Beginning February 1, 2017, children and youth in Jackson County will be “handled with care” in their schools following a distressing event that requires intervention from local law enforcement officers and personnel.

Collaborating to bring a program called Handle With Care to Jackson County are the entire law enforcement community, every school district in the county, Center for Family Health, Family Service and Children’s Aid, LifeWays Community Mental Health and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Jackson County office. Handle With Care was developed in West Virginia and provides the school with a “heads up” when a child has been identified at the scene of a traumatic event such as a house fire, a domestic violence situation, a shooting, an arrest of a family member, a drug raid or a motor vehicle accident.

Police officers are prepared to look around for children when they are on scene and determine their name and where they go to school. Before school starts the next day they will make sure the school is sent a note that simply says to “Handle that particular child With Care.”

The Handle With Care program was designed to help children struggling with the effects of trauma by allowing their teachers just that bit of insight into the child’s previous day to be able to better address issues in the classroom and provide needed support for students experiencing trauma. If the child needs more extensive assistance in working through what they saw happen, the school will work with the parents to provide a trauma informed response by local mental health providers on site at the school.

“Handle With Care is a great opportunity to work together to help Jackson County children be safe and achieve success in school at their highest levels despite any traumatic circumstances they may be experiencing,” said Elmer Hitt, Interim Director of Police and Fire Services for the City of Jackson.

“Our children experience traumatic events in their lives and then have to report to school the next day and perform as though nothing happened,” said Kevin Oxley, Superintendent of the Jackson County Intermediate School District. “The Handle With Care program supports the child and schools in protecting our students and helping them be successful in the midst the everyday chaos and trauma that so many of us experience.”