



Manatee County

Handle with Care

Information Guide



What is Handle with Care?

Manatee County's Handle with Care (HwC) program is modeled after the West Virginia Defending Childhood Initiative and is a multiagency collaborative effort to increase knowledge and awareness when a student has experienced a traumatic event in their home or community. Beginning with the 2017-2018 school year, the School District of Manatee County partnered with all local law enforcement agencies to establish an immediate notification system when a student enrolled in a district school becomes involved with an active case. This system was designed to notify school principals, teachers, and counselors that a student may be experiencing some level of trauma and to simply be aware, if outward signs of problems begin to emerge. Beginning with the 2020-2021 school year, the Manatee County HwC program will seek to become more proactive in identifying students who are involved with potentially traumatic events and exhibit academic, behavioral, or attendance-related issues, in order to connect the student and family with appropriate interventions.

How are Schools Contacted?

As law enforcement comes in contact with a school-aged child during any incident which may be traumatic, HwC form is completed at the scene. The form contains basic information regarding the identity of any children involved, the school they are enrolled in, and the time and date of the incident. The form is immediately communicated to a single district contact via email and then forwarded to the principal of the school where a student is enrolled. The principal will in-turn inform the student's teacher, counselor, and any other personnel who may interact with the student. Teachers and school personnel are then supplied with any need-to-know information about the event, signs of trauma to look out for, and protocol, should any signs of trauma appear or persist.

Common Signs of Trauma or Distress

Any of the below signs of trauma or distress may or may not be an indicator by itself. The most important consideration is to know your students and be observant of any change in the below considerations. ***If any indicators appear or persist, please contact your school counselor immediately.***

- Loss of appetite
- Withdrawal
- Irritability
- Easily startled
- Trouble focusing
- School Refusal
- Constant state of alert
- Inability to experience joy
- Outbursts of anger
- Regression in behavior
- Diminished interest in activities
- Frequent head or stomach aches
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering
- Significant change in personality
- Recurring conflict with peers

Key Supports

All students benefit from classrooms and environments with the below attributes. When a student has been exposed to trauma however, please ensure these key supports are being utilized to the extent possible.

- Provide a physically welcoming and emotionally safe classroom.
- Make positive emotional connections with students.
- Develop predictable classroom routines.
- Provide frequent opportunities for students to demonstrate success.
- Create opportunities for students to make choices.
- Address behavior issues as learning opportunities and teachable moments.
- Learn student triggers and how to avoid them.
- Model emotional control and respectful relationships.