

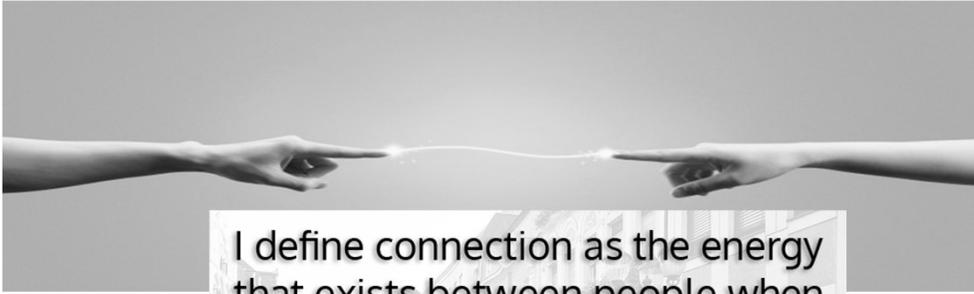
The Power of One: School Psychologists Creating Caring Connections

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Learning Objectives

- Participants will reflect upon their relationships with students and the meaningful and powerful nature of their work.
- Participants will develop methods to connect with students through interpersonal relationships to effect change.
- Participants will identify NASP resources which support their professional practice.



I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship.

(Brené Brown)

Are we “wired” to connect?

Research Findings on Early Social Emotional Development

- **Babies are born to connect with other humans.**
- Babies discriminate sounds of language very early.
- Babies recognize their parents' voices.
- Babies seek physical and emotional equilibrium.
- Babies are predisposed to signal their needs to someone who will help them survive.
- The infant's early brain development is designed to connect the newborn with other human beings around him who will provide care.
- **The brain grows through the experiences the infant has with the world. *Parents and other important adults are that world.***

Function of Attachment

- Survival, safety, and protection
- Support and a secure base for the development of:
 - Cognitive development
 - Ego/sense of self
 - Resilience
 - Bonding
 - Self-regulation
 - Social development

Neuroscience of Attachment

- We come into the world wired to make connections with one another, and the subsequent neural shaping of our brain, the very foundation of our sense of self, is built upon these intimate exchanges between the infant and the caregivers.
- In the early years this interpersonal regulation is essential for survival, but throughout our lives we continue to need such connections for a sense of vitality and well-being.

What fires together, wires together

- From our first days of life, our immature brain is directly shaped by our interactions with the world, and especially by our relationships.
- Our experiences stimulate neural firing and sculpt our emerging synaptic connections.
- This is how experience changes the structure of the brain itself—and could even end up having an influence on our innate temperament.

Can we foster resiliency/emotional wellness through connections?

- If early experiences are positive, chemical controls over how genes are expressed in specific areas of the brain can alter the regulation of our nervous system in such a way as to reinforce the quality of emotional resilience.
- If early experiences are negative, it has been shown that alterations in the control of genes influencing the stress response may diminish resilience in children and compromise their ability to adjust to stressful events in the future.

Three Major Elements of Social Emotional Wellness in Children



- Forming close and secure relationships
- Experiencing, expressing, and regulating emotions
- Exploring the environment and learning

As School Psychologists ...

- The relationships that we build with children, families, and colleagues are at the foundation of everything we do. It is important to build these relationships early on rather than waiting until there is a problem.
- Parents and other colleagues are critical partners in building children's social emotional competence. We should all work together to ensure children's success and prevent challenging behavior.

Benefits of Positive Relationships for Children with *Challenging Behaviors*

- Children with the most challenging behaviors especially need these relationships, and yet their behaviors often prevent them from benefiting from those relationships.
- Adults' time and attention are very important to children, and we need to be sure that we are giving them that time and attention at times other than when they are engaging in challenging behavior.

Connection is critical because we all have the basic need to feel accepted and to believe that we belong and are valued for who we are.

Connecting on a “Human Level”

Engaging in Compassionate Connections

- Compassion is possible for anyone who can accept the struggles that make us human—our fears, imperfections, losses and shame.
- Compassion is not a virtue—it is a commitment. It's not something we have or don't have—it's something we choose to practice.
- Compassion becomes real when we recognize our shared humanity

Emotional Bank Account – Steven Covey

- All relationships have a kind of imaginary “emotional bank account.”
- When you do something to make another person feel good, you make a deposit.
- When there is conflict, the relationship feels less positive. At least one person feels less connected. This would be a withdrawal from the emotional bank account.
- As long as the overall total, or “balance”, of your account is positive over time, you will feel close, or connected, to the other person.

Making Deposits with Children

- How do you build relationships with the children in your school?
- Think of the children with challenging behaviors you currently have or have had in the past – how can you make deposits with them?



Engaging with Students

Empathy to Express Compassion

- Empathy, the most powerful tool of compassion, is an emotional skill that allows us to respond to others in a meaningful, caring way.
- Empathy is the ability to put ourselves in someone else's shoes—to understand what someone is experiencing and to reflect back that understanding.
- When we share a difficult experience with someone, and that person responds in an open, deeply connected way—that's empathy.

Attributes of Empathy

- (1)to be able to see the world as others see it;
- (2)to be nonjudgmental;
- (3)to understand another person's feelings; and
- (4)to communicate your understanding of that person's feelings.

Responsive engagement

- Builds on respectful relationships and sensitivity to the uniqueness of each child and family
- Requires understanding that the most effective learning experiences are based on children's strengths, abilities and interests
- *Characterized by a caring presence*

Attuned Engagement

- Is a characteristic of a responsive relationship
- Involves alert awareness, being receptive and connected to both individuals and the group and responding accordingly

In Practice

Respectful relationships and responsive engagement occur when professionals:

- demonstrate cultural competence in their interactions with children and families
- give priority to warm, respectful relationships between professionals and children
- ensure that children experience continuity in their experiences and relationships

In Practice (cont.)

- Encourage and support children to have respectful relationships with other children and to teach and learn from each other
- Interact with children to extend their learning in a variety of ways
- Listen and respond to children with full attention

Empathic and Responsive Engagement

- What does this look like for you as a school psychologist?



Making Deposits – Creating Caring Connections

- Little things, daily, can add up to big changes over time
- What you do on a day-to-day basis helps students to make growth over time
- Don't get overwhelmed by the big issues and barriers; start small and build towards larger goals
- Find others willing to support change and together you can accomplish great things
- Ignore the negative and focus on the positive...everyone has strengths
- We may not always see the outcomes of our work but you are making a difference!
- REMEMBER...you as an individual can do great things!



Barriers to Caring Connections

- What gets in your way to making these connections with students?
 - Time constraint
 - Shortage of personnel
 - Administrative priorities
 - Reluctance to be vulnerable
 - Shame



Shame unravels our connection to others. In fact, I often refer to shame as the fear of disconnection—the fear of being perceived as flawed and unworthy of acceptance or belonging. Shame keeps us from telling our own stories and prevents us from listening to others tell their stories. We silence our voices and keep our secrets out of the fear of disconnection. When we hear others talk about their shame, we often blame them as a way to protect ourselves from feeling uncomfortable. Hearing someone talk about a shaming experience can sometimes be as painful as actually experiencing it for ourselves.

- Brene Brown

Students are not a distraction from our work, they are the reason for it!

“On Being Human(e)

- “The pinnacle of humanity is the ability to understand ourselves and our environment beyond our immediate needs, and to use this understanding to advance science, build ever-improved environments, to tackle the toughest problems of our society for everyone. This is what it is to be humane.”

- Dr. Jeremy Richman, The Avielle Foundation

Thank you for being on this journey with me!

“TOO OFTEN WE
UNDERESTIMATE THE
POWER OF A TOUCH, A
SMILE, A KIND WORD, A
LISTENING EAR, AN
HONEST COMPLIMENT,
OR THE SMALLEST ACT OF
CARING, ALL OF WHICH
HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO
TURN A LIFE AROUND.”
— LEO BUSCAGLIA

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