



HANDLE WITH CARE OKLAHOMA

PROTECT • HEAL • THRIVE

Advisory Team

Deputy Chief Balderrama

Dr. Teri Bell

Janelle Bretten

Dr. Constance Chapple

Joey Clifton

Brittany Couch

Sheriff Damon Devereaux

Danielle Dill

Lauren Dunlap

Adrienne B. Elder

Dr. Shelly Ellis

Steve Emmons

Michael Figgins, J.D.

Sandy Foster

Julie Geddes

Sheriff Todd Gibson

Jennifer Hays-Grudo, PhD

Brett Hayes

Jill Hazeldine

Superintendent Joy Hofmeister

Annette Jacobi

Craig Knutson

Carolynn MacAllister

Linda Manaugh

Beth Martin

Cheryl McGee

Sheriff Ray McNair

Nikkiey Morton

Tanya Mosier

Representative Cyndi Munson

Traylor Rains

Laura Ross-White

Dr. Jane Silovsky

Jeff Tallent

Jennifer Towell

Kimbra Whaley

Sheamekab Williams

Dear Oklahoma Community Leaders,

December 2, 2019

In preparation for 2020, we need your voice. Oklahoma ranks worst in the nation for kids experiencing the most Adverse Childhood Experiences ([America's Health Rankings, 2019](#)). **Multiple ACE scores translate into long-term negative outcomes and higher costs for our state and local communities.** In the absence of responsive relationships, traumatic events create toxic stress in children that alters brain chemistry, reduces exposure to core life skills, increases susceptibility to negative comfort-seeking behaviors, increases chronic diseases, and prompts premature death ([Harvard's Center on the Developing Child, 2019](#)). No one sector can do this work alone, therefore it is more important than ever to align efforts, especially in Oklahoma.

One strategy that communities are using across the nation to increase collaboration is **developing a shared purpose of providing support and resiliency skills to children who have experienced trauma.** Specifically, there are a significant number of emergency 911 calls where children are witnesses to a traumatic event without any follow-up support. Children are often sent to school the next day after without support systems in place, which undermines the children's ability to focus, behave appropriately, and learn. Schools are often not alerted to these traumatic events and may interpret a child's disengagement in the classroom as disrespectful, increasing the chances of school failure, truancy, suspension, expulsion, drop out, involvement with the justice system or long-term negative health effects.

Started in West Virginia in 2014, the "[Handle With Care](#)" model provides a cross-sector opportunity to prevent long-term inequities by changing the trajectory of children exposed to traumatic events. If a law enforcement officer encounters a child during a 911 call, that child's name and three words, **HANDLE WITH CARE**, are forwarded to the school/child care agency before the school bell rings the next day. The school implements individual, class and whole school trauma-sensitive curricula so that traumatized children are "Handled With Care." If a child/family needs more support, on-site trauma-focused behavioral health, health and social services are available with consent of guardian.

This simple public health model starts a positive ripple effect by increasing important conversations to encourage trauma-informed trainings, offering clearly defined roles, building trust, & increasing cross-sector alignment with law enforcement, schools, behavioral health providers, health and social services for the child and family. **By intervening at [critical moments in time](#), we advance the cause of providing everyone a fair and just opportunity to protect, heal, and thrive.**

With a local pilot study, Oklahoma House Interim Study, 10 state leaders attending the National HWC Conference, and over 20 local communities interested, **the Handle With Care Oklahoma's Advisory Team invites community leaders and their partners to continue learning about this critical work and co-creating a top ten state.** Please visit:

- 1) info@publichealthok.org (email to request a Handle With Care presentation)
- 2) <https://salud-america.org/handle-with-care-full-action-pack/> (sample HWC materials)
- 3) <https://systemsofcare.ou.edu/resources/> (Oklahoma Systems of Care resources and trauma training)
- 4) <https://systemsofcare.ou.edu/yis/referral/form.aspx> (behavioral health referral)

Handle With Care Oklahoma's 501(c)(3) fiduciary agent and nonprofit partner:
Public Health Institute of Oklahoma, P.O. Box 60926, Oklahoma City, OK 73146

www.publichealthok.org