

Abused students can return to school and thrive with educator help, researcher finds

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A new study from the University of Missouri shows that children who are abused can return to school and do well academically if teachers can help them control their emotions, pay attention to detail and stay motivated.

"The first step, of course, is for teachers to watch for signs and stop the abuse to the child," said Stephen Whitney, associate professor in the Department of Educational, School and Counseling Psychology in the MU College of Education. "My colleagues and I worked with [Child Protective Services](#) to examine [test scores](#) to determine what factors indicate future achievement, and of those factors, what ones actually translate to the classroom. Teachers and counselors can help the student succeed by focusing on daily living skills."

The study compared the duration of abuse with math and reading scores in 702 children, ages 6 to 10. The results indicate that the length and type of abuse had the most effect on the children's [academic achievement](#), but that students who were successful in daily [management skills](#) had the most achievement.

Whitney suggests that teachers or even [family members](#) can help abused children by focusing on the following daily skills:

- Self-regulation (controlling thoughts and behaviors)
- Attention to detail (accomplishing tasks with focus on all aspects

of the tasks)

- Motivation (finding challenges that inspire learning, including a focus on strengths)

"The key to a successful response to an unprecedented life event is to control what you can. Children who can translate that skill into the classroom can have an advantage over others who cannot," Whitney said. "Teachers are the gatekeepers to reporting abuse, getting kids the help they need, and then providing crucial support in helping those kids overcome their past."

More information: The study, "Academic achievement despite child maltreatment: A longitudinal study," was published in the journal *Child Abuse and Neglect*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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