

Misunderstood Behaviors and Responses

Misunderstanding #1:
“Listen, I have had lots of trauma in my life, and I made it!” I am not putting up with this kind of disrespect!

The social and affective neurosciences are now informing the field of education with research we did not know or hold 10- 20 years ago! Our chronic behavioral challenges with students are only symptoms or signals of a dysregulated nervous system. Children and youth who grow up with significant adversity and trauma carry toxic levels of stress in their bodies and brains and this changes their nervous systems, heightens their stress response systems, and compromises brain development! Children in a survival brain and body state are ONLY paying attention to *felt* safety! There is a critical dose response relationship to the number of adversities a child carries into schools and their emotional, mental, and physiological health outcomes! (ACE STUDY) Trauma is not just an event, but a physiological and nervous system state that is carried in autonomic pathways and can live in the body for years and generations! Discipline begins with the adults! Behavior Management is about my brain and body state! Trauma responses are not light switches that we can turn on and off!

Misunderstanding #2:
This isn't teaching anyone a lesson; you are rewarding negative behavior! She just said fk you and ran out of the room! Now you are giving her a fidget and a bottle of water???**

If a child grows up without kindness, they do not develop the circuits in the brain for kindness! The same is true for empathy and regulation! We need to teach our students the science beneath their behaviors! When you understand what is happening in your brain and body, you feel empowered and relieved! Regulation is a learned skill that takes time to develop much like kindness, and during the first 1000 days of life, when the brain is the stickiest, embodied shared experiences and attachment to an emotionally available, predictable, and consistent caregiver are critical for brain organization and integration! Children and youth who continually fail to self-regulate need THE MISSED EXPERIENCES OF CO-REGULATING! Just because you are 9, 12, 15, or 20 years old does not mean that with physical development, you just automatically develop emotional regulation! Our nervous systems require a safe emotionally regulated adult who can consistently provide experiences and model how to calm the nervous system! This is brain aligned preventative discipline that produces a sustainable behavioral change rather than compliance or obedience! A New Lens for Discipline Begins with the Adults! Behavior management is about my brain and body state!

Misunderstanding #3:
Rules are rules ...when kids know the rules, they make the choices! It's her choice I have told this student 30 times today and I am done!

When a student becomes "rough" and dysregulated, their nervous system state dependent functioning has changed rapidly! In fight/flight or collapsed states, children and youth cannot process stickers, rewards, time, consequences, and logic! Our discipline protocols need to begin on the front end of every day through spaces of safety and connection with adults! 30 times? Insanity is doing something over and over and expecting a different result! A New Lens for Discipline Begins with the Adults! Behavior Management is about me! In a neutral time, we need to share with our students how our brains and bodies are wired to protect and defend, and eventually shut down if our needs are not met! We need to create routines and procedures that teach our expectations ahead of an event! Our nervous systems, in a state of dysregulation, do not hear words! Neuroplasticity takes repetition, time, and a focus on what is going well! You hear "f**k off" 14 times on Monday, you need to feel hopeful if you are at 13 times by Friday!

Misunderstanding #4:
For the past few weeks, I have given this student the time and space you have suggested and there is no change!!!! Her behavior is getting worse!

When we are addressing children and youth who carry in pain-based behavior, their nervous systems are generally activated, and their stress responses are sensitized to their environments! When we provide experiences that feel safe, the circuits in the brain require patterned, repetitive experiences to embody these new experiences and this takes time! This can be an endurance event, and this is why we need to assess the process, and not the end result! As much as we would like to believe that programs and specific strategies can stop unwanted behaviors, this is false! There are no strategies and programs that can fix a child or adolescent! Relationships and experiences of regulation that develop through small micro-moments over time create safety and connection! We must teach our children the science beneath their behaviors and how their nervous systems are always trying to protect them, even when they do not need to! We talk about the science in neutral times such as morning meetings, transitions, discussions before we leave school for the day! These are micro-moments of preventive relational and brain aligned discipline that occur slowly and sustainably!

Misunderstanding #5:
Now everyone in my room
wants water, fidgets, to
shoot baskets and to spend
time in the amygdala area!!
Now no one is working!

When we plan our procedures and class guidelines at the beginning of the year, we need to constantly revisit these and talk about these "challenges" as a class! We want student input as we share that everyone has different needs and as a "class family," we will support each other in those needs! We traditionally do not think of these practices as discipline, but this is the time to be intentional about accommodations for all students when it comes to social and emotional learning! These are Tier One Interventions! We do not hesitate to create adjustments for our academic gaps! We need to change the conversation this fall from learning LOSS and gaps and to our emotional and mental gaps! THIS is college and career readiness!

Misunderstanding #6:
When this student leaves the room to co-regulate, they are missing significant academic time! This is not fair! They are falling further and further behind!!

This is ONLY a challenge when we have not set up the procedures for when a child or adolescent leaves the room! My tone and face matter so much here! We agree ahead of time, that if we take time to find calm and safety, we will agree on a plan to repair and in a cortex state, we make up the work we missed! If there is a conflict, which is a rupture, we need to repair when all brains are calm and feelings safe! Never repair in the heat of a moment We want to model the behaviors we want to see! We also need to think about the work missed... and how can we “chunk” the assignments, so our students understand the content and not feeling overwhelmed by the amount! We need to pick and choose our battles here! Emotional Stamina will be low as we begin in the late summer, and we need to rethink “how” we create islands of success. We will get there, but this is about small steps and nervous system sustainability!

Brain and Body Dual Repair and Restoration!

1. What was our challenge?
2. During this challenge, what were you feeling in your body? (hot, sweaty, headache, seeing red, hearing black-out, tight chest or muscle tension, rapid heart rate)
3. Do you recall any thoughts you were thinking?
4. What do we think or feel led up to our challenge?
1. How did we handle it? Can we think of one strength we implemented or wish we would have implemented?
2. If we both get a do-over, how could we handle this more peacefully?
3. What are two adjustments in our nervous systems, thoughts, and actions we will try the next time?
4. How? Let's create brain map of our plan!

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