



**I've been thinking a lot about you and this work today in light of these horrific events. There's real urgency for this work. Thank you for your training last month. It will make a difference.** – February 15, 2018 phone message from Ava Chattergee, Early Childhood Education Program Coordinator, Columbia College – Chicago, referencing Douglass High School Shooting in Parkland, FL.

On December 14, 2012, I was at a friend's house in Chicago with my 4- and 5-year old children and received text from another Chicago friend.

"Are your parents OK?"

My parents were in my hometown of Sandy Hook, CT. "Of course they are OK – what makes you ask?"

"There's been a shooting in Sandy Hook."

My parents were safe – so many other children and adults were not.

That night as I watched my two peacefully sleeping, safe and ALIVE children – I noticed two parallel thoughts. The violence that happened in my small hometown was committed by one human being who had not learned the skill of self-regulating his emotions. In almost the same breath, I noted that within my adopted home of Chicago, just as many people every day are affected by violence due to a similar lagging skill – the inability to stay, as Dr. Dan Siegel says, *integrated*.

Something else started to shift – what I now see as a response to vicarious trauma. Whenever I would overhear someone with a responsibility of caring for children, especially in a school, yell at a child to be quiet, my survival brain took over. I went directly to the thought, "If you are yelling at children to be quiet, then they are not going to trust you. If they don't trust you, then you will not be able to keep them safe if someone is here to do harm."

At the same time, I realized yelling was my go-to parenting tool – and that I needed to learn some new tools to make a shift. I now know this to be an authoritative management style – neither permissive or dictatorial.



Kristin receives her diploma from Newtown High School Principal, Dr. Timothy Breslin.



Kristin and a group of new Certified Positive Discipline Classroom Educators from Columbia College's Early Childhood Program January 2018.

In 2013, the fall my oldest child entered Kindergarten, I read the **New York Times Magazine** article "Can Emotional Intelligence Be Taught?"<sup>i</sup> In it, I first encountered the term "social and emotional learning" ("SEL") and new (to me) knowledge that the State of Illinois had adopted SEL standards for public schools in 2003. Something clicked for me – I sought out a public school that placed a priority on SEL. My family discovered Ravenswood Elementary School, a Chicago Public School on the city's north side. It was here I learned about **Positive Discipline**, the SEL and classroom management system Ravenswood implemented in 2006 inspired the work of Alfred Adler and Rudolf Dreikurs.

One of Positive Discipline foundations is that all human beings desire and seek belonging and significance. When I began reading **Positive Discipline** by Jane Nelsen, this sentence landed powerfully in my world:

*A sense of connection (or lack thereof) is a primary indicator of how well children will do in school – both academically and socially. None of the students who killed other students and teachers felt a sense of belonging and significance.<sup>ii</sup>*

As I processed my own Sandy Hook connection as a mother of young children, I recognized;

- the importance of **connection, belonging and significance** for children to create thriving relationships.
- the humans who make choices to harm were all once children and
- the world is not designed to support environments where children's voices and feelings are encouraged to be expressed, deeply listened to and experienced

SEL Chicago was founded to facilitate conversations for change. SEL Chicago envisions a world where communities of citizens are supported to be, responsible, resilient, resourceful, respectful of self and others, and focused on solutions. We know this not possible without intention. To make this world possible, SEL Chicago facilitates coaching, courses and training to support relationships that build connection, where adults and children learn social and emotional skills, and families, schools and communities are connected with knowledge of human development.



*Kristin leading school staff in conversations about SEL and Positive Discipline in Chicago, February 2018*

When I met with Scarlett Lewis of the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, I began to have the courage to speak about my connection to Sandy Hook. Scarlett shared The Sandy Hook Advisory Commission Report with me, and I now make sure to weave this into all my conversations about SEL. The report was released in 2015 to make policy suggestions to mitigate future violence, and offers this a clear and direct recommendation:

*Social-emotional learning should form an integral part of the curriculum from preschool through high school. It works best when it is a pervasive component of the school environment that informs the culture of the school and the behavior of adult educators. <sup>iii</sup>*

*The report also provides a caution:*

*Too often school administrators and teachers view SEL as secondary to academic curricula, worrying that time spent on aspects of SEL will detract from students' academic achievement. As a result, even evidence-based SEL curricula are rarely included past the earliest grades, and where SEL is taught it rarely receives the time and attention it deserves.*

*Despite the centrality of social, emotional and behavioral health challenges to Adam Lanza's [the Sandy Hook shooter's] identified disabilities, his IEP was directed almost exclusively toward supports for his academic progress. <sup>iv</sup>*

SEL Chicago was created to collaborate with legislators, teachers, administrations and families to provide training in social emotional learning curricula and the immediately useful tools of Positive Discipline to create connection and accountability. When we facilitate opportunities for adults and students to become leaders who are resilient, self-regulated, responsible and respectful of self and others, we to build the foundations for peaceful communities.



*Kristin and Scarlett Lewis from the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement – meeting in Sandy Hook, CT, December, 2017*

<sup>i</sup> Jennifer Khan, "Can Emotional Intelligence Be Taught, *NY Times Magazine*, September 2013, found here: <http://www.cabrillo.edu/~ogarcia/Can%20Emotional%20Intelligence%20Be%20Taught.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Jane Nelsen, *Positive Discipline, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*, Ballantine Books, 2006, pg. 21

<sup>iii</sup> Sandy Hook Advisory Commission Final Report, Page 100, found here: [http://www.shac.ct.gov/SHAC\\_Final\\_Report\\_3-6-2015.pdf](http://www.shac.ct.gov/SHAC_Final_Report_3-6-2015.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid, pg. 101