

## Handle With Care (HWC) Talking Points for Schools

These talking points were created as a resource for school staff. It provides guidance when asked about the Handle With Care program: the purpose of the program, the Handle With Care referral process, and the school protocol following a referral notification.

### What is the Handle With Care Program?

Handle With Care improves communication between schools and law enforcement to ensure that school-age children and teens who are exposed to potentially traumatic events that happen outside of school feel safe and supported by staff in school. With the endorsement of both Lehigh and Northampton District Attorney's Offices, all Lehigh Valley k-12 school systems and police departments are participating in this program.

### How does HWC work?

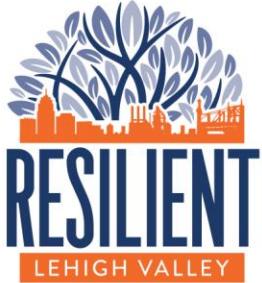
When law enforcement officers are called to an incident, they are asked to pay attention to whether or not school age children are present and are trained to understand that the child may experience this incident as traumatic. The officer then makes a confidential referral through the HWC system to the child's school to give the school an early heads up that the child may need some extra time, attention and understanding. Another part of the HWC program is to train school staff on how to recognize signs and symptoms of childhood trauma and how to create a safe and supportive learning environment to best support that child.

### What HWC is not -

- NOT entered into the child's permanent school record
- Does NOT include any information about why the officer was engaged with the family/student (Just the child's name and name of school and "HWC", nothing else is included)
- NOT a disciplinary action by the school or reported in the child's permanent school
- NOT used to create a referral into the legal system or child welfare

### What organization is managing Handle With Care?

Handle With Care is a project under Resilient Lehigh Valley, a collective impact effort focused on fostering youth resiliency through trauma informed and culturally responsive youth and family serving systems. The Resilient Lehigh Valley team develop and disseminate the Handle With Care training and marketing materials, convene HWC partners to promote continuous quality improvement, track HWC referral numbers by police department, and provide outreach to increase buy in with police and school leadership for this program. The United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley acts as the backbone organization and fiscal agent for Resilient Lehigh Valley.



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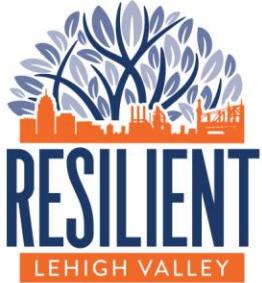


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**IF** a parent or community member has additional, more specific questions, here are additional details about how the HWC program works and some answers to commonly asked questions:

- IF the parent is concerned about the involvement of police officers, share that in the Lehigh Valley, officers also act as our first responders with house fires, car accidents, overdoses and suicide attempts, etc.
- When a police officer responds to a call and a school-age child is present, the officer understands that this incident might be traumatic for the child and gently asks the child's name and name of their school.
- Following the call, the officer submits a HWC referral using a confidential referral portal only accessible to law enforcement. (The referral is then entered into the Safe 2 Safe Something system for that specific school and district.)
- Safe 2 Say Something is a hotline system for anonymously reporting unsafe, potentially harmful, dangerous, violent, or criminal activities that is used by all PA schools. In this system, anyone can make an anonymous referral if they are concerned about the safety of a child. It is accessible to students, parents, teachers, and the community.
- When the school district receives the HWC referral, the designated Safe 2 Say Something staff informs the building principal.
- When the school receives the HWC referral, the only information provided is the student's name. No details about the incident are provided nor is there any indication of the nature of the event.
- The principal shares the notice with staff that need to know, such as the classroom teacher(s) and school counselor.
- Teachers and school staff are trained to observe the child for signs or symptoms of trauma following their experience. They DO NOT ask this student what happened.
- After observing the child, a determination is made as to whether they need additional support.
- The support can include getting food for the child, allowing them to rest in the nurse's office, delaying a test, not penalizing a child for being late to school or a missed homework assignment, allowing more time to complete school assignments, and giving the child an opportunity to speak with the school counselor.



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