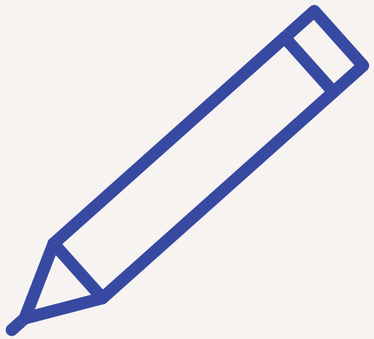
Learning From Kids Who Hurt

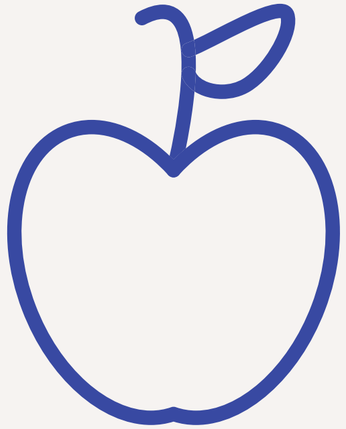
PRICE SCHOOL - OCTOBER 2020

Writing Reflection

Think back on a student who you have worked with that had experienced trauma. In the next 10 minutes, write a summary of your experience, similar to the ones completed by the author. As you write, consider the following questions:

- What was the source of trauma for the student?
- How did this trauma impact the student as a learner?
- What triggers most impacted the student?
- What lesson did you take away from this experience?





Core Principles of Trauma-Sensitive

Understand trauma and its impact

Believe that healing happens in relationships

Ensure emotional and physical safety

View students holistically

Support choice, control, and empowerment for students, staff, and families

Strive for cultural competence

Use a collaborative approach

Trauma is not a single thing, but a constellation of symptoms and challenges of varying duration and intensity, stemming from an array of experiences.

I'll be more helpful to any student if I don't try to go it alone.

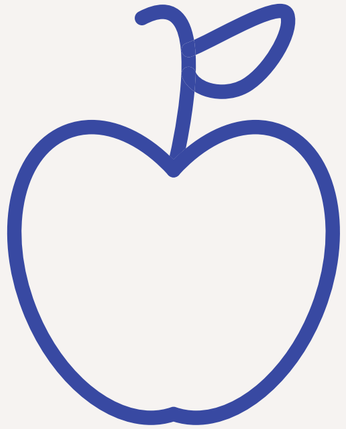
How are we working to identify and share predictable triggers?

Trauma often accompanies long struggles with disabilities.

No academic goal is worth the soul of a child.

Don't ever assume a student's behavior is about you.

No kid's worth is tied up in grammar lessons, algebraic formulas, or any other content knowledge.



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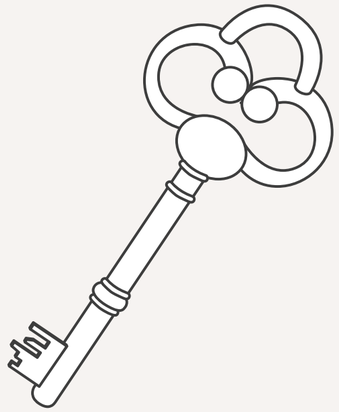
Around the Table

How is what we talked about today going to impact your work with students?

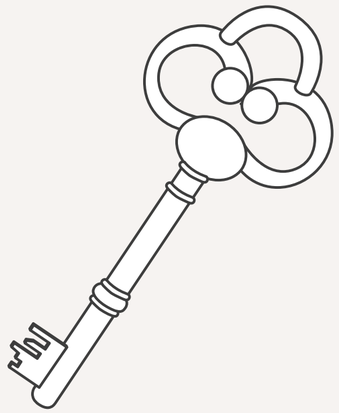


Working with Kaitlyn

I was in my first years as an assistant principal, and was still learning the ropes of addressing student discipline. My training had taught me to respond to disciplinary concerns from a black-and-white lens.

By October, there had been many conversations related to Kaitlyn. She was a student in our emotional support program who exhibited rapid escalation. In class, she could be polite for most of the class, and in an instant become aggressive and defiant. One day I received a call that she was on her way to the office - she had been pulled into the hallway for her behaviors in class and had cursed out the teacher and stormed off. When she came to my office, she began cursing and slamming furniture around. She eventually slumped into a corner and closed herself out of any conversation.

Rather than continue to force the issue, I went against my training and decided to begin playing my guitar. My hope was to focus the energy away from the situation and towards something present. As I started playing, Kaitlyn started to calm down and cry. "Is my playing really that terrible?" I asked her.



Working with Kaitlyn (Continued)

Kaitlyn then asked if I knew any Chris Young music. I told her I did and started to play one of his songs. She stood up from the corner and moved to the chair adjacent to my desk. As I played, she started humming along to the song. When I finished, she had reached a new calm.

I asked her why she requested that song. She shared that her father could be very aggressive with his language at home, and that song is one she sings when she needs to "get away." As we discussed the situation in the classroom, Kaitlyn shared that when the teacher confronted her in the hallway, he was speaking loudly in her face and had her path blocked. She felt trapped - more importantly she said it reminded her of her father.

Kaitlyn's trigger was a result of years of negative family relationships and patterns of aggressive behaviors from her father. When confronted, she defaulted to that same place. I shared this with her teacher, who suddenly started to weep. He was embarrassed that he had caused that reaction, but he was now ready to be a stronger force in her life.