



BALLAD HEALTH STRONG BRAIN INSTITUTE

EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

CONNECTIONS

Vol. 2, Issue 3

NEWSLETTER

Building Resilience Through ACEs Informed Networking

The Strong BRAIN Institute, founded through a five-year gift from Ballad Health, is the preferred resource for promoting the awareness and empirical study of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs); for promoting the development and dissemination of evidence-based practices that prevent, reduce or mitigate the negative effects of ACEs on health and health disparities; and for promoting a trauma-informed citizenry and workforce in the Appalachian Highlands region and beyond.

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The Resilient Schools Project

Ginger Christian Ed.D., East Tennessee State University



In the fall of 2021, the East Tennessee State University (ETSU) Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis (ELPA) and the ETSU Ballad Health Strong BRAIN Institute (SBI) created a collaborative partnership with Unicoi County Schools (UCS) to design and implement a trauma-informed district model, known as the Resilient Schools Project. The foundational beliefs are that adults and children face challenging life events that can affect their ability to learn and thrive. The vision of the five-year project is to support UCS school leaders, transform learning environments, and implement evidence-based trauma informed practices to mitigate the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) among educators and their students. The purpose of the project is to reduce the consequences of toxic stressors affecting children and adolescents. Our “learner-first framework” identifies systemic changes through the lens of leadership, community partnerships, and trauma-informed practices to leverage innovative resources for students in all educational settings.

PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships have been instrumental in the development of training, coaching and assessment tools to launch and sustain new processes, stemming from the Resilient Schools Project. Director of Schools, John English, wrote, “The project champions the Unicoi County School System’s vision to invest in students and build our future and we are excited about the focus on social emotional learning and research-based programs that align with our district goals.” The ELPA and SBI faculty members provided free asynchronous training to all UCS faculty, leadership coaching, and trauma-informed assessment tools to provide data for school leaders. Additionally, in the spring of 2023, Ballad Health Behavioral Health partnered with the Resilient Schools Project to provide additional training and resources to create “Reset Rooms” at Unicoi Middle and High Schools. This unique collaboration recognizes the power of community school partnerships while leveraging expertise through a myriad of perspectives to solve complex problems and build strong brains.

PROGRESS

In the first year, UCS faculty from three elementary schools, the middle school, and the high school completed the ETSU Ballad Health Strong BRAIN Institute Level 1 Training

etsu.edu/institute/strong-brain

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The Resilient Schools Project (con't)

"Introduction to ACEs, Using Trauma-Informed Approaches and Fostering Resilience". etsuredcap.etsu.edu/surveys/?s=99W7TJPL47Y8ALPK Principals established Resilient School Leadership Teams (RST). The teams crafted school visions and core values, instructional plans to teach consistent school-wide behavior expectations, and started the process of identifying students who required additional interventions. The RST members also met with ELPA faculty to review Resilient Schools' survey results, faculty feedback, and to develop strategic plans for Year 2.

During the first days of school in Year 2, teachers used the plans created in Year 1 to define, teach and demonstrate core values. ELPA faculty created interventions focused on deescalating students who have challenging days and designing a bridge from an office discipline referral back to class.

Restorative practices have been essential to the process. Historically, students suspended from school return to campus without intervention. The idea of resilience is to learn how to overcome significant challenges. Resilient Schools implemented a new process to bridge the gap from a difficult day to a fresh start. Before returning to the regular educational setting, the at-risk student meets with a designated educator to start the process of restoration. UCS teams use restorative questions (which are linked to expanded supports) for their students, which include the following:

- What happened?
- What were you thinking about at the time?
- What have you thought about since?
- Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way?
- What do you think you need to do to make things right?
- What do you need in order to successfully return to the school environment?

The Ballard Health Behavioral Health partnership sponsored the implementation of "Reset Spaces" at UCM and UCHS. The Reset Space provides resources for students to calm and learn how to self-regulate when they are experiencing "fight or flight" moments. Resources include comfortable seating, sensory calming tools, music and lighting. We are learning when the physical



Ginger Christian, Ed.D.

environment is adapted, the emotional regulation aspects of the brain will respond in kind and can learn how to access rational responses. The use of the reset room allows a 15-to-20-minute reset, replay and restore process. In a similar approach, ETSU is providing designated spaces across the campus for students to reset their emotions and recharge during challenging days.

UNIVERSITY SCHOLARS

Creating resilient students is at the heart of this work. In the spring of 2023, the SBI expanded the project to collaborate with Clemmer College of Education and Human Development faculty to create seminars for freshmen scholars at ETSU. The first seminar provided an interactive experience to equip these scholars with trauma-informed strategies to strengthen their personal emotional intelligence. In keeping with the idea of recognizing the "Four R's of ACEs" and promoting a culture of resilience, these students learned how to realize the impact of ACEs, to recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma, to respond by identifying potential pathways for recovery, and developing student-centered strategies to actively resist opportunities for additional trauma. Activities invited scholars to respond with student-centered trauma through a safety mindset. The seminar cultivated the students' voice and choice to support the goals of the first session which were twofold: to enhance the student's knowledge about ACEs and to gather student feedback to support a continuum of service from high school transitions to university life. The scholars generated creative ideas to better serve students who have experienced traumatic events. They also requested a second session, and the team is excited to continue to provide a space for students to lead and learn.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Teaching and learning are anchored in how our brains function, and we are learning that emotional intelligence is an essential component in this learner first framework. EQ embodies the idea that one can recognize emotions as they unfold, learn how to manage challenging emotions, and

apply new strategies in a social setting. Daniel Goleman crafted the concept of EQ, and researchers continue to provide intentional evidence-based practices to strengthen our ability to deescalate challenging situations. Strategies guiding this work have been an anchor for both adults and students. Resilient School Team members completed EQ training and are using personalized plans to strengthen individual practices with connections in classroom settings. Teachers have a unique opportunity to expand upon this work to better support students who have experienced traumatic events.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AND RESILIENT STUDENTS

Community schools have unique stories. They represent the historical significance of their communities and provide a vision for their students to become leaders and ultimately strengthen the workforce in years to come. This work champions the rich history of individual community schools and offers guidance to refresh or create school visions and core values unique to each school. Resilient schools and students model ideas around perseverance, compassion, adaptability and commitment. Educators explicitly teach behaviors associated with school values and celebrate success. Students are working with educators to understand and apply strategies that build strong brains so they can experience rational and wise responses.

P-20 COLLABORATION

In summary, the Resilient Schools Project is creating connections to think and lead with purpose in a P-20 education system. This emerging idea supports collaboration from early childhood, K-12, higher education and workforce training (CT.edu, 2023). Educational leaders are challenged to lead innovative initiatives to create research-based applications during student transitions from preschool to 8th grade, 9th-12th grade, and onward through technical school, community colleges, universities, the military and the workforce. We are learning that systemic change provides renewed hope for children who experience ACEs. The children in our classrooms today will be our leaders in the workforce tomorrow. The project directors are grateful for the investment of collaboration and community resources to create a future that inspires healing and access to unlimited potential. ★

Reflective Leadership Development through an SBI Lens

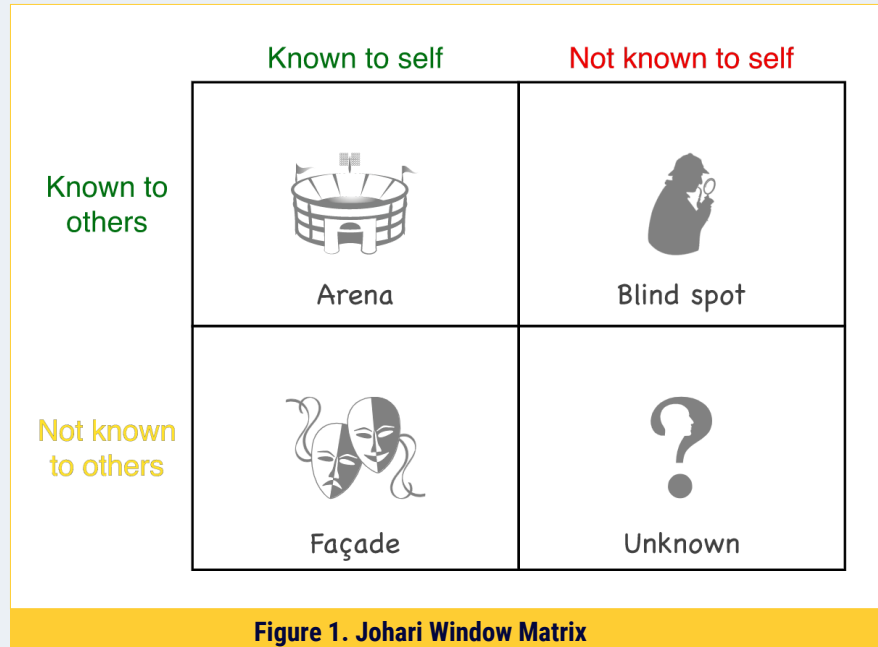
Wallace E. Dixon, Jr, Ph.D., Founding Director

In the Strong BRAIN Institute, we spend a lot of time thinking about leadership and devising strategies for using a trauma- and resilience-informed lens to develop leaders. As a general rule, leadership seems to be one of those topics that practically anyone can write or speak about at any time and from any perspective, without necessarily touching on any of the key elements that, scientifically speaking at least, makes one a good leader. Indeed, there is a cottage industry of leadership self-help books written by famous and not-so-famous leaders whose only apparent credentials involve having held a leadership position of some kind.

In the SBI, science drives all of our activity, including our work around leadership development. Did you know, for example, that there is a whole – and excellent – leadership development book dedicated to The Surprising Science of Meetings? (See the work by Steven Rogelberg here: stevenrogelberg.com/the-surprising-science-of-meetings-1). In the SBI we turn to the science of leadership because we believe it to be the most informed way to develop and teach about effective leadership practices.

The particular brand of leadership we advocate is called reflective leadership. Reflective leadership builds on evidence-based, self-reflective practices that center relationships and relationship-building in the service of effective leadership. Skills that are strengthened through reflective leadership development include: 1) growing and understanding one's capacities for engaging in self-awareness, 2) being curious and making careful observations of people, structures and systems, and 3) flexibly adapting one's leadership role to accommodate the unique strengths, styles, motivations and preferences of those whom one's leading. Indeed, reflective leadership is maximized to the extent that self-awareness, curious observation, and flexible adaptation is strengthened.

One tool we use to promote reflective leadership is called the Johari Window, named after the two psychologists who invented it: Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham. The Johari Window parses the world into 1) information known and not known by 2) those who are doing the leading and those who are being led. The result is a 2 x 2 matrix that looks like Figure 1.



The “Arena” comprises what the leader knows and what the team members know. Information in the Arena is game for public consideration, and discussions centering on that information ideally includes a common, shared vision for the team. The more that everyone on the team collectively knows and understands, the more effective the team can be in addressing opportunities and challenges.

The “Blind Spot” consists of what others know that the leader does not. It is the Achilles’ heel of effective leadership. The Blind Spot could include back-channel or gossipy communications about the leader directly, or about the environmental context facing the entire team. Either way, the more the leader knows about what the rest of the team knows, the more effective the relationships the leader can make with the team. So, it behooves the leader to reduce the size of their blind spot by being curious about what others on the team know, and

importantly, to create safe spaces for them to share that knowledge and expertise.

The “Façade” comprises what the leader knows that others do not. If the leader knows about opportunities and challenges that the balance of the team isn’t aware of, then, again, the functionality of the team is compromised by the disempowerment of the team members. Reflective leaders strive to share what they know with the rest of the team, thus moving that valuable information from the Façade into the Arena for more public vetting and consideration.

Finally, is the “Unknown,” which includes all the information that neither the leader nor the team is aware of. The Unknown is obviously the largest quadrant, considering all the information at our fingertips in today’s

modern world. But it is also a significant source of uncertainty and anxiety for the team, leader included. Team functionality is maximized to the extent that relevant, new information can be acquired and shared among the team members in the arena.

With the Johari window as a tool, the SBI strives to help leaders build capacities for reflection, self-awareness and flexibility by encouraging them to improve information flow among the quadrants in ways that maximize the size of the Arena, while minimizing Blind Spots, Façades, and the Unknown. Information flow among the quadrants happens most smoothly when leaders build and promote strong authentic relationships with and among team members. Where there are authentic relationships, there is trust, mutuality and empowerment; all of which promote the free-flowing exchange of ideas. Among all team members, leaders are in the best position to build spaces where these kinds of things can happen. *

How to Human Series | “Wondering about Trauma-Informed Schools”

Diana Morelen, Ph.D., East Tennessee State University

Dear Dr. Diana,

Across my 20 years as a teacher, there is always some new idea floating around that's popular for a season and then fades away. Right now, lots of people are talking about trauma-informed care and trauma-informed schools. I haven't learned much about it yet, but I'm worried that we're focusing too much on the bad—schools should be a place for learning, not a place to focus on trauma. It's hard enough to be a kid these days. I thought that you might have some advice on how we can best support our children without getting caught up in the trends of the moment.

Sincerely,

Teacher who is wary of trauma-informed schools



Dear Teacher,

Thank you for your service to our children and our community. It makes sense that you've seen trends come and go and that you'd be wary of anything that distracts from doing what's best for the children. I share your concern for youth in our community and share your commitment to wanting to do what we can to promote healthy development for all kiddos.

I hear you that it's a bit daunting to think about integrating something with the word “trauma” into our schools. I'd like to offer a different frame, rather than “trauma-informed schools,” what if we said “resilience-informed schools?” I'm a part of a group, the Strong BRAIN Institute, that is working to spread what we like to call “trauma and resilience informed (TRI for short) practices” across the Appalachian Highlands. But enough about word choice, let's talk about what really matters—doing what's best for children.

As an experienced educator, I'm sure you have seen that children learn best in safe, stable, and nurturing environments. Further, when children feel well, physically and mentally, they are better able to learn, grow, and thrive. Research has shown that the more adverse and stressful experiences a child has growing up, the higher their risk for experiencing physical and mental health problems across their lifespan. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic things that can happen to children, such as experiencing abuse, witnessing violence, experiencing prejudice

or discrimination, or living with a caregiver who is struggling with substance use. One key point of the TRI movement is to raise awareness, across communities, that ACEs exist and that ACEs impact children's brain development. If you attend a TRI training, you'll likely get to hear the metaphor of “building strong brains.” Children's brains develop rapidly in the first few years of life and what happens from ages 0-3 lays the foundation for all that is yet to come, like the foundation of a house. Safe, stable, and nurturing relationships help a child build a healthy foundation for brain areas essential for learning, behavior, and health. When children experience a lot of adversity, sometimes called toxic stress, it can “get under the skin,” and impact their developing bodies and brains in ways that make it hard to learn and grow.

Toxic stress hurts the areas and connections in our brains that help us control our impulses and remember things-called executive functioning. Executive functioning is like the air traffic control center in our brains-it helps us take in lots of different pieces of information and know what to do with that information. Executive functioning is crucial for good behavior and academic success.

One of the best ways to promote healthy development is to be a part of communities that are committed to preventing ACEs through actions such as offering supports to families that are overburdened by stressors like poverty or mental illness. When we take better care of our caregivers—parents, grandparents, teachers, early childhood educators and other community members

who care for our children—we are creating healthy communities for our children.

If you are working with a child who has experienced a lot of ACEs, there is still hope. Resilience-positive outcomes despite negative experiences-is absolutely possible. Healing happens in the context of safe, stable, and nurturing relationships. Now more than ever, schools are crucial places where children can be uplifted and empowered, despite what hardships they have been through.

Another key piece of the TRI movement, is learning about the ways that trauma response symptoms may show up as “problematic” behaviors. Children who experience ACEs and/or toxic stress, often learn ways to cope that are adaptive in the abusive or stressful environment but are maladaptive in other environments. For example, Sarah is 6 years old and lives with her grandmother who is trying her best to raise Sarah, but the grandmother struggles with depression and alcoholism. At home, Sarah has learned that the only way to get her grandmother's attention and to get what she needs is to throw a tantrum. At home, this is adaptive because it's helping Sarah get her basic needs met. At school, this is viewed as a problem behavior. A TRI-school would be aware that children's behavior is a form of communication for underlying feelings and needs. They might use strategies such as placing Sarah in a classroom with a nurturing and TRI teacher, teaching Sarah regulation strategies to help her learn to manage her feelings and use her words to communicate needs, and working with a case manager to help Sarah's grandmother find the supports that she may need to help her cope with her mental illness.

You may be thinking, “I already know this stuff and do it.” If so, wonderful! Then you've likely been using TRI practices before it ever became a buzzword. Your experience and wisdom could help others as they learn how to apply this lens. I'll note that becoming resilience-informed is a journey not a destination. It's a practice and there is no one-size fits all approach to fostering resilient children, schools, and communities. There are some active ingredients though: curiosity and compassion. And the more we offer our compassion to others and open

Continued on next page

ourselves up to learning about the suffering that is all around us, the more important it is for us to lean into our own practices of self-compassion.

If you'd like to learn more about ACEs, please check out:

- Harvard Center on the Developing Child:

ACEs and Resilience website

- developingchild.harvard.edu
- The video on YouTube titled, "How Brains are Built: The Core Story of Brain Development"

If you'd like to learn more about TRI practices and trainings in the Appalachian

Highlands, please contact the Strong BRAIN Institute at SBI@etsu.edu.

In sum, thank you for being a person committed to promoting resilience in our children and community. Resilience happens in relationships and to offer safe, stable, and nurturing relationships to others, we need to be intentional to take care of ourselves. Take care. ✨

Trauma-Informed Practices (TIPs) In Higher Education

Chelsea Robertson, Ph.D., West Liberty University



Years ago, I taught an introductory psychology course as a graduate student who was very new at navigating the world of teaching. I went into my first days of class with a deep nervous energy, as many new instructors tend to, but I quickly realized that the vast majority of my students in this class were engaged and ready to learn. As we came toward the last few months of the semester, I noticed one of my highest achieving students, one who had excellent attendance and who contributed thoughtfully to class discussions, seemed to drop off of the map. They were rarely attending class, and when they did, they did not engage. They seemed perpetually distracted. Assignments were not being turned in and they slipped multiple letter grades in the span of a few weeks. At the suggestion of my practicum instructor, I submitted behavioral and academic alerts on this student and I reached out to them via email, but I never heard a response from them. My first

inclination was to be frustrated. Why was this student throwing their grade away after they spent months working so hard?

My frustration quickly receded after they spoke to me after class one day. They told me that they had been dealing with domestic violence and the legal matters, medical bills, housing and transportation insecurity, and mental health difficulties that resulted from it. They apologized profusely about not telling me sooner; they simply did not know how to approach the topic. Looking back, I think that day shaped the way that I view education and my role as an instructor. I connected the student with campus resources and we worked together to come up with a plan on how to finish the semester strong. I was relieved that I did not act out of frustration, but disappointed that I assumed the student's behavior was solely based on ill-intent. This was prior to me becoming involved in the science of adversity and resilience and in the application of trauma-informed pedagogy, but I see it as an important step forward in my professional development.

I know now that this student's situation was not unique or even uncommon. Countless conversations with colleagues have revealed stories similar to mine, especially in recent years during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. This knowledge has been confirmed by research that suggests that the majority of college students arrive at institutions of higher education with trauma histories, and more still will come to experience trauma before graduation, much like my student those years ago. We know that students with trauma histories may struggle with skills necessary for learning and wellbeing (e.g., memory, emotion regulation, executive function) and are

less likely than their peers without trauma histories to graduate from a postsecondary institution. With this knowledge has come a paradigm shift that not only recognizes the effects of trauma on student outcomes, but also prioritizes trauma-informed practices to mitigate the effects of these experiences and to promote resilience in all students.

What is less clear, however, is what exactly this process looks like. There is no definitive checklist that describes every step an instructor must take to become trauma informed. Rather, becoming a trauma trauma-informed instructor is a process that is living and dynamic. It is a process that is constantly evolving to accommodate the needs of you and your students and can look different semester by semester, week by week, or even day by day. Simply put, there is not one single way to be a trauma-informed instructor. The natural question, then, is where do we start? Below I offer some suggestions on ways in which instructors can begin or continue on their trauma-informed pedagogical journeys with the understanding that there is no "finish line" for this process.

STEP 1: Learn about trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences, one especially harmful form of trauma. In order to become a trauma-informed instructor, it is necessary to first understand what trauma is. There are many high-quality resources out there, but here are some of my favorites:

• **Websites:**

- The Center on the Developing Child through Harvard University
- The Center for Disease Control and Prevention

Trauma-Informed Practices (TIPs) In Higher Education (con't)

• Books:

- *The Deepest Well: Healing the Long-Term Effects of Childhood Adversity* by Dr. Nadine Burke Harris
- *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma* by Dr. Bessel van der Kolk

STEP 2: Look into current work being done on trauma-informed practices in education. While not all resources are specific to higher education, many practices can be adapted for use at any level:

• Books:

- *Trauma-Informed Pedagogies: A Guide for Responding to Crisis and Inequality in Higher Education*, edited by Dr. Phyllis Thompson and Dr. Janice Carello
- *The Heart of Teaching and Learning: Compassion, Resiliency, and Academic Success* by Ray Wolpow, Mona M. Johnson, Ron Hertel, and Susan O. Kincaid

• Guide:

- *Trauma-Informed Practices for Postsecondary Education: A Guide* by Dr. Shannon Davidson

STEP 3: Become familiar with and aim to embody the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration's six pillars of trauma-informed care. Although there is no checklist on how to become trauma-informed, these pillars are considered to be a "gold standard" in trauma-informed practices. To help you begin thinking about how these pillars can be implemented in your classes, I pose some suggestions of practices you can consider for each pillar:

1. Safety:

- Create predictability through a thorough syllabus and classroom routine.
- Communicate changes far in advance if possible.
- Create assessments that encourage scaffolding and learning from mistakes.
- Provide written and verbal content warnings for class topics when applicable.

2. Trustworthiness and Transparency:

- Welcome and utilize early feedback that asks students what is going well and if they would change anything about the course within reason.
- Give the "why" behind assignments, decisions, and policies in class and on your syllabus.
- Give the "how" behind grading and assessments by walking through grading rubrics in class.

3. Peer support:

- Provide students with opportunities for meaningful engagement of the material and with each other. This can be done through various active learning strategies (e.g., think-pair-shares and gallery walks) and with technology-aided discussion tools (e.g., polleverywhere).
- Connect students with relevant peer and professional resources on campus. Consider having a space on your learning management site that outlines these resources.

4. Collaboration and Mutuality:

- Check in with students early and often. Using a confidential student questionnaire can inform

you of student name preferences and gives students a space to voice their concerns about the course or to tell you anything else they want you to know.

- Consider implementing small changes in the language you use. For example, reframing the statement "you have an exam next week," say "our next exam is next week."

5. Empowerment, Voice, and Choice:

- Allow students to choose various aspects of the course, whether that is a lesson topic, course policies, or between assignment or project options.
- Consider implementing one "no questions asked" assignment pass.
- Reconsider "all or nothing" late work or attendance policies.

6. Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues:

- Make accessibility a habit. For example, ensuring every video you show has a transcript or closed captioning and using accessibility checkers on all class documents.
- Acknowledge the systematic biases in your field and open space for discussion on these biases.
- Be aware of the language you use and the unintended messages you may send. For example, use examples that highlight a variety of gender, sexual, and ethnic identities.

STEP 4: Be patient and practice self-compassion. You will not get trauma-informed teaching right all of the time, and that is okay. Remember that this transformation will not happen overnight, or even in a year. It will take a lot of effort and time but remember that recognizing the need to become trauma-informed is often the hardest and most important step. You've got this! ✨

Returning with Resilience

Please plan to join the SBI for Returning with Resilience, a three-part series to engage the campus community around concepts relevant to trauma and resilience-informed practices.

PART 1

Resilient Speaker Series Presentation, "Caring for Ourselves While Caring for Others: Minimizing Burnout and Replenishing Empathy" with Nikita Gupta.
September 21, 2-3 p.m. (EDT).
tinyurl.com/2bnmz786



PART 2

Reflecting for Resilience Part 2,
October 6, 12-1 p.m. (EDT)
tinyurl.com/3h8e62uf



PART 3

Reflecting for Resilience Part 3,
November 3, 12-1 p.m. (EDT)
tinyurl.com/yey8yuh4



After this date, you may access the recording: youtube.com/playlist?list=PLAjrsWY6TKLAH_gldTGLi0_6nUJIDfB52

Synopsis of “University Stewardship of a Healing Community”

Benjamin Schoenberg, M.P.H.
SBI Research Services Coordinator



The Strong BRAIN Institute was delighted to read ETSU President Brian Noland’s support for leveraging the post-secondary education system to address and mitigate ACEs and trauma in his article in the 2023-2024 edition of President

to President, *The Well Campus: An In-Depth Look* (president2president.com/library/2022-23_ch9).

The article “University Stewardship of a Healing Community” laid out the evidence for why ACEs and Trauma are not only relevant to higher-education upper administration but “incumbent upon all higher education leaders to do everything in their power to understand, and, when possible, provide solutions that help students overcome those barriers, enhancing the potential for increased educational attainment.” Dr. Noland continues by focusing on how exposure to ACE’s-related adversities can create barriers for students, faculty, and staff to achieve academic and professional success. On the other hand, adopting trauma-informed care (TIC) principles can create a culture of resilience on campus that promotes student retention and the likelihood of making it to graduation while simultaneously lowering turnover among faculty and staff.

Throughout the article, Dr. Noland lays out the evidence for why prioritizing academic excellence and merit is not mutually exclusive with TIC policies and principles, such as promoting psychological safety, building trust, and prioritizing overall well-being. He articulates that higher-ed has a social responsibility to adapt to the needs of incoming students in a way that goes above and beyond preparing them to have the skills to succeed in the workplace. Among the rationales he gives is the empirical evidence that ACEs and trauma can significantly impact a student’s ability to concentrate, learn, and manage the mounting complexity and stress of working toward graduation. Dr. Noland cites multiple sources to make his case, including a Tennessee Department of Health study reporting that over 52% of Tennesseans experienced at least 1 ACE, and 21% reported having three or more

ACEs (tn.gov/content/dam/tn/health/documents/Tennessee_ACE_Final_Report_with_Authorization.pdf). The president also outlines a well-cited 2017 Sycamore Institute analysis finding that the predominance of ACEs in adults has led to an estimated \$5.2 billion in preventable direct medical costs and lost productivity from employees missing work (sycamoreinstitute.org/economic-cost-adverse-childhood-experiences/).

So how can campus upper administration work toward shifting the culture to a resilience-promoting orientation and “address problems rooted in situations that often occur decades before students or staff arrive on our campuses?” In comes the Strong BRAIN Institute. “Through the Strong BRAIN Institute (SBI), East Tennessee State University is working with community partners to inform our campus and regional employers about the importance of adopting a trauma-informed approach to care, education, and collaboration.” Dr. Noland highlights how the SBI is employing the latest brain science to mitigate ACEs across the lifespan and building long-term relationships with more than 250 local organizations and employers in the region and across the state. “Faculty from the Strong BRAIN Institute work hand-in-hand with K-12 educators to link medical research to educational practices, provide education on trauma awareness and resilience, and help to transform ETSU’s policies, procedures, curricula, and philosophies to promote resilience, increase retention among students and decrease turnover among faculty and staff.”

President to President is a higher education, thought leadership series sponsored by Sodexo and guest written by university presidents for university presidents. In the 2022-2023 edition, *The Well Campus: An In-Depth Look*, authors were charged with going beyond just opining about what the “well campus” ought to look and feel like but also examining what institutional leaders have done and can do to make meaningful improvements to the lives and experiences of students, faculty and staff over the long-term. We are honored that Dr. Noland sees the SBI as a critical partner in materializing ETSU’s strategic objectives and look forward with a few definitions to get us on the same page. *

Learning Resources

Level 1 Training “Introduction to ACEs, Using Trauma-Informed Approaches and Fostering Resilience” - ETSU Ballard Health Strong BRAIN Institute

- *Fundamentals of ACEs and Resilience Level 1 badge - click here*

Level 2 Training, “Compassionate Teaching Practices” - ETSU Ballard Health Strong BRAIN Institute

- *Compassionate Teaching in Higher Education Level 2 badge - click here*

Access video recordings from the Strong BRAIN Institute Resilience Speaker Series:



On the SBI Bookshelf

Demma, P. (2022) *Timmy is Resilient. Growing into Resiliency.*

Clements, A.D. (2023) *The Trauma Informed Church: Walking with Others Toward Flourishing.* Uplift Press.

van der Kolk, B.A. (2014) *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma.* Viking.

Winfrey, O., & Perry, B. D. (2021). *What Happened to You? Conversations on Trauma, Resilience, and Healing.* Flatiron Books: An Oprah Book.

Lakshmin, P. (2023). *Real self-care: A transformative program for redefining wellness (Crystals, Cleanses, and Bubble Baths not included).* Penguin Life.

Manning, K. (2021) *The Empathetic Workplace. 5 Steps to Compassionate, Calm and Confident Responses to Trauma on the Job.* HarperCollins Leadership.



Regulation and Co-Regulation: Students don't always choose their behavior

Ginger Healy, MSW, LCSW, author of *15-Minute Focus: Regulation and Co-Regulation*

I am going to say something that may challenge your beliefs and even frustrate you.

STUDENTS DON'T ALWAYS CHOOSE THEIR BEHAVIOR.

Hang with me for a second. Relational neuroscience has proven this to be a true statement. Behavior is not always a willful choice but a form of communication, a lagging skill, or a need that must be scaffolded. Understanding this opens us up to a new view on behavior management. And why would we need this new view? Because the academic success of our students is deeply connected to our discipline strategies.

I aim for schools to move towards brain-based discipline through regulation and co-regulation. Instead of sending students away, we must bring them closer. Take a breath; you may want to challenge me on this. I get it; I do. I am not saying this is easy or intuitive, but keep reading, and we will get to that accountability piece I know you want to see resolved.

Let's start with a few definitions to get us on the same page.

Dysregulation: Being unable to manage your emotions. Chaos and challenging behaviors in the classroom? Yup! That's dysregulation! Both children and adults experience dysregulation every day. Managing all those big feelings and behaviors is called emotional regulation. We regulate to self-soothe and feel better when our stress response system is activated. We all need regulation!

When regulated, a student can:

- Learn
- Empathize
- Reason
- Be self-aware
- Solve problems

So yes, we want this for our students. We want a regulated classroom. Regulation is a necessary skill and essential for not only academics but success in all areas of life.

Co-regulation is warm and responsive interactions between two people (educator and student!). The key to these exchanges

is that the adult is attuned to the student's needs, and the student perceives the adult as safe. Because of that, the student can be settled, helping to dissipate misbehavior.

Self-regulation requires skills that get developed and built through co-regulation with a safe and dependable person who is already regulated themselves. Dysregulated students need regulated educators! It's all about having a buffer relationship with someone we trust to help guide us when we are struggling.

The possibilities for how dysregulation manifests in the school environment are endless. We don't always know what activates (or triggers) a student's nervous system, and the student may be unable to tell us. If we can identify patterns and figure out the why, we can make significant headway, but even more important than the "why" is the "what." Find out what works to help the student feel safe.

Here are a few places to start:

- Listen and support through physical presence. You can calm students' nervous systems by letting them know they aren't alone.

- Movement is the quickest and most efficient way to shift emotional states. Take the student on a walk, turn on the music, and dance. Whatever you do, do it together.
- Give them water and a protein snack.
- Listen, empathize, and validate, "I am so sorry this is hard."
- Offer regulation tools: Breathing techniques, Mindfulness exercises, Fidgets and manipulatives, Sensory input

The overall goal is to send the message to the student that you "see" them and will be there no matter their behavior. Once the child is regulated and ready to talk, listen, and process, you can discuss what happened and what should be done next. Appropriate consequences can be implemented once both the adult and student are regulated. It's essential to let the student know dysregulation will likely happen again. They need to know they are not perfect and are not expected to be so.

Some would argue that this framework lets students get away with things they should be held accountable for. But co-regulation doesn't mean a lack of structure, boundaries, expectations, or consequences. Co-regulation is not a reward for behavior that is deemed inappropriate. Quite the opposite, it is a higher standard of accountability coupled with compassion. It alleviates the need for students to act out because it keeps them safe inside their bodies. It's the key to developing self-regulation, which results in better behaviors.

Students need support more than ever. They need you. You are the strategy. You have the power to help students manage behavior and ultimately heal through co-regulation. ✨

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