

This resource guide is a companion to the Emotional Health and Wellness brief, which highlights statewide data from the 2023-24 Tennessee Together Student Survey. The survey measures youth substance use attitudes, behaviors and social norms, and student mental health concerns that often co-occur with substance use.

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According to the 2021-22 National Household Survey of Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 20.5% of Tennessee youth (ages 12-17) reported suffering from at least one major depressive episode in the past year, and 14% of youth had serious thoughts of suicide.

Schools that prioritize mental health create a supportive and inclusive environment where students feel valued, respected, and understood.

This positive school climate contributes to overall student well-being and academic success.

The resource guide provides schools with sample tools, models and resources for promoting safe and supportive learning environments and effectively identifying and responding to youth mental health needs.

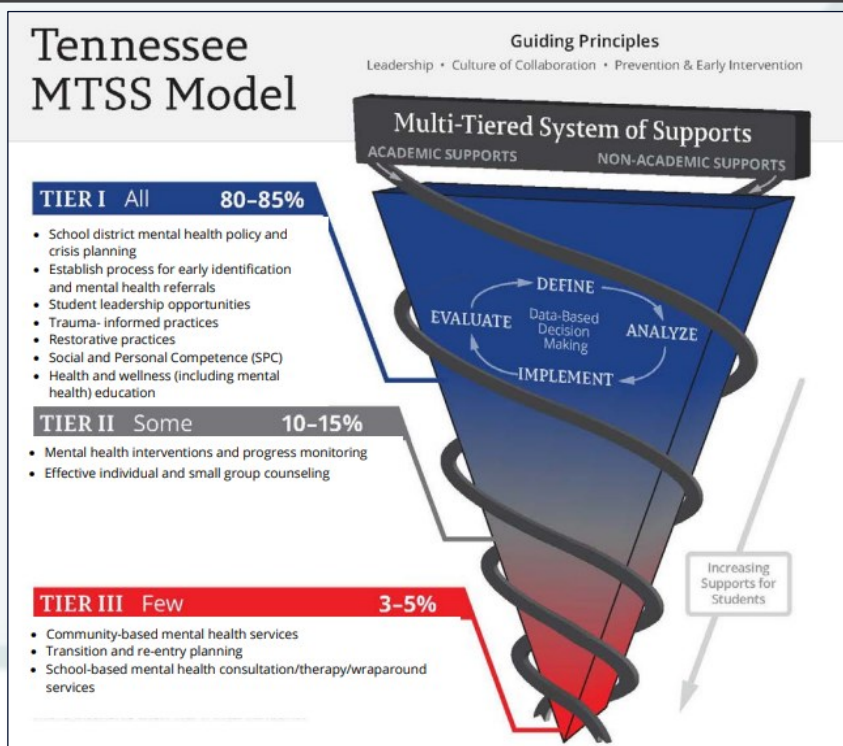
MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS (MTSS)

Tennessee schools use a **Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)** model to guide implementation of comprehensive school based mental health services and supports.

The MTSS framework includes strategies to:

- promote the social and personal well-being and development of **all students (Tier I)**,
- strategies to support **some students** at risk of or with mild mental health challenges (**Tier II**), and
- strategies to support those **few students** who have not made significant progress as a result of earlier interventions and/or need more individualized and intensive supports (**Tier III**).

MTSS is a layered approach, and when effectively and consistently implemented, it is the key to the success of providing mental health supports to students.



NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND RESOURCE MAPPING



The **School Health Assessment and Performance Evaluation (SHAPE) System** was developed by the University of Maryland School of Medicine to support assessment of the school mental health landscape, and to guide planning implementation and quality improvement. Schools and districts can use SHAPE to document mental health resources across multiple tiers of support, evaluate strengths and identify areas of improvement, and utilize data driven strategies to improve quality. For more information, visit: www.theshapesystem.com/

For more information about needs assessment and resource mapping, please visit: <https://www.schoolmentalhealth.org/media/som/microsites/ncsmh/documents/quality-guides/Needs-Assessment-&-Resource-Mapping.pdf>

SCHOOL POLICY

School policy is an important tool for establishing clear guidelines and procedures to promote the safety and well-being of students and school staff, and ensure effective school operations. School policy also serves as a useful tool for sustaining programs and best practices, and promoting school accountability and compliance with state law. One critical focus of school mental health policy is suicide prevention. Tennessee state law (49-6-1902) requires each local education agency (LEA) in the state to adopt a policy on suicide prevention that addresses procedures related to **prevention, intervention, and postvention**. The Tennessee Departments of Education, Health, and Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services together established a model policy to assist districts and schools in meeting the requirement. This policy understands that physical, behavioral, and emotional health are integral components of student achievement.

For more information, visit: https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/safety/suicide_prevention_policy.pdf

For other examples of model suicide policies and plans, consider these additional sources:

Washington State: <https://doh.wa.gov/sites/default/files/legacy/Documents/Pubs//631-058-SuicidePrevPlan.pdf>

Utah: https://dsamh-training.utah.gov/_documents/SuicidePrevention/UtahSuicidePreventionPlan_22-26.pdf

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Staff training is another component of the MTSS model approach that empowers school staff to recognize, respond to, and support the needs of students, creating a positive school environment. Tennessee state agencies have lead efforts to expand professional development opportunities in accordance with state law in key areas:

Promoting Youth Resilience & Trauma-Informed Practices

Tennessee state law (49-1-230) outlines the requirements for ongoing in-service training and professional development for educators on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)

"**Building Strong Brains**" and the "**Six Pillars**" are training initiatives that aim to teach youth-serving adults about healthy brain development in children and how to support their overall well-being. Each framework emphasizes the importance of early childhood experiences and the role of caregivers, communities, and policies in shaping children's brain development.

- [Building Strong Brains](#) emphasizes that early experiences have a lasting impact on children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. Initiatives involve partnerships to promote policies and programs.
- The [Six Pillars](#) framework is often used within the context of [Building Strong Brains](#) to outline key principles and strategies for promoting healthy brain development.

For more information, visit: www.tn.gov/dcs/program-areas/child-health/aces.html

Increasing Mental Health Literacy

Youth Mental Health First Aid / Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) are state funded training programs designed to teach individuals to recognize the signs and symptoms of challenges or crises and provide initial support until appropriate professional help can be obtained. The program aims to increase mental health literacy, reduce stigma, and empower individuals to intervene effectively in crises. For more information, visit: www.tn.gov/health/mhfa.html

Preventing Youth Suicide Risk

As mandated by Tennessee state law (49-6-1901) all school personnel are required to complete suicide prevention training annually, **The Jason Foundation** provides free online training programs designed to equip educators and staff with the knowledge and skills needed to recognize warning signs of suicide risk, intervene effectively, and connect students to appropriate support services. For more information, visit: <https://jasonfoundation.com/get-involved/educator-youth-worker-coach/professional-development-series/>

SCREENING & ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Screenings and assessment are key components of the MTSS model in schools that are used to identify students within the school population who may be at risk for emotional or behavioral health challenges. Screening provides data to systematically assess student needs to promote equitable access to additional supports and interventions (Tier 2 and Tier 3) for ALL students. Screening tools are NOT used to formally diagnose mental health issues or to identify students with disabilities.

Examples of evidence-based screening tools used across Tennessee schools include:

Universal Behavior Screening

The Student Risk Screening Scale (SRSS) is a brief, no-cost, universal screening tool that is used to identify unmet needs for non-academic student supports within the whole school population. Each teacher completes the SRSS for all students enrolled in a selected class period. Teachers rate students using a four-point scale to indicate the frequency with which they observe certain externalizing and internalizing behaviors. Ratings are combined into measures of low, moderate, or high risk. Results are used to inform planning of Tier 1 universal strategies and to identify students for Tier 2 and 3 supports.

For more information about the SRSS, please visit:

<https://www.ci3t.org/screening>

Suicide Risk Screening

The Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS) is a questionnaire used for suicide assessment that helps to determine the severity and immediacy of suicide risk and to gauge levels of needed support. Developed by Columbia University with support from the National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH), the scale is part of an evidence-supported approach to assessing suicidality. The screener uses a series of simple, plain-language questions that can be administered by a school counselor or other staff.

For more information about the C-SSRS, please visit:

<https://cssrs.columbia.edu/>

For more information about school-based screening, please visit:

<https://www.schoolmentalhealth.org/media/som/microsites/ncsmh/documents/quality-guides/Screening.pdf>

The Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS) Screener		
Always ask questions 1 and 2.	Past Month	
1) Have you wished you were dead or wished you could go to sleep and not wake up?		
2) Have you actually had any thoughts about killing yourself?		
If YES to 2, ask questions 3, 4, 5 and 6. If NO to 2, skip to question 6.		
3) Have you been thinking about how you might do this?		
4) Have you had these thoughts and had some intention of acting on them?	High Risk	
5) Have you started to work out or worked out the details of how to kill yourself? Did you intend to carry out this plan?	High Risk	
Always Ask Question 6	Life-time	Past 3 Months
6) Have you done anything, started to do anything, or prepared to do anything to end your life? If yes, was this within the past 3 months?		High Risk
<p>If YES to 2 or 3, seek behavioral healthcare for further evaluation.</p> <p>If the answer to 4, 5 or 6 is YES, get immediate help: Call or text 988, call 911 or go to the emergency room. STAY WITH THEM until they can be evaluated.</p>		

SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE DELIVERY

Tier 2 services and supports address the mental health concerns of SOME students who are experiencing mild distress, functional impairment, or are **at risk** for a given problem or concern. Tier 3 services and supports address mental health concerns among THE FEW students who are **already** experiencing significant distress and functional impairment. Services can be provided by school-based mental health professionals or through mental health partners in the community with services funded through the Behavioral Health Safety Net for Children, TennCare, or private insurance. The **TDMHSAS School-Based Behavioral Health Liaisons Program**, is a state program that funds local community mental health centers to provide school-based behavioral health liaisons. Services include individual counseling sessions, assessments and referrals, intervention, and education on coping strategies.



The Tennessee Together Survey linked students with resource information, including the **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** to promote student help-seeking for mental health crises.

For more information, visit: [TN.gov/behavioral-health/sbbhl](https://tn.gov/behavioral-health/sbbhl)

TENNESSEE ORGANIZATIONS

TN Voices is a non-profit organization based in Tennessee that focuses on advocating for children's rights, providing support services and promoting policies and practices that enhance the well-being of children and families in the state. The organization offers education and training programs on topics related to children's mental health, trauma-informed care, child development, and other relevant subjects. These programs aim to increase awareness and build capacity to better support children and families. For more information, please visit: <https://tnvoices.org/>

The **Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network (TSPN)** is a statewide organization dedicated to suicide prevention efforts. TSPN focuses on raising awareness about the warning signs of suicide, providing education and training, offering support and resources, and advocating for policy changes to address the underlying factors contributing to suicide risk. The TSPN collaborates with organizations to ensure that individuals in crisis have access to immediate support and assistance. TSPN offers training to teach participants how to recognize the warning signs of someone contemplating suicide and how to question them, persuade them to get help, and refer them for help. For more information, please visit: www.tspn.org

National Center for School Mental Health (NCSMH): NCSMH strengthens policies and programs in schools to improve learning and promote success for through research and evaluation, providing training and technical assistance, program development and policy monitoring. For information, visit: www.schoolmentalhealth.org/

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

National Center for Safe and Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSE) offers information and technical assistance to states, districts, schools, institutions of higher education, and communities focused on improving school climate and conditions for learning. For more information, visit: safesupportivelearning.ed.gov

National Association of School Psychologists (NASP): NASP provides resources and guidelines for school psychologists and other school-based mental health professionals. This includes suicide prevention best practices and crisis responses and postvention strategies for schools. For more information, visit: www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA): SAMHSA offers suicide prevention resources tailored for schools and educational settings, including guides, toolkits, and training programs aimed at helping school staff identify and support students at risk of suicide. Visit: www.samhsa.gov/suicide-prevention-resource-center-sprc

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP): AFSP provides toolkits and training programs designed specifically for educators and school staff. Their website offers guidance on how to recognize warning signs, intervene effectively, and support students at risk of suicide. Visit: <https://afsp.org/suicide-prevention-resources/>

The Building Student Resilience Toolkit is designed for school educators as a tool to strengthen their skills for nurturing student resilience during development. Building resilience enables students to rise above challenges and recalibrate responses accordingly. For information, visit: safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/building-student-resilience-toolkit

PRODUCTS AND RESOURCE MATERIALS

Planting Seeds to Promote Family-Centered Student Mental Health is a document provided by the Department of Education that offers strategies and best practices to promote family-centered mental health in schools:

<https://www.tn.gov/education/districts/health-and-safety/school-based-mental-health-supports/positive-childhood-experiences.html>

Trauma Sensitive Schools (Web-based) Training offers a roadmap for adopting a trauma-sensitive approach. In a trauma-sensitive school, all aspects of the educational environment are grounded in an understanding of trauma and its impact. For information, visit: safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/trauma-sensitive-schools-training-package

School Mental Health Quality Guide is a collection of resources by the NCSMH that provide information to help school mental health systems advance the quality of their services. The guide contains information on teaming, best practices, action steps, examples, and resources: www.schoolmentalhealth.org/resources/school-mental-health-quality-guides/

Nine Elements of Effective School Community Partnerships is a resource guide that identifies a framework for building and sustaining effective mental health partnerships between schools and their communities. For more information, visit: https://www.nasponline.org/documents/Research%20and%20Policy/Advocacy%20Resources/Community%20Schools%20White%20Paper_Jan_2016.pdf

Mental Health 101 is a curriculum developed by the Mental Health Association of East Tennessee (MHAET). It provides mental health information, a focus on youth suicide prevention, and resources to middle- and senior high school students statewide. For information, visit: <https://www.mhaet.com/what-we-do/mental-health-101/>