Trauma, Brain Based Needs and Creating Safe School Environments

1.

> ## Universal Developmental Needs

Most serious problem behaviors among children and youth are tied to disruption of <u>brain based needs</u>, which are critical to growth and well-being (Jackson, 2014). University of Pittsburgh researchers Li and Julian (2012) reviewed studies showing that the active ingredient in all successful work with children and youth — now as well as throughout human history — is the *developmental relationship.*

- Four essential elements of of brain-based needs / *developmental relationship* :
    1. a close emotional bond (<u>Attachment</u>) increasingly complex tasks (<u>Achievement</u>) shifting the power to the learner (<u>Autonomy</u>) a relationship of reciprocity (<u>Altruism</u>).
    b. When these needs are met, individuals thrive. But if frustrated, humans experience pain and revert to reactive coping strategies, which has been described as **pain-based behavio**r with children and adolescents.

- Abraham Maslow (1943) proposed a hierarchy of human needs that, after three-quarters of a century, is still the world's most-cited model of human motivation (Cory, 2000).
    a. The foundation is—> physiological and safety needs.
    b. Above these survival functions are higher growth needs for—-----> belonging, esteem, and self-actualization.
    c. A powerful principle articulated by Abraham Maslow (1959) is that most **problem behavior results from unmet needs, and effective treatment must focus on these.**
- **Traditional coercive behavior management systems manipulate pain and pleasure for compliance and contro**l.
- In humans, unlike other animals, the social brain has evolved in such a manner that our primitive pain and pleasure circuits are closely tied to higher biosocial needs (Brendtro & Mitchell, 2015). Thus, **meeting these needs is a powerful source of positive emotions,**
- Deprivation of these needs is profoundly painful.
- Since humans need their fellow humans to survive, we have evolved brain structures that make <u>positive relationships richly rewarding.</u> Social bonds release a rush of oxytocin and other pleasure chemicals that create well-being and even elation.
    a. In contrast, rejection can trigger a wide range of pain-based behaviors: grief, hopelessness, or shame. Achievement: Developing talents, solving problems, and learning skills are directly related to life success and thus are intrinsically rewarding in the brain.

b. The frustration of ongoing failure can create anger, avoidance, or a debilitating sense of being stupid and unvalued.

c. **Failing students often try to repair their self-respect by hostile behavior, defying teachers, or breaking school rules** (Gold & Osgood, 1992). Of course, these behaviors are ultimately self-defeating. <u>Autonomy: The sense of personal power starts with self-regulation, and, with maturity, leads to growing confidence and self-efficacy.</u>

d. Having a sense of power is a major contributor to pride and self-worth. But, persons who feel powerless and unable to shape their destiny have a sense of learned helplessness that can lead to depression and hopelessness.

e. In other cases, the pain of powerlessness is directed outward as youth become defiant and rebellious. Research shows that powerlessness has life-long effects on health and well-being (Keltner, 2016).

f. Further, developmental trauma, by definition, involves a combination of threat with feelings of helplessness.

PUNITIVE BASED BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT
● Traditional cultures developed systems of power leveling to insure that aggressive persons would not be allowed to wield unchecked power.

● While our culture has drastically changed, our brains have not (Gluckman & Hanson, 2008). We are genetically designed for altruism. <u>Our well-being is directly related to creating a shared community of respect instead of a hierarchy of dominance and subjugation.</u>

● While we may not be able to change the larger society, we can build microcommunities in our families, schools, and communities that better fit the human brain with universal values and needs.

● We will only thrive when we meet universal needs and values for belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. Discovering the need beneath the problem is the ultimate antidote to pain-based behavior.

2.

> **<u>Pain-Based Behavior / Pervasiveness of Trauma</u>**
> *Hurt people hurt people. (Native American proverb)*

What the Research Shows
In an intensive study of 10 programs for youth at risk, concluded that every young person without exception <u>*"had experienced deep and pervasive psycho-emotional pain"*</u> (2002, p. 111).

<u>Pain-based behavior</u> is used to describe <u>acting out</u> or <u>withdrawal reactions</u>, which are a residue of unresolved past trauma. Essentially, most of what has traditionally been labeled as deviance or disorder is better understood as *pain-based behavior.*

****CONSIDER A SLIGHT SHIFT IN THINKING****
1. Traditionally, the young person is seen as the problem because of the pain he or she is causing others.

2. We ask, "What is wrong with you?" But the more important question is, ***"What has happened to you?"***

3. Attuned to another's pain, we shift from blame to empathy. And when reactive behavior is understood as a coping strategy, we discover hidden resilience; the new question becomes, "What is strong with you?" (Moving to a growth mindset)

4. **<u>Painful emotions</u>** include fear, anger, sadness, disgust, hopelessness, helplessness, hatred, shame, and guilt. While there are myriad labels for negative feelings, most are variations of a handful of basic aversive emotions.

5. **<u>Painful thinking</u>** includes distressing thoughts such as worry, anxiety, distrust, pessimism, blame, vengeance, denial, and defensive rationalization.

6. **<u>Pain-based behavior</u>** puts painful emotions and thinking into action as an attempt to escape from pain, defend against pain, reciprocate pain, relieve pain, or eliminate the problem causing the pain. **<u>Acting out anger is the most common behavior as it appears less risky than showing vulnerability</u>** (Brendtro & Larson, 200.

7. Physical and psychological pain trigger the same brain signals to signal danger.

8. **For young people in pain, life is a daily struggle to handle distress;** they often use coping strategies which might be considered as reactive resilience.
    *   Actions that seem senseless to others make perfect sense in their private logic, to borrow a term coined by Alfred Adler (1930). All behavior serves some

purpose, even if it causes further problems. Abraham Maslow (1959) observed that most so-called "symptoms" of emotional problems are attempts to cope with unmet needs.

- The typical intervention is either a sharp reprimand or the threat of consequences. Thus, adults easily become drawn into battles with the very children who most need encouragement.
- **Pain-based behavior is met with pain-based discipline, which is the essence of punishment.**

Intended Effects vs Unintended Effects of Punishment

Intended Effects of Punishment	Unintended Effects of Punishment
● Youth experiences pain from physical punishment, loss of privileges, exclusion, time out, or reprimand. ● Punishment motivates the youth to evaluate his or her behavior and learn from this unpleasant experience. ● The youth feels remorse and vows to reform behavior: "I won't do something dumb like this again." ● Later when tempted, the youth recalls the previous incident and shows self-control and responsible behavior.	● Youth is impervious to pain, shows toughness by battling authority, seeks negative attention or exclusion, or believes he or she deserves abuse. ● Youth directs anger at the punisher instead of owning behavior and reacts with fury, avoids relationships with the adult, or runs away. ● Youth fails to recognize a problem or accept responsibility and becomes sneakier, vowing: "I won't be so dumb and get caught next time." ● Youth fails to recognize a problem or accept responsibility and becomes sneakier, vowing: "I won't be so dumb and get caught next time."

9. A wealth of research on the neuroscience of relationships supports the <u>role of love as the primary mechanism for behavioral change and growth</u> (Perry & Szalavitz, 2011).

10. Exclusionary time out is seldom if ever therapeutic. Instead, children in emotional distress need supportive interventions where they can communicate with trusted adults and reflect on their behavior.

11. Building a safe relationship is the pivotal event in healing pain.

12. Further, research showing that social engagement calms fear and rage (Bath & Seita, 2018) is calling into question the widespread use of exclusionary time out as a means of managing misbehavior.

3.

From Rancor to Respect

The way others respond to challenging behavior can either intensify pain or help develop resilience. Talking to a supportive peer or adult can calm an agitated brain. Yet, without training, many are likely to react to negative feelings.

- Our social brains have evolved to operate on the **"tit-for-tat" rule**
    A. We react to positive or negative emotions of others in a mirror image fashion: friendliness invites friendliness while hostility evokes hostility.

    B. At the first sign of danger or threat, we are biologically programmed to stop being friendly and react with fight, flight, or freeze behavior.

    C. This natural process is **upended when children who have known trauma and hostility react to our good intentions with distrust or disrespect**.

    D. **Once tit-for-tat hostility is triggered, conflict is self-perpetuating until one party disengages or is defeated.** Tit-for-tat may have survival value when meeting strangers but is a terrible way of dealing with troubled children. "If you respect me, I'll respect you" may sound like common sense but backfires when a child has little experience of being treated with respect.

Verbal and NonVerbal Communication:
Visual cues of facial expressions and eye contact as well as the tone of voice trigger instant judgments of threat.

- These can strengthen or damage bonds

- When a person is seen as safe and trustworthy, this activates the social engagement system which is the preamble to building positive attachments.

- It's not what you said, it's how you said it….
    - "I said **I** believe you."
    - "I said I **believe** you."
    - "I said I believe **you**."
    -
1. **Rancor':** Verbal and Nonverbal communication seen as negative,
    - Conveys hostility and rejection: aloofness, irritation, annoyance, scolding, sarcasm, mocking, rolled eyes, insults, superiority, belittling, and lack of concern.

    - Rancor triggers pain-based reactions including feelings of rejection, inadequacy, humiliation, and worthlessness.

CAN BE SUBSTITUTED WITH….

2. **Respect:** an esteeming response which conveys empathy and positive regard.
   ● Examples are warmth, sympathy, humor, encouragement, kindly criticism, and gestures of liking, affection, and generosity toward the other person.
   ● Respect produces feelings of acceptance, competence, confidence, and self-worth and builds social bonds.

Replace ranchor with respect: A simple shift in the way we interact with student behavior can make a significant impact.
1. It is essential in working with children in pain that one communicates warmth and respect instead of rancor (Brendtro & du Toit, 2005).

2. THE TRICKY PART —---> without self-reflection FROM ADULTS, they may not be aware that they are sending potent signals that trigger amygdala alarm.

3. **Even very young children can read these cues of rancor or respect.**

Aspects of Rancor vs Respect

Rancor	Respect
Hostile Blaming Demeaning Impatient Arrogant Dominating Indifferent Provocative Argumentative Vengeful	Friendly Empathizing Encouraging Patient Empowering Interested Calming Cooperative Forgiving Humble

4. An extensive study of youth development concluded that most emotional problems among children were the result of **experiencing too much stress with too little support.**

4.

Common Stressors for Children and Restorative Environments

The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) screening questionnaire provides a quick way of tabulating 10 common stressors that children experience before age 18. Ten key adverse events were correlated with problematic health, social, and behavioral outcomes,

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Household Dysfunction	Childhood Abuse and Neglect
Parental separation or divorce Substance abuse Mental illness Domestic violence Criminal behavior	Psychological abuse Physical abuse Sexual abuse Physical neglect Emotional neglec**t**

1. **Coercive and Restorative Environments**
   The Alliance for Children and Families commissioned a study of behavior management methods employed with troubled youth, which identified a potpourri of pain-based forms of discipline used widely, even in well-staffed schools and treatment programs (Brendtro, 2004).

   - The coercive methods fell into three categories that increased physical, emotional, and developmental stressors.
     - **<u>Physical stressors</u>**, **<u>Emotional stressors,</u>** **<u>Social stressors</u>**

2. **Coercive climates** increase levels of physical, emotional, and social stressors.
   - Have toxic effects and trigger pain-based behavior

   - 3 Types of Coercive Climates: **The coercive methods fell into three categories that increased physical, emotional, and developmental stressors.**

   A. **Physical coercion** produces physiological distress. This involves physical punishment, deprivation of physical needs, and physical restraint or seclusion. In contrast, physical support fosters protection, nurturance, and freedom.

   B. **Emotional coercion** produces psychological distress and interferes with the normal development of emotional resilience. This includes threat, hostility, and blame. In contrast, emotional support involves trust, respect, and understanding.

   C. **Social coercion** interferes with universal needs for belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. These coercive practices include exclusion, frustration, domination, and unconcern. In contrast, social support is essential in meeting developmental needs.