

Miss Kendra Program

Connecticut

Application

Miss Kendra Programs is a trauma-informed, social and emotional learning (SEL) program that equips schools (K - 12) to proactively address the social and emotional needs of their students as they return to school while continuing to grapple with the ongoing threat of COVID-19, the lasting impacts of extended school closures and stay-at-home orders, and the upending of many other aspects of their lives.

For some children, school closures and social isolation have meant increased tension at home and stresses such as neglect, abuse, or violence. For all children, dramatic changes to routines and relationships, as well as concerns about their own safety and the safety of loved ones, have presented major challenges.

Children are, therefore, returning to school holding many worries inside them. Miss Kendra Programs offers an established, cost-effective, and sustainable intervention to help meet the emotional needs of children as they return to school by giving them a safe space to share their stressors and worries and by creating whole-school environments that welcome open conversation about stressful experiences.

Three factors uniquely position Miss Kendra Programs to support schools during this period of communal fragmentation and fear:

1. Every child has been exposed to stress - and potentially trauma - during the pandemic. Miss Kendra Programs' public health framework gives **every** student the opportunity to identify core stressors, communicate their worries to a trusted and caring adult, and discharge some of the emotion associated with these stressors.
2. As schools re-open, it is vital to give children opportunities to share what they experienced while schools were closed, and to assure them that **someone is listening**. Miss Kendra Programs offers teachers the training and structure needed to process concerns and worries with their students.
3. Students' sense of school connectedness has diminished during several months of separation, and they return to schools that may feel quite different from what they are used to. Miss Kendra Programs **restores school connectedness** by showing students that their teachers and classmates care about them and their well-being.

In more than 40 schools in 10 states, Miss Kendra Programs have consistently reduced disruptive behaviors, increased teacher efficacy, and improved school climate, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, in rural and urban communities. Best of all, because the program trains teachers and school support staff to deliver the program, the Miss Kendra Program produces **lasting improvements** in a school's ability to support children's social and emotional health at a cost that schools can sustain.

What are Miss Kendra Programs?

Miss Kendra Programs aims for each and every child to know that, no matter how bad things may be, **a trustworthy adult knows about their struggles**. Building these relationships and strengthening children's psychological immune systems produces positive results without necessarily eliminating the stressors themselves.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) such as trauma, abuse or neglect, or chronic stress as a result of financial pressure, lack of resources, interpersonal strain, systemic oppression, or community violence result in a state of toxic stress inside a child that interferes with their capacity to meet the normal demands of life. ACEs have been linked to negative health outcomes including risky health behaviors, chronic health conditions, future victimization and perpetration, low life potential, and early death. Exposure to traumatic events disrupts development and has immediate and lifelong adverse effects on physical, social, and emotional well-being.

Miss Kendra Programs emerged from research on the impact of stressful childhood experiences and **research on protective factors that bolster the resilience they need** to reduce the effects of stressful life events; increase their ability to avoid risks or hazards; and promote social and emotional competence to thrive in all aspects of life now and in the future.

Research shows that children who have been exposed to ACEs can avoid the impact of toxic stress if they have at least one caring, trustworthy adult in their lives (**a "social buffer"**). In fact, "The single most common (protective) factor for children who develop resilience is at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver, or other adult" (Shonkoff, 2012). Research identifies **school connectedness**, defined as "the belief by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals," as another important protective factor.

Miss Kendra Programs builds both of these protective factors by guiding teachers and support staff to provide care and attention to stressed children, in structured and limited times - framed within the imaginal context of the fictional Miss Kendra, introduced in a book titled **"The Legend of Miss Kendra."** Through open classroom conversations, children learn that when they talk about their experiences, they can find the help they need. Children also share their concerns by writing letters to Miss Kendra and receiving empathic responses that assure them they have been heard. By sharing their worries and burdens, children improve their capacity to attend to schoolwork, remain calm when facing demands, and develop a more secure sense of self

Mine Collapse Survival and Miss Kendra Programs

The single best predictor of survival among miners in a mine collapse is how quickly people on the surface communicate to the miners trapped below that they know what has happened, know they are trapped, and are coming to get them. Miners who hear that message are able to withstand the psychological stress ten times longer than those who do not hear it. That is why the first thing done in a mining accident is to guide a loudspeaker down into the mine to blast that message as loudly as possible. Hoping that someone will come to rescue them is not enough; the miners have to know someone is coming. For children experiencing toxic stress, Miss Kendra Programs is that loudspeaker telling children that someone who cares knows what they are going through.

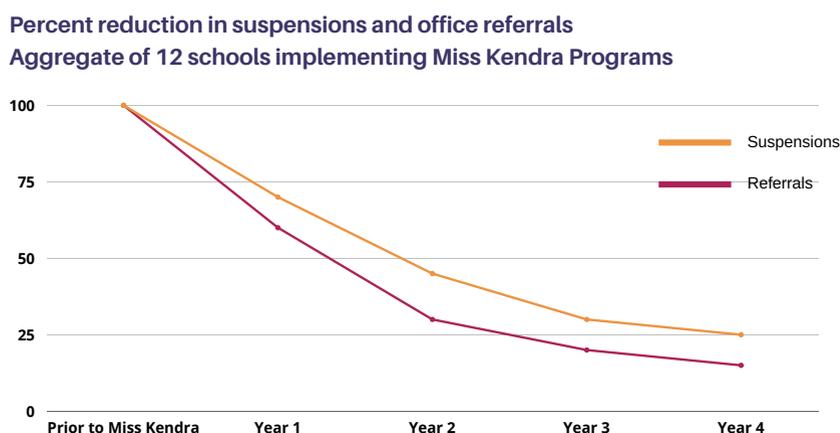
Miss Kendra Programs model, at its core, centers on asking every child on a regular basis if they have experienced stressful events in order to identify problems early and strengthen children's psychological immunity. For the child, this process consists of:

1. Identifying core stressors using Miss Kendra's List (a list of ACEs that helps children realize that their reactions to relatively minor stressors derive from the important stressors in their lives);
2. Communicating to the child the existence of a knowledgeable and caring listener (their teacher and Miss Kendra); and
3. Gaining language about these concepts to achieve more cognitive control over the emotions that are evoked.

Does Miss Kendra Improve the Things I Care About?

For students and schools across the country, the Miss Kendra Program has consistently produced **reductions in disruptive behaviors and improvements in teacher efficacy and school climate.**

- 75% reduction in suspensions in four years (aggregate data for 12 Miss Kendra schools)
- 85% reduction in office referrals (12 schools)
- 95% of Miss Kendra teachers recommend the program to other teachers (22 schools)
- 90% of teachers report that the program calms down their students (22 schools)



Long-term, the program supports social, emotional, and cognitive development that contributes to academic and career success. In comparison to other SEL programs, the Miss Kendra Program has demonstrated a high level of effectiveness because it delivers a stronger intervention, directly to the children, in open discussions about ACEs.

Can My School Afford Miss Kendra Programs?

Because it utilizes a public health model that relies on teachers and school support staff to deliver the program curriculum, the all-inclusive cost of implementing the Miss Kendra Program during the first year of the program is roughly \$25,000, depending on school size - **\$50 per student** for a school of 500 students. In Year 2 and beyond, The Miss Kendra Program costs only \$5,000 per year - **just \$10 per student per year.**

SEL programs that rely on remedial/mental health approaches involving intensive interventions with the most distressed, symptomatic, and needy students, by contrast, can cost upwards of \$5,000 *per student* per year. Because these programs typically rely on outside clinicians to come into the school, the per-year cost never declines significantly, and even effective programs risk fading away as schools cannot afford the ongoing cost and philanthropy eventually looks to invest elsewhere. Miss Kendra Programs offers an ***affordable, sustainable alternative***.

Given Miss Kendra Program's impact on students, teachers, and school communities, a start-up cost of \$25,000 and an annual fee of just \$5,000 represent a fantastic return on investment for schools that are committed to their students' social and emotional well-being, especially in the wake of COVID-19.

Other resources are available to expand Miss Kendra Programs to additional Connecticut schools. **The State Department of Education's plan to re-open schools**, for example, encourages districts to allocate a portion of their share of Connecticut's \$111 million in federal coronavirus relief aid to address "a heightened student, staff, and school community need for SEL." Miss Kendra Programs offers districts that are looking for effective SEL programs an established, cost-effective, and sustainable intervention that is custom-made for the current circumstances.

Return on Investment in SEL Programs

A 2015 study by the Center for Benefit-Cost Studies of Education at Columbia University's Teachers College found that every dollar schools spend on SEL programs returns an average of \$11 of economic benefits to society.

Support for Miss Kendra Programs

The acclaimed 2016 documentary "*Resilience: The Biology of Stress and The Science of Hope*," directed by James Redford, highlighted Miss Kendra Programs as an exemplar of a preventive program for children in schools and communities devastated by toxic stress, violence, and trauma. For more information on the film, visit <https://kpfjfilms.co/resilience/>.

Three leading Connecticut education and childhood health organizations support Miss Kendra Programs:

1. After offering screenings and facilitated discussions of the "Resilience" documentary for Connecticut school districts for years, the **Connecticut Education Association (CEA)** recently established a partnership with Miss Kendra Programs to promote the program as a component of its "Support Safe and Compassionate Learning Environments" Initiative.
2. The **Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS)** also recently established a partnership with Miss Kendra Programs to promote the opportunity to participate in the program to its member principals as part of its mission to develop the skills and effectiveness of school leaders and its commitment to fostering positive school climates.
3. The **Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut (CHDI)** has relied on Miss Kendra Programs to provide trauma training to Connecticut schools for several years. CHDI leaders have called their partnership with Miss Kendra Programs, "an integral component of the School-Based Diversion Initiative that effectively introduces school staff to best practices for trauma-informed care at the school and classroom levels and provides much-needed support for improving social and emotional learning and school climate."

How Can We Become a Miss Kendra School?



Miss Kendra Programs is **expanding in elementary schools across Connecticut** to respond to the widespread need for effective SEL programs that reach every student in the wake of the COVID crisis. Whether your school is currently operating remotely, in-person, or using a hybrid model, the Miss Kendra team can prepare your administrators, teachers, and support staff to launch and implement Miss Kendra Programs once students are in school. Your school will soon – like more than 40 current Miss Kendra sites – develop a whole-school environment that welcomes open conversations about students’ stressful experiences, reducing stress and behavioral issues and freeing teachers and students to focus on teaching and learning.

Becoming a Miss Kendra School costs \$25,000 for Year 1 launch and implementation, depending on school size. This covers:

- Initial 5.5-hour training for teachers, social support staff, and administrative staff conducted on-site or online by experienced Miss Kendra trainers.
- Ongoing phone coaching/supervision of school personnel, follow-up visits, and ongoing support for school administrators to monitor program success from Miss Kendra Program staff.
- Official Miss Kendra materials, including worry boards, mailboxes, stationery, training manuals, posters, and stamps.

“We have seen decreases in behavior; we have seen children speak their truths in letters to Miss Kendra and conversations on the carpet. To watch their faces after they speak their truths is like watching someone who has been trying to carry a large weight on their shoulders for a long time finally be able to put it down.”
- 2nd Grade Teacher, Bearfield Primary School, Ahoskie, North Carolina

Miss Kendra programs is looking for partner elementary schools that have experience delivering trauma-informed care, that can make a whole-school commitment to the program’s guiding principles of trauma-sensitivity, non-punitive discipline, and a whole-child approach, and that are prepared to sustain the program. **If your school is ready to move beyond being trauma-informed and ready to address trauma proactively**, download an **application** to become a Miss Kendra school.

“Miss Kendra Programs provided a way for our students to give voice to their worries, and know our school was a safe place in which they could receive support.”
- Principal, Quinnipiac School, New Haven, CT

If your school does not have experience with trauma-informed care but is **ready to begin your journey**, **contact** the Miss Kendra team for training and resources on trauma-informed school mental health.

To learn more about Miss Kendra Programs, visit misskendraprograms.org.

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