**Handle with Care: A Trauma-Sensitive Approach for Educators**

**What is "Handle with Care"?**
"Handle with Care" is a proactive approach to support students who may have experienced trauma or stressful events outside of school. When a student is identified as being in need of special care due to a difficult experience (e.g., family crisis, violence, loss), educators are alerted to provide extra support. The goal is to create a safe, empathetic, and understanding environment that helps students cope with their challenges and succeed in the classroom.

**How does it work?**

1. **Identification**:
	* Law enforcement or school officials will notify the school when a child has experienced a potentially traumatic event. This could include situations like a family death, domestic violence, or other crises.
	* The notification will include only the child’s name and a “Handle with Care” message—no specific details about the event are shared for confidentiality.
2. **Support in the Classroom**:
	* Upon receiving the “Handle with Care” alert, educators are encouraged to:
		+ **Be aware of the student’s emotional state**: Look for signs of distress such as difficulty concentrating, withdrawing, irritability, or trouble with social interactions.
		+ **Respond with compassion**: Approach the student with understanding and patience. If needed, offer a quiet space, a comforting word, or extra time on assignments.
		+ **Adjust expectations where possible**: While maintaining academic rigor, allow for flexibility with deadlines or tasks as students may be struggling to manage their emotions.
		+ **Check in with the student**: A gentle inquiry about how the student is doing can help foster a sense of safety and support.
3. **Confidentiality and Respect**:
	* It is important to maintain the student’s privacy and dignity. Only educators who need to know should be informed about the "Handle with Care" message. Respect for confidentiality helps build trust with the student and family.

**Benefits for Students**:

* **Emotional support**: Reduces the emotional burden by creating a safe space for students to manage stress.
* **Improved academic outcomes**: Emotional well-being is crucial for learning; supporting students in distress helps them focus and engage.
* **Fostering trust**: Students feel cared for when they know their needs are understood and met without judgment.

**Best Practices for Educators**:

* **Be observant**: Look for signs of distress and give students space to process their emotions.
* **Offer a safe, structured environment**: Consistency helps students feel grounded during times of uncertainty.
* **Collaborate with support staff**: Counselors, social workers, and other school staff are important resources to support students dealing with trauma.
* **Encourage open communication**: Foster an open-door policy where students feel comfortable seeking help when needed.