



## What is Handle with Care?

*Handle with Care* (HWC) is a national model which aims to provide trauma-informed support to children who are exposed to traumatic events, such as violence, abuse, or other crises in their home or community. When law enforcement or first responders encounter children during such events, they alert relevant school personnel and request that a child be “handled with care.” The school then monitors, offers mindful check-ins, adjusts supports - academic, behavioral, emotional, and connects the child/family to further services if needed.

The goal is to modify how systems respond to prevent re-traumatization, mitigate negative impacts on learning and behavior, and foster a more trauma-sensitive school and community environment.

---

## Georgia’s Current Status and Stakeholders

Georgia is currently in a growth/implementation phase for Handle with Care. Below are stakeholders and what is known so far:

- The **Georgia Center for Child Advocacy (GCCA)** led a state coalition of organizations either implementing or interested in implementing HWC. [cmgeorgia.org](http://cmgeorgia.org)
  - **Connections Matter Georgia** hosts information about *Handle with Care* in GA, showing interest and early adoption of the model.
  - Training and education through GCCA: The Center offers prevention education, professional trainings, and outreach across the state. This includes training adults, caregivers, teachers etc., to recognize and respond to childhood trauma. [georgiacenterforchildadvocacy.org](http://georgiacenterforchildadvocacy.org)
- **Resilient Georgia** is a coalition that works statewide to build trauma-informed systems. Its mission includes prevention, early intervention, policy, research, and system coordination for ages birth through 26. This kind of infrastructure provides fertile ground for HWC to scale. [Resilient Georgia](http://ResilientGeorgia.org)
- Behavioral health pilot projects: For example, Georgia’s Department of Human Services (DHS), through its Division of Family & Children Services (DFCS), has launched *Behavioral Health Care Pilot Projects*, such as the CAT (Community Action Treatment) teams, in certain regions. These seek to provide early, wraparound, and trauma-informed mental health services to children and youth. [Georgia Department of Human Services](http://GeorgiaDepartmentofHumanServices.org)
- **Georgia Family Connection Partnership.** At the state level, Georgia Family Connection works to promote trauma-informed policies and encourage broader adoption of HWC.

# Key Challenges and Considerations

As with any statewide implementation of a school-law enforcement-mental health coordination model, Georgia could face (if not already) several challenges:

## 1. Communication Protocols

- Ensuring law enforcement agencies, schools, mental health providers, and possibly child welfare or first responders all have clear, consistent procedures for when a “handle with care” notification is sent, who receives it, and how schools respond without compromising privacy.

## 2. Resources and Capacity

- Schools resources: trained staff, possibly trauma-informed teachers/counselors, capacity for monitoring and follow-ups. Rural or underfunded districts may especially struggle.
- Mental health service access is uneven across the state, and existing limitations (clinician shortages, funding, insurance barriers) may limit how much follow-through can occur once need is identified.

## 3. Data, Tracking, and Evaluation

- To know what works, Georgia will need data: how many “Handle With Care” notifications, how schools respond, whether students’ outcomes (academic, behavioral, emotional) improve.
- There may also be concerns about privacy, consent, and record sharing (school records, law enforcement reports etc.).

## 4. Consistency Across Jurisdictions

- Georgia is large and diverse. Ensuring the model is implemented **with fidelity** across urban, suburban, and rural counties, and across districts with varying resources, will be a major task.

## 5. Sustainability

- Funding must be stable (beyond pilot grants) and policies set so that the model is fully integrated into standard practice operations of school districts, law enforcement, etc.

# Opportunities and Recommendations for Scaling

To maximize impact, Georgia’s efforts could consider:

- **Pilot/demonstration sites** in a variety of settings (rural, urban, etc.) to refine protocols and build proof points.
- **State policy or legislation** to formally recognize the “Handle With Care” notification requirement, define roles and responsibilities, and provide funding or incentives for participating schools/districts.
- **Alignment** with Georgia [Senate Bill 123](#) and [Behavioral Health Commission](#)
- **Statewide Model** [Tennessee State Government](#)
- **Training programs** for first responders, law enforcement, school staff (teachers, counselors), mental health professionals, on trauma, trauma-responsive care, cultural competence.
- **Partnerships** between state agencies (e.g., Dept. of Education, DHS DFCS, Dept. of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities), nonprofit organizations (like GCCA), local school districts, law enforcement.
- **Data systems** to monitor implementation: tracking notifications, response, outcomes; continuous quality improvement within privacy law parameters.
- **Community engagement:** raising awareness among parents, caretakers, students about what HWC means, how schools can help, how families can access supports.
- **Seeking sustainable funding sources:** state budget allocations, grants, public/private partnerships.