic. Adults and families are also impacted.
3. Develop policy that is responsive to brain science, particularly what is known about the effects of trauma on the developing brains of children and youth and the secondary impact of trauma on the essential workforce responding to the crisis.
4. Recognize that some communities and populations are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic because of structural racism and concentrated poverty and advance equitable approaches that ensure that every person in America has full access to supports and services that sustain their well-being during the crisis and restores their well-being when the crisis is behind us.
5. Facilitate alignment between the public and private sectors at the local, state, and national levels.
6. Promote the use of the social ecological framework and take into account the inter-relationships among individual, family, workplace, community, and society.
7. Empower those who are living the experiences driven by this crisis to develop and inform solutions and responses.
8. Draw from existing, relevant policies, approaches, programs, and pilots that demonstrate success in responding to traumatic events to expedite the provision of relief and recovery measures.
9. Bolster the capacity of community-based organizations that provide services to children and families, especially during an economic crisis.
10. Respond to the needs of those who work with traumatized children, adults, families and communities and experience secondary traumatic stress, vicarious trauma and other occupational hazards.

(This list of principles was adapted from the Values and Principles section on page 5 of Using a Brain-Science Infused Lens in Policy Development, published by the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities' Change in Mind Initiative).

A Framework of Core Concepts to Apply When Creating or Analyzing COVID-19 Pandemic Policy
When drafting policy proposals or analyzing new laws and policies passed to support COVID response and recovery, check to see if this framework of core concepts is adhered to. As you analyze, ask the questions, "Does this new law or drafted policy proposal adhere to the core concepts? If not, can I offer a solution, amended language, idea for implementation, or something else that brings the new law/drafted policy into full alignment with these core concepts?"

The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2016), through its groundbreaking research has identified core concepts that help us understand what it takes to ensure healthy development and protect children from the effects of overwhelming stress. These include:

- "Relationships with caring, responsive, adults and early positive experiences build strong brain architecture for children.
- Significant stress from ongoing hardship or threat, such as exposure to violence, extreme poverty, or child maltreatment disrupts the biological foundations of learning, behavior, and health, with life-long consequences.
- Providing the right ingredients for healthy development—including protective factors that can counterbalance the effects of adversity—from the start produces better outcomes than trying to fix problems later.
- In the early years, it's critical to provide both the buffering protection of responsive relationships and safe and stable environments that help to reduce poverty, maltreatment, community violence, racism, and other threats to child well-being."

(Excerpt taken from page 1 of Using a Brain-Science Infused Lens in Policy Development, published by the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities' Change in Mind Initiative.)

For each policy provision you analyze, ask:
- How could this COVID-19 law or policy be applied in my state, community, or organization (e.g. school; community-based provider, etc.) to ensure it is implemented using a trauma-informed and hope-centered approach? Is there any advice your organization would give to federal, state or local leaders on how to implement the provision based on trauma science and practice?
- What more/different/additional is needed in future policymaking (at the federal level, or any other level of government) to ensure our nation's and community's response to this crisis is trauma-informed and that our society emerges from this prepared to respond to the effects of trauma and build resiliency?

Then using the core concepts as your guide, ask:
- Does this provision work to adequately support or enhance relationships with caring, responsive adults?
- Does this provision protect children and families from the significant stress of the ongoing hardship, and personal/economic threats caused by this pandemic?
- Does this provision provide the elements required for families to have access to all of the necessary protective factors that will counterbalance the effects of adversities caused by this crisis?
- Does this provision acknowledge and attempt to address historic inequities that exacerbate the trauma caused by the crisis?

Steps to Take to Based on Your Analysis
- **Opportunity identified.** When your analysis identifies opportunities for applying new laws and policies using a trauma-informed approach, contact the leadership for the organization or institution in charge of implementation, e.g. the superintendent of schools or the Governor/executive branch, to share your concrete ideas and advocate for them. If you are not already part of a trauma coalition, you may want to start by contacting your trauma coalition to see if your ideas align with theirs.
- **Gap identified.** When your analysis identifies gaps in new laws and policies, contact your local trauma coalition, the National Trauma Campaign, or a local advocacy organization you are a part of, to organize in support of a gap-closing solution.

New or additional policy needed. When you have an idea for a law or policy that is needed to ensure a trauma-informed approach to COVID-19 response or recovery, capture your idea in 3-5 sentences, then contact your local trauma coalition, the National Trauma Campaign, a local advocacy organization, or the policymaker's office that has jurisdiction related to your idea, e.g. the Governor/Governor's cabinet member for a state-level policy, the Mayor for community-level policy, your U.S. Representative for federal-level policy.

For any of these steps, you can always start the conversation and change process by accessing or connecting with someone you know well who may have a valuable connection with one of the influencers.

(Developed by the National Trauma Campaign Core Team, April 2020)