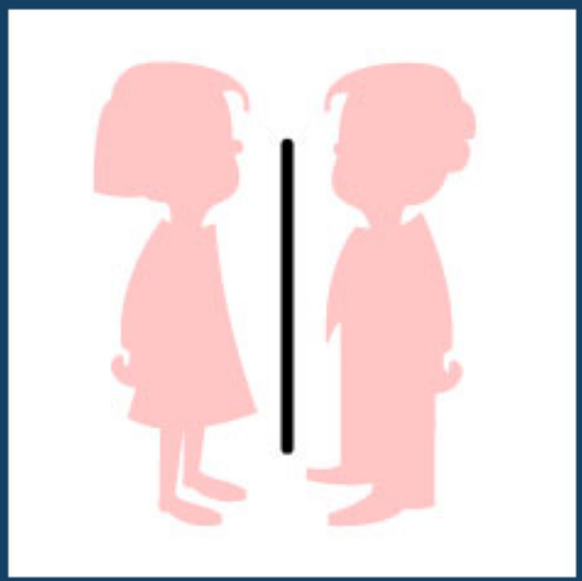
REVELATIONS IN EDUCATION

MISUNDERSTANDINGS *of* DISCIPLINE



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 developmental neurosciences are now informing the field of education with research we did not know or have a few decades ago. Our chronic behavioral challenges with students are only signals of a dysregulated nervous system. Children and youth who grow up with significant adversity and trauma can carry toxic levels of stress in their nervous systems and this changes how they sense, feel, behave, and learn while altering their stress response systems. Children in a survival brain and body state are ONLY paying attention to anything that feels threatening, unsafe or unfamiliar. There is a critical dose-response relationship between the number of adversities students carry into school and their emotional, mental, and physiological health outcomes (ACE STUDY). Trauma is not just an event, but it is what happens inside of us, and is carried in autonomic pathways. Trauma can live in the body for years and can be passed on to future generations! Discipline begins with the adults! Behavior Management is about the adult brain and body state. Trauma responses are not light switches that we can turn on and off. These fast survival reactions take time and patience to shift as we learn to feel safe & trust others.

MISUNDERSTANDING #2:
THIS ISN'T TEACHING ANYONE A LESSON; YOU ARE REWARDING NEGATIVE BEHAVIOR! SHE JUST SAID F**K 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 nervous system, you feel validated, empowered and relieved. Emotional regulation is a learned executive function skill and circuit in the brain that takes time to develop, much like kindness. During the first 1000 days of life, the brain is the stickiest and attachment to an emotionally available, predictable, and consistent caregiver is critical for brain organization & integration. Children and youth who continually fail to self-regulate require the practices from missed experiences of co-regulation earlier in life. Just because you are 9, 12, 15, or 20 years old does not mean that chronological development aligns with emotional development. Our nervous systems require a safe emotionally regulated adult who can consistently provide co-regulatory experiences, and the opportunities to repair conflicts following ruptures. A new lens for discipline begins with an adult's awareness of his or her nervous system state and the joining up with a student sharing a calm grounded presence.

MISUNDERSTANDING #3:
RULES ARE RULES... WHEN KIDS KNOW THE RULES, THEY MAKE THE CHOICES! IT'S THEIR CHOICE, I HAVE TOLD THIS STUDENT 30 TIMES TODAY, AND I AM DONE!

When students become "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 the spaces of safety and connection with adults! 30 times? Insanity is doing something over and over, expecting a different result. 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 a crisis or conflict. Our nervous systems in a state of dysregulation do not hear words. Neuroplasticity takes repetition, time, and an intentional focus on what is going well! If you hear "f**k off" 14 times on Monday and only 13 times by Friday, be hopeful!

MISUNDERSTANDING #4:
FOR THE PAST FEW WEEKS, I HAVE GIVEN THIS STUDENT THE TIME AND SPACE YOU HAVE SUGGESTED AND THERE IS NO CHANGE. THEIR BEHAVIOR IS GETTING WORSE!

When we are addressing children and youth who carry in pain-based behavior, their nervous systems are generally activated to protect, 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. This takes time! This can be an endurance event. Therefore, 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, bell work, and end-of-the-day gatherings. These are micro-moments of a preventative relational and nervous system aligned discipline protocol that occurs slowly and therefore 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 our "challenges" as a class. We want student input as we share that everyone has different needs. 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 practices and interventions! We do not hesitate to create adjustments for our academic gaps. We need to change the conversation from "learning loss" and attune to the social losses. When we meet students in nervous system development, we are preparing them for deep learning as well as emotional connection & safety.

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 greatly. Our student(s) agrees ahead of time that if they take time to find calm and safety, we will agree on a plan to repair and take care of our responsibilities. Our goal is to access the cortex, the thinking regions of the brain, so that we are able to think logically and rationally to emotionally regulate and ask for help if we need another. If there is a conflict, which is a rupture, we need to repair with others when all nervous systems are calm and feel safe. 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 do not feel overwhelmed by the amount. We need to pick and choose our battles, as emotional stamina may be low as we begin the transition into the new school years following a pandemic and all the challenges facing our communities.