Trauma Informed Person-Centered Approaches to Behavioral Challenges & Mental Wellbeing

December 15, 2025

1h 27m 24s

Amy Rich Crane

Welcome everyone. Teachers, administrators, parents, healthcare providers, and community members. My name is Amy Rich Crane and I am a dual board certified pediatric occupational therapist and I'm grateful for the opportunity to present this training today on trauma and.

transformed, person-centered approaches to behavioral challenges and mental well-being, using proactive strategies to support students, empower teachers, and with the ability to transform school culture. With many thanks to the Youth Well Foundation for their very generous grant.

As I mentioned, I am an occupational therapist, dual board certified in Pediatrics. I am one of only four in the state of New Hampshire. I spent about 14,000 hours helping children in direct care. I've also had the opportunity prior to getting my degree to serve as.

A substitute teacher in crisis support intervention rooms, the opportunity to serve as a paraprofessional within school districts throughout the the country, and the opportunity to work with youth in the juvenile justice system through an outdoor recreation program.

All of these have led me to focus on trauma-informed care and understanding children and what's going on for them below the surface. I have additional expertise in feeding, trauma, sensory vision, neuro affirming care.

aquatics and hippotherapy. As you can see by the pictures there, I love to have fun and engage with the children in whatever modality we have available. Uh We also provide education-focused consults to collaborate with the school systems from outpatient

care, and we do trainings for local organizations in the community. We focus on biopsychosensory social therapy for complex little ones, looking at how all the different aspects that can be impacting them are showing up.

And I also have lived disability experience personally and as a mother of two children that have physical disabilities that have just ignited the passion I have and bring to the table. Well, you can see me having fun here in a lot of different ways in our clinic

that has so many tools.
in all of our community-based programming. I also just believe three basic models that don't require very much at all mottos that help guide my practice. So first, we must feel safe both physically and emotionally to be able
to learn or to progress or to accept help. Second, that being seen, understood, supported, and celebrated is everything in life. And that all you need is a rubber band and a spoon. So I say that to my therapist at our clinic all the time and to caregivers.
Evers even. You don't need all of these specialized tools to help a child. Your greatest tool is your connection and yourself.
So today we're going to talk about what is trauma-informed care, why use it? Who is this important for, how we view behavior and assess what lens you're currently looking through. We're going to go over some strategies, including growth mindset versus fixed mindset.
as well as applying the lens with deeper understanding. We're going to dive deeper with some examples in context. We're going to go over the 10 truths about growth mindset learning environments, talk about the unmet needs that are under the surface, as well as taking shame and labeling
out of how we show up for children. And then lastly, we'll end with the mismatch framework.
So what are we going to be talking about today? Trauma. It's any experience which can be a one time event or an ongoing situation or series of events that overwhelms a child's ability to cope, which makes them feel unsafe and changes how their brain and body respond to the world.
And we know that this can be very different from one child or human to another. So for students, trauma isn't defined only by what happened, but by how their nervous system interprets the experience. Two children may experience the very same event and have different reactions based on their age.
Based on their support systems, based on their history, a trauma-informed approach using positive childhood experiences, or PCEs, can help overcome ACEs or ACEs adverse childhood experiences.
How common are ACEs? Around 60% of adults have experienced at least one ACE as a child. About one in six experience four or more, and that puts them at much greater risk for health problems later on, which could include heart disease, depression, a shorter lifespan, and more.

PCEs are the safe, predictable adults and basic needs being met, co-regulation, healthy play, and connection. Those are some of the the heavy hitters that we can add into our everyday.
I have on each slide extended learning apologies for the overlap in the format there. There's a book called The Deepest Well by Nadine Burke Harris, which is incredible, and the podcast Trauma Informed Educators Network by Matthew Portell that could help give you more.
Information on trauma-informed approaches and the impact.
Why? Why are we doing this? We know that children do well if they can, and that challenging behaviors occur when the demands and the expectations being placed on the child exceed the skills they have to respond adaptively, both by Doctor Ross Greene here on the Northeast.
And he has some incredible resources out there that can help expand this concept that children are struggling. They're not being hard kids. They're having a hard time when we change that lens.
We can make an incredible impact and and difference in their lives. Showing up, believing that they're intentionally trying to cause harm impacts the support and response that they receive.
We know that schools that use a trauma-informed or restorative based approach report 50% reduction in restraint and seclusion. That was from Massachusetts, 60% reduction in behavioral incidences in both Washington and California.
75% decrease in student aggressions from Wisconsin, 40 to 80% reduction in suspensions when you combined multiple school districts across different states. and overall improved teacher satisfaction and student engagement. With MTSSB here in New Hampshire, we're seeing fewer office referrals in general when these concepts are applied.
To extend your learning even further, you can get Doctor Green's book The Explosive Child and his his follow-up book Loss at School, or follow along with the podcasts at Utopia.
Who is this important to? We must address the youth mental health crisis. This impacts all of us and all of our children. We cannot punish pain out of children. Youth mental health is a national crisis with one in five children
experiencing a mental health disorder each year. How we show up and respond to that is what matters most. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among individuals aged 10 to 24.

Every day we will lose 112 adults and children in the United States to suicide.
The supports that we receive and the understanding of our self and our needs starts now when they're children.
We know that approximately 65 to 75% of youth in the juvenile justice system have mental, emotional, behavioral and physical health problems that they're suffering from as a result of not getting support and not being understood.
We know that suspended or expelled students are also three times more likely to have contact with the juvenile justice system in the following year.
And we also know that teacher burnout affects over 50% of educators annually, and consistently showing up there is not having the resources and support to to provide adequate support to children with higher needs.
This impacts all of our school districts in one way or another. It is critical and urgent that we start applying these strategies we know are working to make a difference.
I want to tell you about the story of one of the kids I was able to help in the last few years here in New Hampshire. So Jake showed up to OT. Mental health talk therapy was not working for him.
And he was really struggling in school. He had been adopted into a new family after experiencing extreme neglect following by physical, emotional and sexual abuse.
Naturally, given everything he had been through, he was having a hard time regulating, understanding his body's needs and learning in the general classroom.
Even with supports added, he was continuing to struggle. He was being sent home regularly. He had not made it through a full day of school since he had started the school year. He had been suspended multiple times.
and was at risk of expulsion.
So he started in occupational therapy and we focused on safety, trust, connection and understanding all the signals his body was giving him when activities were challenging or the environment was overwhelming.
Through trust, safety and play, we were able to figure out skills that he could build, able to figure out strategies that work for him to help him push himself a little bit further once he felt safe.
And how to advocate for those needs with others in his in his life, trusted adults, and then those at school as well.
And I remember that first week that we celebrated him making it through a full day of school, and then the week that we celebrated 2 full days of school, and then the first full week that he was not sent home or suspended, and then when it came to a

month.
And two months, so many victories. And it was with this collaboration with the school who understand, who understood he had gone through some very difficult lived experiences, but who weren't quite sure how to help him in.
Where to start? And we looked at all the different aspects in terms of supports for his body to help his sensory system, supports with his social emotional learning, supports with his ability to ask for help, receive help.
And also to be able to make mistakes and recover from them. That was huge. That is where the growth mindset comes into place. So we were able to see an incredible difference in his ability to feel safe, regulated, participate and then succeed.
And went from surviving to thriving. And Dr. Ross Green, I just circle right back to that. We cannot punish pain out of children as much as we want them to do well. Behavioral compliance is not going to help them overcome their body signals. Telling them they can't.
If you want to learn more, some extended learning opportunities are the book The Whole Brain Child and the podcast Catch Up on Kids Mental Health.
Regulation before expectation and connection before correction are a couple phrases you might have heard out there, maybe even you say to others in your life. We know that behavior isn't the child, it is the signal. Mona Dellahook is an incredible teacher and has some.
resources out there um that I'll mention later on. We know that the goal is to teach our children not to punish them for their struggles because a child's behavior is a form of communication.
And our role as an adult is to pause, get curious, and understand the story behind it. When a child is out of control, they need connection, not correction. When we start looking at behavior as communication and we get curious about what's going on for them.
We're much better suited to find solutions that are focused in empathy and predictability that then also help prevent challenges later on.
Bruce Perry's three R's show us that we, at the bottom of the pyramid, must focus on being regulated first. Then, in the middle of the pyramid, we can relate
With others and feel that safety and at the top there we can reason. This is how our brain is geared to work if at the bottom of the pyramid we're feeling threat.
in our in our environment, or because the demand doesn't match our skill, we are not going to be able to relate and listen to the teacher to then reason and do the work.

So we must ensure regulation within our classroom, which can be difficult when we have many children at
And sometimes their different sensory systems or learning styles are impacting one another's.
But just because it's tricky doesn't mean we can't make it happen.
I would love if you had the opportunity to check out childtrauma.org, which was the original website created by Bruce Perry before he started his neuro sequential model training. And then the book Beyond Behaviors by Mona Dellahuk is an incredible resource to help us understand.
How to respond in an affirming and responsive way when children are struggling.
It isn't about trying harder. It starts with teaching brains how to grow. So one of my favorite strategies to use and embed throughout all of my sessions and work with with children that are struggling.
And the caregivers that are supporting them is this concept of the growth mindset versus a fixed mindset that Carol Dweck came up with. And the fixed mindset is the belief that our abilities, our intelligence and our talents are just set traits and we either have it or we don't.
I have a green thumb. I'm an incredible cook. Just have the skill, right? This is fixed mindset, even in a positive lens. Students with a fixed mindset, though, often avoid challenges and shut down when things are hard and they equate struggle with failure. They don't want to put them.
themselves out there and risk that vulnerability. Having a growth mindset, though, is the belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed with effort, practice, and effective strategies and support.
Students with a growth mindset see challenges as a path to growth. They use feedback and mistakes as a way to get better, and they persist through difficulty. So I already discussed how we can even label positive things in a fixed way. A growth mindset would really focus on the.
effort people are putting in and how they're learning or adapting to some of the challenges that they've seen um and how they're able to persist through when things are not easy. One of my favorite resources is Big Life Journal and I'll have them
On the next slide, but they have the the e-mail freebies every week, so it's a great resource to sign up for to get a growth mindset focused work that can be applied in the school, can be applied at home, could be great for carryover between the both.
Between both of them and then the book The Power of Mindful Learning. It's a great

resource that many teachers have found helpful to apply growth mindset. So as I mentioned here we have.
big life journal in one of their handouts. This is what they frequently look like, a one-page visual, um and they gave us permission to share this, to spread knowledge about what they're doing over there um to help build resilience through positive support strategies and really having
us look at our lens of of how we're looking at children's needs. This one is about filling your child's emotional cup and what might be draining it. They also have worksheets that the children can fill out themselves or crafts that they can create. And as
I said, they have a lot of free exercises and materials that you just sign up for in your e-mail. The New Hampshire Office of Student Educator Wellness also has an incredible number of supports for educators and for districts on there. They have 37 different modules and toolkits available and I put the the website there for anybody that might not be familiar or hasn't been there in a little while because I find it incredibly helpful and attaches to the legislation that has been passed in New Hampshire specifically.
To get the the the required trainings in, but also to extend that with what we know about ACEs and trauma and responsive based approaches that understand the underlying needs.
um for children.
So some reframes for teachers. Model the thinking out loud. When you get stuck, say it. I'm stuck. I'm going to try a new strategy. So instead of saying I'm a terrible cook at home, you can say when I go to cook a meal, I need to watch a couple videos first to prepare me so that we can all enjoy this.
Dinner, you know, as best as possible, can own that nobody is perfect and that just because we're not naturally good at something doesn't mean we need to give up. And maybe, oh, I'm not the cook of the family. Well, you can be if you put in some effort naturally if someone else in your.
Our family is a much better cook. It might be a lower lift for them, but just thinking about the language that we're showing up with. A lot of these phrases that we use are just second-hand, you know, nature. They just flow right out of our mouth and we're not really stopping to to reflect on what these words mean.
So normalizing mistakes. Oh, that was a beautiful error. Great job. I see what your brain was doing there, and that's going to tell us where to go next. So that positive

reframe in the moment, calling it out loud if you can in the class.
In a really supportive way and helping bridge that gap on how we're going to get to that next step. And one that we often say be careful, shifting that to let's be curious. We have some kids that take risks and be careful doesn't teach us.
About what's tricky in the moment, or what's impacting our safety in the moment, or how our body is signaling that we need to move, but we need to make a safer choice. So let's get curious about what our body's telling us, what the environment's telling us.
If we've experienced other instances with a similar kind of challenge that's being presented, and then to praise the process, I notice how you adjusted your approach, adjusting, adapting effort.
seeking resources, all great ways to to praise the process. And then the power of the word yet, a very simple word that we can add um when we don't have it, when we don't have something yet, when I can't do this yet.
We can flip things quickly and also a great way because we're going to make mistakes. These phrases are going to just come right out of our mouth and adding a yet to the end of it can be that that repair in the moment that catches yourself.
And and really role model that for for our youth. So teaching students to regulate first, we know that regulated brains learn and dysregulated brains survive. So I have another story of a youth named Olivia.
She also experienced sexual abuse and as a result, struggled with her ability to regulate, to find calm for her body's sensory system, to be able to handle everyday events. Everything was way more intense.
And that means she had less energy to give to all of these learning activities because her body was already pushing against the stress from the sensory overload and with understanding of her body and not.
Making it bad, but making it different in ways that we can approach it and we can still, you know, participate in our daily hygiene routines, which are difficult and we can still find ways to fall asleep and get a good night's rest and we can still find a healthy relationship with food. All of these.
things that the child might be struggling with before they even get to school. And then learning how to adapt in the moment in the classroom when the demands of the activity or the environment are too much, or when she feels unsafe.
With her teachers or her peers because of the way something was presented that sends her into fight or flight. She is just surviving, and that happened to her more

recently when she had a physical injury on top of everything she had gone through. And was struggling to participate in her physical recovery. And so we have old emotional wounds impacting physical wounds currently, and that's tricky to understand the most.
Important thing is that those in her life, her teachers and her peers are showing up with understanding. You know, we think you could.
Recover. You could be physically well if you did XY and Z.
Has positive intent, but it is not supporting her very real emotional needs in the moment and how her body is telling her there are threats all around her and it isn't safe to do so.
We have to trust that children know what they need in terms of signaling something's off. I need more from you. They don't. They might not know what it is, and they might not make the self the safest or the healthiest choices.
Off the bat, but their signals to push for something different are something very real and necessary that we need to listen to. And so as a result of these struggles, Olivia was not able to.
Sand school and the family had to make the very difficult decision to pull her to homeschool because it had become so stressful for her that she was considering suicide.
As the only option, and we know that no teacher, no administrator wants that to be the outcome, the result, to have the thought or that action become a reality.
But what we do beforehand is very much connected to that.
And the data, the research that I provided you at the very beginning echoes all of that. How we show up for them in the moment is what adds them to those statistics or takes them out of those statistics.
We have the power to make a difference and our days are busy. We're moving fast. We might not have all of the information we need to help support them, but leaning in with curiosity and pausing and asking for more support.
Support is the most critical piece of this. So some other extended learning opportunities through some classroom supports are some books that are geared for the youth in the different, you know, age groups.
We have two supporting webinars that will be geared towards K through five and six through 12. So those younger youth, the little spot books are great in the classroom. The Ninja books, The Beautiful Oops, The Most Magnificent Thing, and The Fantastic Elastic Brain just really showing.

Through fun, engaging stories and content, how to apply the growth mindset, how to adapt and overcome while acknowledging and validating. It's very real what they're going through and that they have needs.
And that we're not just going to force them to hide their needs, to comply and to do what we want them to do, but we're there to help them understand and to thrive, to learn for teens, the seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens.
And the Grit Guide for Teens are two other resources that teachers have found helpful to embed within the classroom.
So the framework that a lot of trauma-informed based approaches use have 4 main components.
I'm gonna get my emotional support water before we dive in here.
And also point out that I have some fidgets here that I'm helping to use me to regulate and stay focused while I deliver this content, which hopefully in today's day and age is becoming more of a norm to have that even for adults that are learning.
So I encourage you, if you have not taken a break, pause this webinar, go take a bio break or get some water, get a snack, get a fidget tool, move your body and ensure that you're regulated to take in this information that can help you reach the next level with these kids.
So frameworks all have, like I said, that are trauma-informed, all have components of this in it. I like to use notice and wonder a lot in in my practice that I've seen in a lot of different models and then.
Connection is what we're really focused on, and problem solving at the end together to help respond both reactively in the moment, but also proactively going forward, setting up a plan.
And involving the the youth as much as possible. So through this old lens again, we're saying why is this student giving me a hard time? And the new lens is what is the student's nervous system trying to tell me?
How can I help them? How can I support their understanding of themselves? And how can connection create safety so that learning can happen? So the first part is notice. Observe the child without judgment or without labeling. Look for patterns, emotional cues.
Happening right beforehand. Are there different triggers that might be related to things they've experienced in the past, or that we see again as a pattern happening frequently? Is it around loud sounds or busy environments or getting bumped or making a mistake?

If it's sensory, if it's physical, if it's social, if it's emotional, whatever these different observation cues are, write them down and ask what is their behavior communicating to me? What's going on here?
Wonder. Be curious, not critical. Ask what might the student need right now and what is behind this? Avoid assumptions like they're being manipulative and use I wonder phrase instead to help come to an attuned understanding. So we'll use the I wonder with.
The students often you know that you're going to have to have a couple of wonders. They might say no to the first few, but even taking that this is what's happening and I know out of it with a.
I wonder if when this happened, it might have made you feel in a certain way, or it might have made things harder and that that did not feel good to you, right? Try to gain some understanding because that's where they will feel like.
Oh, they see me, they get me, they get what's going on here and they don't see me as a problem, as a hard kid. I am having a hard time and then connect with them, respond with that empathy and.
Help them feel seen, validate their feelings in the way their brain learns while offering that support. Just being there, creating safety that makes a huge difference in the life of a child.
Personally, with my invisible disabilities as a child and having experienced traumatic events, I can remember those teachers that were there for me that saw me as struggling, not as difficult.
And that found different ways that they saw were helping me and were helping my body to learn and regulate. And they applied those more frequently and had them there so I didn't even have to ask. Those are the teachers that made a huge difference in my life.
And then rupture and repair. When things don't go well, we have to own it on our end and we have to say I didn't get that right or I jumped. I jumped right to a conclusion and it really got in my way of supporting you or I was overwhelmed because everybody was loud and that made my sense.
System heightened into fight or flight. And that's when I responded below the line, not how I want to to show up for everybody. And then owning that we're all human, we all make mistakes. How are we going to do better? What are tools that you use like a lot of?
Teachers have their go-to ways to regulate when they have breaks throughout the

day as well, cause this is a difficult career to be in. It's a difficult profession, the support staff that are supporting some of.
Some children that have some of the highest needs and not always getting a high level of training and support of knowing how to work the systems that are set up within. It is difficult and we really need to honor and validate that we need breaks just like they need breaks.
We need to stretch, move our body, have some quiet time, listen to a podcast, chew gum, find a fidget, all of that and doing so in our break time and showing them when it's not break time that we need these tools and that they're OK to have. Normalizing that is huge and it can.
Help again, connect you and doing so in repair when there's been a rupture is the highest level of role modeling. This is what you know can help my body and I need to return to that. And then problem solving, brainstorming strategies once they're regulated, once you're connected with them again.
Using the opposite of that, that model from Bruce Perry, where you're focusing on regulation and then relating and then reasoning. That's what we've just done here. We're focusing at the top on noticing and wondering, getting them some supports and connecting is that relating piece afterwards.
And then problem solving. So you can adjust the environment, you can adjust the supports or the expectations based on what you know about them. As I was saying before, to put it in there proactively, a lot of a lot of people will say if you've already gotten to the point of.
The big dysregulation. You've already missed the window, but you can help it bring a child back down and you have to read their cues, but it might be possible to return back without having to take a significant pause.
It's all about your understanding of that child's needs and how they're going to respond, that attunement, and then collaborating with the child, if possible. What helps you feel ready to learn? What helps your body feel better? What helps your brain to focus?
I noticed when you were doing your reading, your body was moving with a little wiggle, and then you were reading words that you hadn't read before. That's incredible. How can we do that more? You know, we have to think of some ways that are going to help you, that aren't going to distract our friends.
We want to use these as tools, right? Or the fidgets are tools, not toys. They look fun and like toys, but we can find ways that we can use them to regulate that help us

while thinking about her classmates too. So kind of.
Kind of putting all of those pieces together. A lot of different parts from trainings that you've learned in the past, concepts on regulation, on brain development, on being in fight, flight, fauna, freeze.
All of these put together can be used with this framework and that growth mindset to help turn around daily struggles with with a child that that's not getting their needs met. So the next slide has more extended learning quite a bit here. So we've got trauma.
For.
Practices for early childhood educators, the trauma-sensitive classroom, trauma-responsive schooling, the podcast Trauma-informed Education and Early Childhood Chapters. So a lot here that really goes into that trauma-informed piece, which comes down to.
Seeing and understanding children for what's really going on below the surface, even for a child that hasn't had what you know of large traumas, lots of big T traumas, some people call it.
They can be impacted by adversity all day long in small ways, and a lot of children with invisible disabilities have grown up to say they are impacted and it feels as real as one big trauma.
And without support can have the same impact. The brain chemicals are releasing the same, the same hormones and chemicals that are flooding their brain and getting in the way of of learning. And if that's happening all day long.
But they're masking and trying to keep it under the surface. It can impact them long term just as significantly and.
Being aware of that and knowing that this can help your whole classroom universally, shifting the way you see things and respond to things can shape how a lot of your children are learning, not just the ones with the biggest behaviors.
The highest escalation, I often say it's the children that go into shutdown and internalize that are some of the the most difficult for us to recognize their signals, connect back to them and help them.
Because they they fly more under the surface until they're in full shutdown. And the kids with the high externalizing needs call for our attention a little bit more. That behavior is saying I need support, right?
And I like to look at it as like there's a a lot of times you're having multiple kids in your classroom struggle just in different ways about scale and applying these

strategies is going to help everybody. And if you're spending a significant amount of time trying to support this child up here.
Here, in these ways, you know you're you're going to see the benefit if you're if you're applying it everywhere, and if you're using more punitive behavioral compliance based approaches, you're going to be spending the time again and you're not.
Helping all of these children attuned to their bodies and supports regulation needs in their best learning without masking. We're actually adding to more masking and compliance and fear of having needs show up in different ways.
And often a real big focus if we go into behavioral compliance on external motivators and taking away that internal motivation to show up and build resilience. So I highly encourage you to dive deeper into all of these podcasts.
These books um that I've recommended and trainings because it will help you build that deep understanding of what's going on when we combine the science behind how the brain's functioning and learning with the body.
In the biopsychosensory social framework, we're really helping children to learn their their bodies, learn their needs and set up for a lifetime of success.
Connection over correction and action. So a first grader won't sit on their carpet for story time and we go with correction. If you can't sit on the carpet for this story, the entire class is going to lose pom-poms from the jar.
So there we're using some group expectations wrapped in shame and punishment to try and correct the behaviour. Using connection first would sound like I know sitting on the carpet is hard.
And I noticed it can feel itchy. I notice what your body's doing. And I wonder if your belly muscles get tired after a while, and that's why we're getting so wiggly. I wonder if sitting hot, sitting still is hard.
And if wiggling would help, so let's get a wiggle stool or a rocking chair and see if that works. Or do you have some ideas that might help? Or a middle schooler that won't sing along during music class if you won't participate as expected?
You can sit in the office for the rest of class, so that's not as common these days to do a quick send out. I'm sure most people have more classroom management techniques, but let's go with connection 1st and see what that looks like. So hey. Student, I notice you're not singing along and your face looks kind of stressed. Something going on? I wonder, is it too loud in here? I noticed that you were kind of covering both of your ears and your hoodie and with your hand, or if you're having

trouble memorizing the words.
I would love to learn more about what's going on for you and how to make this work, showing up with that validation, attunement that there are some other reasons that could be legitimate reasons why they're having a hard time.
That can make an incredible difference to youth.
Outcomes of attunement and connection. It builds deeper self-awareness, self-advocacy, and it protects children from harm in the long run. It's not us forcing them to do something that their body's telling them they need.
Forcing them to do something the opposite of or to mask or hide their needs. Adults build deeper understanding of what's going on. They're attuned and connected, and that helps with regulation and overall classroom management. It creates a culture of understanding and support.
Not masking and compliance. Teachers feel empowered and successful and authentic and aligned with you know why they came to teach in the 1st place. They want to see children light up and feel successful and they want to know how to support them. So this is that's why I put this together.
Today there's been a lot of call for more support and I hope this helps get each person on the next step in their in their journey. And if the child is struggling, you're going to spend the time one way or another. How do you want to spend it?
Do you want to spend it in a way that feels punitive and reactive and negative, or do you want to spend it in a way that helps them understand themselves and set up for long-term success?
Manipulation and intentional defiance is this one I hear all the time.
And I love to choose the opportunity to use both of my daughters as infants giving the middle finger. So children aren't manipulating us, they're alerting us. I did not see them giving the middle finger as intended.
Intentional frustration and acting out against me. I know that developmentally they have no idea how their little hands are moving. And as children start to get older, we tend to think, oh, they're intentionally manipulating me, they're trying.
to get their way. We hear this a lot around 2345, um even 678, right? It's not developmentally possible until 8 to 10 years of age. It's a complex interplay of executive function skills.
Or intentional manipulation. And so I point that out because when we really just focus on the signal and we see the child and support them and help them feel safe, we teach them to regulate, to relate, and to rise up to reason.

We take out this you are manipulating me, this label of you are intentionally. It feels like a power struggle right off the bat. You've already made-up your mind as the adult that they're doing that. But we know in brain development that regulate regulation develops over twenty-five years.
And the prefrontal cortex is the last part of the brain to develop and mature fully. 90% of challenging behavior in school setting is linked to regulation, sensory processing, or unmet needs.
Not intentional defiance. And that's from the national MTSS research that's been done in social emotional learning studies and why MTSS has this focus on that 90% of challenging behavior, right?
So students in regulated relational environments show improved executive functioning skills, problem-solving skills, and academic outcomes. That's from the Center for Developing trial. We know that when you apply these concepts.
Into action that your classrooms are changing, changing, that your ability to teach is changing, that these children's lives are changing, and that they are that the the behavior is decreasing because we're getting to underlying reasons and not just controlling surface level.
And we have to take out that they are manipulating me. They are struggling here. My infants are not struggling, maybe to fall asleep or maybe holding their neck up in tummy time a little bit.
But they're just learning what their fingers are. So I just hope this leaves a memory for you when you're having a hard time with a student, because you will. This isn't going to solve everything right when you're having a hard time with a student or with your own child.
Pause. And remember, they're not manipulating you. If they're over 10 and you see other signs as well, it's a great opportunity to speak to a mental health counselor to get a more in-depth assessment of that.
But under that age range, we're going to look at what their behavior is communicating right off the bat.
So token economies.
This is something that really hits home for me, having others used star charts and behavior charts to try and overcome learning differences and sensory needs and seeing it happen to many of the the children
And youth I've supported over the years and learning of the harm that does, it brings it to the forefront to to speak to, to say we can't have this be our go to.

Right. It promotes surface level compliance without addressing what's going on, the root causes of behavior. It ignores emotional safety and co-regulation and underlying needs of the child.
It undermines that intrinsic motivation, as I was speaking to earlier, and their autonomy, reducing their long-term learning and growth, and it forces masking distress. They have to hide what's going on for them from someone who's supposed to be safe.
this trusted adult, these peers, they cannot show up with what's going on internally for them. And that leads to shutdowns or escalations, explosions. And you see this when rewards stop working or when their thresholds are maxed out or off
In when they come home to their parents and they have that restraint collapse, they've kept it together all day long and now they feel safe at home and they let everything out.
And at the end of the day, it diverts attention away from connection-based, relational and trauma-informed strategies that really foster deep regulation, understanding and growth.
The National Association of School Psychologists encourages trauma-informed, relationship-based approaches over reward systems, and so does CASEL, the Collaborative for Academic Social Emotional Learning. We really need to focus on understanding children's brains and bodies and.
Nervous systems. That is what's going to help us go to the next level in our teaching, in creating a safer future. More regulated children that become regulated adults can help make a difference in some of these larger systemic crises that we're seeing.
in our society as a result.
Some extended learning opportunities. The books Punished by Rewards is a a well spoken of book in the in the growth mindset and relationship trauma-informed based practices.
The emotionally intelligent teacher and one of my favorites that really breaks it down so that we can understand through scripts and role-playing scenarios is how to talk so kids will listen and listen so kids will talk.
And the podcast, The Mindful Kind. So I hope this inspires you to push to deeper understanding and not surface level compliance.
10 truths about growth mindset, learning environments, how to shift your mindset, and how to see if you're on the right track.
Truth one, brains cannot learn when they're in fight, flight, fun, or freeze. So fight,

flight, or freeze. We've heard this over and over again. You are in the lower part of your brain. You cannot learn. You cannot access up here. Truth two, we learn.
when we feel safe. When you're regulated, you're able to access those higher parts of your brain. And research that I learned through Bruce Perry's training is that your IQ capacity
Your actual IQ can drop by nearly half when you go from being in a regulated relating reasoning state to then survival, fight, flight, freeze, or fun.
Your ability to perform depends on how regulated and safe you are, and that makes a lot of sense conceptually. But how are we applying it in practice? But just thinking about those numbers if you have.
A student or youth that's showing up on average with a an IQ in the 90 to 100 range, when they are dysregulated, fight, fight or freeze, they are down in the 50 range and we're asking them to still do hard things for them.
Their brain is not there. We have to remember that we thrive with the just right challenge and making sure that the demand matches where they're at, scaffolding that support to help them get there and predicting where they are going to struggle as much as possible so that we can make it.
So that we can jump in with support, so that we can level with tears, how much support and reteaching we're giving all critical. We know when safety's not there and we have these higher level at risk behaviors showing up, fighting meltdowns, avoiding tasks.
Ask back talk and swearing, lying, skipping school, doing drugs. All of this surface level behavior is what we're seeing.
But it's not the why. You have to get down below the surface and understand the why for the child. If you want to make a difference when you're using reward charts and token systems, you're just up there at the surface saying.
Do better. Try harder. Here's a sticker if you do it.
That does not help them.
It helps the environment have them there.
It might create safety in the moment, but it doesn't give way to true growth that's going to get to overall safety and needs being met, and having trust
That comes with all of the understanding, the pausing, the wondering, the supporting.
That we've gone over today because what's really going on? Are they lagging skills that they need support building up? Are they unmet needs? Are they experiencing

neglect and stress at home?
Are their family members having high levels of conflict? Are they going through a divorce? Are they struggling with transitions between homes? Differing parent parenting approaches?
Do they have sensory distress, where in one home there's a parent that supports and understands it, and one home they're told to mask it? How confusing is that?
Is that happening at school? Are they bored because they're at a higher level and we're not engaging them?
Are they struggling with thoughts of suicide because they feel isolated, like they don't belong and like they are the problem?
Are they unable to communicate what's going on in those frustrations?
We have to start thinking about the whole child. What's going on for them? These are very real.
very real problems and challenges in the lives of the children that we serve, and we cannot ignore them.
It is doing harm when we ignore them and we focus only on compliance.
and it can be tricky to figure out where our scope is.
And where another's begins and how to facilitate that. But just because it's hard doesn't mean we don't have a responsibility to figure that out.
Truth #4, we learn best through role models. We've talked about it a lot today, about embedding the use of fidgets, coping skills.
The need to take a break. The need for water.
Apologizing when you get it wrong, making mistakes and how they help us learn and grow.
All of that we can role model back to them live in the moment when it happens or facilitating it.
And role-playing it. The more we embed it in the classroom, the more they will learn.
Truth #5 We thrive when our lived experience is validated, when we feel understood, and when people do not lessen how real our challenges feel to us.
It happens to children often when their challenges are not respected because hearing the word no to a toy does not feel as real of a problem as not having the money to pay your rent.
As adults, we do that all the time. That's not a big problem, right? That's nothing. Adapt. You can't to the child. This is their very real big problem and it's creating the same stressors in their brain.

that the adult is having from their very real problem. So we have to keep that in perspective. Number six, we learn best when we're actively engaged. So teachers, parents, caregivers,
Attuning, paying attention to the signs that they are engaged and engaged might look different. So for one, youth engaged might be looking at their fidget, might be regulating with it, but then they can verbally say back to you everything they just learned.
Or they might struggle with writing down their ideas, but they can scribe them out to you and they have an incredible creative imagination. It just hasn't been accessed yet. And so they're not able to get it out on paper.
How do we bridge that? How do we figure out what's engaged, meeting them where they're at? We have to do more holistic assessment and checking in to see if they are engaged, if they are learning and it's just showing up different.
There's not one right way to be and one right way to learn, though if it were black and white, it'd be a lot easier for us to assess. That's not the reality.
Number seven, we need encouragement to try, not praise for perfection. Again, going back to, let's see your best efforts. Today, your best effort might look different than yesterday. Today, you're having a harder day. I recognize that and I see how hard you're working. I'm really proud of you.
You got that one wrong and that's OK. I'm here to help you. I get things wrong all the time. I tripped on my way in the door today. I felt really silly and kind of embarrassed, but then somebody helped me up and asked if I was OK.
I remembered I don't have to be perfect all the time. Or when I was trying to teach you this, I said this word instead. And I felt whatever. Just kind of role modeling, giving examples in the moment as they apply.
again or coming up with scenarios to kind of build in as they relate to to your classroom needs and to also keeping your skills strong in this area because the more we practice it, the more our brains grow and the neurons fire so that this becomes second
nature. And then you're able to help children with even higher level needs in deeper ways with less effort as you grow skills. Truth number eight, consistent and structured environments amplify learning. This is incredibly important for those that have been impacted by
adversity in their life and they're experiencing trauma in any way or recovering from it. A lot of our neurodivergent individuals also benefit from that consistent,

structured environments. And it doesn't mean we never have anything novel. It just means maybe we have the flow of our classrooms set
in a very predictable way where the unstructured or changing items are built in to the structure of our day. And they're given more um support before they are going to occur if they are less familiar or we anticipate them to be a challenge.
challenge and meeting each youth or pairing youths together that are either both struggling and need some more coaching, you know, two on one or um small groups.
Or having it so that a peer that's not struggling is partnered with a buddy that is struggling if they're able to give that just right level of support and role model. So then truth #9, we need time built in to process and reflect reflection.
is an incredibly helpful tool for learning, and we don't always build that into our day, or it's the first part that gets cut. Um And often we know that in the workplace too, reflection and the ability to process is often cut.
So we know how important that is to our students. We've experienced it ourself. Build it back in as much as you can.
And truth number 10, our most important truth.
We learn through connection. When we slow down to connect, we actually speed up learning because the brain is organized and connection organizes the brain. That's how we were programmed.
You know, to biologically survive was through connection. And again, that might look different for your neurodivergent individuals. It doesn't mean we need to force being in the group, looking at everyone in the group, sitting still.
with everyone in the group. That doesn't mean that's how we show connection. Connection can look different. It can look parallel. It can look highly interested in something that's very motivating to their brain to learn.
How can we use that as a tool, as an asset for the child, for the class? What can they learn about themselves? What can others learn about them? How can we learn that there's more than one way to learn with those that are in our classroom in a safe, healthy way?
That is combining neuroscience, educational research together to find safe ways to include and to promote diverse thinking, diverse ways, different abilities, different needs.
and
Imperfection. We're all human. We're all learning and growing. There's not one right

way. There's our personal best. What is that? And how do we get there? So I'd love this to be another opportunity to pause.
Wherever you're doing this webinar and do an assessment, it's time to reflect.
So I'd love for you to get out a piece of paper, split it in half, um and on one side we're going to do the strengths, and on one side we're going to do the highest impact opportunities. You can, when you pause, go back through these top 10 truths. To apply or any other critical piece that you've taken from the webinar so far, and I want you to assess what is your personal greatest strength? What are you the best at either because you've put in a lot of effort with it or you know.
It's been the thing that your brain just absorbs the quickest. Not to say you haven't put effort in, but what is your greatest strength? What? Where do you feel in your, you know, flow zone? You've gotten in the flow and you could just do this all day.
And then what's your strength or your school's greatest strength as well too? So on the the left side of the paper, go ahead and write those down. Your personal strength, your school's greatest strength. Maybe they align, maybe they don't. Maybe they're different. If you've got two that are up there for both, go ahead and write that down.
And then after you've reflected on what's going well, go ahead and go over to high up impact opportunity. What's tricky right now for you or for the school? Some of us have that analytical brain and maybe we went there to what's not working first.
Go ahead, do that. There's no right way to do this reflection, um but take the time, take 10 minutes, reflect on what is going to help transform your classroom the most right now, either because of the needs within your classroom or because it's your next stepping stone or stepping block to grow, and it's most close to where you are excelling. So go ahead and take the opportunity to do that for you, as well as the school's high impact opportunity. Are there some challenges that are repeating in the school where one of these key components
components would be best? Or does the school have someone that started training on something and you think just applying these concepts more consistently throughout classrooms would be the greatest impact opportunity? I really want you to reflect you're the one in in the hallways, in the classrooms, in the
Teachers lounges. Is that what they still call it? That's what they called it when I was a para and a substitute back in the day. But who lounges? Teachers don't lounge. Administrators don't lounge. Um.
Anyways, I digress.

Go ahead and take the opportunity because you know your school, you know you know yourself. Reflect on, you know, what are the the two biggest areas that we are excelling and could do work to excel in.
And then um after that, we've only got a few more slides. So thank you so much.
If you're not going to pause, go back to this later. I'm going to keep going.
Growth mindset is not just for kids, and this is something I've tried to kind of embed within here what it looks like in kids. Often I'm not good at math. I can't do it. Stop asking me right. A growth mindset response from an adult would be addition.
felt really confusing at first, too. But after practice, you got it, right? Um And hopefully them getting there, too. Practice is what is missing. Mistakes are helping you learn. It will feel easier soon, too.
Nobody is born knowing this stuff. Those are just keys, key little things. If we can get these phrases in their brains on the walls to repeat if it starts there, if they are reading or with short videos, however, we can get them.
Thinking about the brain and how it does learn and grow can help change their their perception of their their self, their effort, and their success. What it looks like in adults. This is a little harder, right? We've got some reprogramming to do.
Not just for ourselves. When I was saying how I talk about myself cooking or singing, I don't often get feedback that I have the best singing voice, though I love to sing and.
Children that are like 6 and younger love when I sing. I I get told I remind them of Miss Rachel a lot, but other people have given me feedback that they they don't love my singing, so sometimes I lean into that but.
the silver lining and not saying that out to others. Maybe saying, you know, if this was something I wanted to do to perform, I probably could train my vocal cords with a lot of practice and effort, get better at it.
Just like, you know, people who are not dancers can learn how to dance with the stars. I mean, we all have examples we could give in real life. Applying it in real life to here, you know, is the next level. So fixed mindset when your class is.
struggling and you feel like it's out of control, right? It's circle time. You're saying to yourself, everyone has to be sitting on the rug the whole time, otherwise this is chaos. That's what you're already programming here. You're believing. If I cannot get every child listening quietly, I'm a bad
Teacher.
Right. These are some things we're telling ourselves inside that's making us show up

to say, sit down, do this, do this. This is what it looks like, right? Very fixed, very black and white.
um But when we show up with a growth mindset, I wonder if Johnny's able to move more at the back of the rug in a rocking chair, would he then be able to pay attention to the story? What does paying attention look like for Johnny in other examples?
Maybe he pays attention better when he has something in his hands. I could give him a fidget too. Maybe trying to keep him still is what makes circle time feel chaotic in the 1st place. I'm helping a child with unmet needs get what they need to learn. And that takes time and effort. This is the work. I'm learning his needs so that everyone can learn. We don't all just learn automatically. That's the pause. That's the reframe and the reminder.
And sometimes we're so focused on um conditioning classrooms for success and getting the classroom management strategies right away. Um You've never had this dynamic before. These
However many kids you have in your classroom, 1622, however many other teachers, aides or paras you have in your classroom, whoever your administrator is, whatever new curriculum you're learning, you've never had these dynamics before. It would be unrealistic to say.
This is what it looks like and we all sit still and we all are quiet and we all learn well. That is not reality.
Classrooms that are still with children that are quiet are often run with fear and shame and external motivators.
We need to focus on understanding.
Getting supports. We all need supports and teaching self-advocacy so that we can help these children grow up to be the best version of their self.
And honestly, help us become the best version of ourselves. Let's take shame out of the game. Shame and fear-based phrases will sound like stop being so wiggly, sit still, listen, or you're not getting your token.
The intent, we can see it can still be good. You're trying to help the child focus and you're trying to help them settle their body. But how it lands for the child that their natural energy and arousal, that movement needed in their body that's helping their brain try to find regulation.
Because they have higher needs is bad. That's wrong. That's unacceptable. I cannot, right? And sometimes it might be unsafe and we have to stop the unsafe behavior.

Our job is to keep them safe.
But our job is not to keep them still. There's a huge area of space in between that, right? But sometimes we jump from one to another. Our job is to help them regulate their bodies and their arousal levels.
related so that they're finding that just right level of focus, calm and access their memory and their learning.
That is our job.
So an alternative would be, I know it's hard to stay still sometimes. How about we take a deep breath and find a wiggle cushion to help you focus? And it might not be a deep breath. Some kids have been deep breathed too much.
And it's not working anymore because it's deep breath and do this hard thing.
Like the deep breath fixes everything that's going on for them. No, it is a great tool if you have the other tools there too, to attune to the need to understand what's going on.
can get that arousal back to a regulated state, but it is not a fix-all, and some people have used it as such. And so now some kids avoid it, like all all things, you know, that seem terrible for them.
So.
When we're able to use that alternative, it reinforces the need for movement. It promote that promotes focus. We've done so with Co regulation showing up for them, bringing my calm body to them.
Let's take a deep breath together. Let's the whole class take a deep breath together if they've not gone so far into dysregulation that they're not accessed yet, right? And then let's use some breathing, some body tools, some brain.
Growth mindset focus language to remind them. Oh, we didn't get it yet. I'm I messed that one up. I jumped too fast into that lesson. I should have. I should have used our brain break. Why didn't we do?
a movement song. You know what? There's still time. Let's do it. Adapt. Read the the moment and what it needs, right? Another great extended learning opportunity is A-Z trauma-informed teaching.
And that has some simple go-to summaries of each thing and then each concept from trauma-informed practices and then applying it through some different possibilities of what these actions might be communicating to us. A great resource.
Another example showing up with shame or fear base phrases. I know you can do better than this. This really seems lazy. Why aren't you trying harder?

We say this to kids as caregivers because we're trying to motivate them to put in more effort. We think they we've seen them do before, and we don't understand why they're not showing up with that same capacity right now. We have good intent. Right. Not questioning that, but how is it landing for that child? It makes them feel like they're not good enough. Reinforce reinforcing that idea that their best effort is not appreciated that when they don't have.
Their top to give. They shouldn't even try at all because they're just going to be criticized and that they need to be perfect, mask and hold it all together. Push themselves, maybe to the point of their breaking point.
That's not what we want to be saying to them. This tough it out approach we're seeing does not work with our our children, our youth and our adults in our society. The numbers statistics, they're showing us it doesn't. We need to listen. We need to use these strategies that the research shows helps all of us. And for most of the people I've spoken to and trained with on this,
really aligns with their their why they went into it, their what were their strengths when they decided they could do this and went into teaching or becoming a therapist or a counselor or administrator. Um
Or even just being, you know, wanting to become a parent.
It wasn't to lay down the law and raise a robot.
Right. It was to connect, to share and joy to.
See.
what child comes forward and grows and develops and celebrate in, you know, who they are as a as a child, as a youth, as a person, in the relationship we can create with them. Usually relationship is a big piece of why we go into
Becoming a caregiver or, you know, our career path, we feel aligned with the type of relationship that will happen from that role.
Um. So I've seen an alternative here would be.
I've seen you give more effort and do better with activities like these, so I want to break the task down and figure out, you know, what's going on with this task or what's different for you today.
You're still pointing out that you've seen them do better, but you're not calling them lazy, right? You're trying to figure out, and maybe that's the moment they tell you that they were bullied and that they they felt like their life was over.
Because we have too many kids holding big feelings, big hurts, grief, loss.
isolation in their hearts under the surface.

- And they need that safe caregiver to show up in a way that they feel not just physically safe, but emotionally safe.
  To not have it all together, to not be OK today.
  And approaching it like this reinforces problem solving that we see fluctuating performance levels and we can check in on that and it often indicates something else is going on.
  Giving children the tools they need to improve and that they can do it through both of your effort and patience. So another extended learning opportunity is building a trauma-informed, compassionate classroom.
  encourage you to check that out. And lastly, your homework is to learn the mismatched framework that I've created. It is embedded in the K through 5 and the 6 through 12 frameworks as a way to help
  the youth to think about these concepts in their every day. Understand their body, understand their needs, understand how they are talking to themselves and how others are talking to themselves or showing up with support or not with support.
  and how we can all move forward to go in the right direction that helps us understand, feel seen, supported, celebrated, move from survival
  To thriving. That's what we want for these children, for these youth, for ourselves, for our classrooms, for our communities. And we know that when we.
  Build children up.
  and build the supports around them. Everything changes.
  So thank you for your commitment to child well-being. Thank you for watching.
  Many thanks to the Youth Well Foundation for sponsoring this learning opportunity.
  This is how we will change things. And um if you have any questions, any questions or want to reach out and
  collaborate in the future, uh you can find the the organization I run at reachftt.org and happy to help push this to the next level. Check out all those resources recommended when when you have time in all of your spare time.
  Because we're all too busy, but hopefully today you were able to see simple ways to apply the concepts into your classrooms to understand it a little bit more and to start making these changes.
  That will.
  Transform.
  Yeah.