Fostering Resilience: Working with Marginalized and Traumatized Youth

The Consortium on Trauma, Illness, and Grief in Schools

Ken Ginsburg, MD, MS Ed
The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia
Covenant House Pennsylvania

Objectives

1. Using a strengths-based approach (Resilience 101)
2. Positive Youth Development 101
3. Trauma Informed Care 101
4. Eliminating shame, building confidence
5. Not undermining confidence; Learning not to lecture
6. Giving control back to people who have lost control over their lives
7. Serving Over a Lifetime
How do we define success for ALL Kids?

Problem Free . . .

. . . is NOT Fully Prepared!

Karen Pittman
The Balancing Act:

It is a Problem to Believe
Any Single Model Has All of the Answers

Core Principles of Positive Youth Development (PYD)
We Matter…
more than the buildings or the programs.

Kids come for the content, but the context is what heals youth.

Core Principles of PYD

Young people need to feel valued. When we see them as the experts on their own lives, youth learn to believe their opinions matter.

Youth are often the best teachers and role models for other young people.
Adults can be instructive and supportive, but children should choose and carry out activities as independently as possible. Nothing discourages mastery more than an adult who steps in and says: “Let me do that for you.”

Adolescents are still capable of healing and do so best when caring adults trust in their capacity to right themselves while offering appropriate support and guidance.

Most behaviors we fear serve as coping strategies that help youth manage uncomfortable stressors. If we help them (starting at very young ages) develop alternative coping strategies, we will diminish their need to turn to worrisome quick fixes.

Youth watch adult behaviors closely and how we model adaptive strategies to stress matters.
Resilience

• The Ability To Overcome Adversity

• The Capacity to Bounce Back

Resilience is a Mindset
Resilience

is

NOT

a temperament trait.

It is affected by supports and circumstances!!!
Resilience is NOT Invulnerability

When Resilience Reaches Its Limits

- Physical symptoms
- Fatigue
- Disinterest
- Dropping grades
- Sad mood
- Irritability/anger
- Substance use
The Bottom Line

• Young People will be more resilient if the important adults in their lives believe in them unconditionally and hold them to high expectations

• Young People live up or down to the expectations we set for them

The 7 C’s of Resilience

Confidence
Competence
Connection
Character
Contribution
Coping
Control

(Little, 1993; Pittman et al., 2003; Eccles and Gootman, 2002; Roth and Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Lerner, 2004; Ginsburg, 2006; Frankowski, Leader & Duncan, 2009)
Once upon a time there was a town built just beyond the bend of a beautiful river. One day, children were playing beside the river when they noticed three bodies in the water. They ran for help and the townsfolk quickly pulled the bodies out of the river.

One body was dead, so they buried her. One was ill, so they took him to the hospital and nursed him back to health. The third was healthy, so they placed her with a family who cared for her and took her to school.

From that day on, every day bodies came floating down the river, and every day, the people tended to them – taking the sick to the hospitals, placing the healthy with families, and burying the dead.

This went on for years. The townsfolk came to expect the bodies and developed elaborate systems for recovering and attending to them. Some were generous and a few gave up their jobs to do this full time. The town developed pride in its generosity and efficiency in body tending.

However, during all these years and despite the effort, nobody thought to go up river, beyond the bend that hid what was above them, and find out why those bodies came floating down the river.

(Adapted from Rolbeiser, R. (1999). The holy longing. New York: Doubleday)
Trauma Informed Care

The model is borrowed from Camara Phyllis Jones, M.D., M.P.H., Ph.D.
Felitti VJ, Anda RF, Nordenberg DF, Williamson DF, Spitz AM, Edwards VJ, Marks JS.

The Adverse Childhood Experiences

- Emotional Abuse
- Physical Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Neglected
- Exposure to Substance Abuse in Household
- Exposure to Mental Illness in Household
- Exposure to Domestic Violence in Household
- Parent(s) Sent to Prison
- Were Parents Divorced or Did You Experience Parental Abandonment?
UNLESS

UNLESS until when???
“The proper time to influence the character of a child is 100 years before he is born. In each of us lives our childhood and the values of past generations.”

Robert ten Bensel, pediatric psychiatrist, Mayo Clinic

Acute Versus Chronic Stress
The Effect of ACEs on the Brain

The Effect of ACEs on Behavior
How Do We React to Behavior

NOT Triggering Traumatic-based Behaviors

• Earning Trust
• Radical Calmness
• Listening
• Construct Rather than Destruct
• Body Language
• Understanding People Regulate Themselves Differently
• Knowing Your Own Buttons
• Physical Space and Touching
• Boundaries, Boundaries, Boundaries
Trauma Does Not Break Kids . . .
. . . Nor Does it Cause Brain Damage

- Predictive is Not an Absolute Determinant
- A Different Kind of Credential
- Having a “Protector’s Brain”

Offer Radical Calmness Amidst a Chaotic Reality

- Key to de-escalation
- Critical to anticipation
Recognize the credentials youth who “have been through it” bring to the world

Giving Kids Control Over Their Decisions
Being Trauma Informed is Healing (for Us and Youth)

But focusing on trauma or risk holds the potential to re-traumatize

To enable all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens. (BGCA)

- Youth who need us the most are often those who push us away
- Youth who need us the most are often those who push our buttons
- Youth who need us the most, raise uncomfortable feelings in us
- Youth who need us the most withhold rewards from us.
Tying it Together: Addressing Risk, Acknowledging Trauma but Developing Strengths
Behavioral Change 101

(What they’re missing)

The Five Steps of Behavioral Change

1. Awareness
2. Motivation
3. Skills
4. Trial and error
5. Maintenance
Confidence gets it started . . .

. . . and shame and demoralization prevent action
Finding Competence . . .
. . . Building Confidence

“Love is seeing someone as they deserve to be seen, *as they really are*, not through the lens of the behaviors they have sometimes needed to display.”
We are loving for reasons beyond spirituality; we are loving to initiate positive change

CONTROL:
The C most affected by trauma
Giving Kids Control Over Their Decisions

Learning Not to Undermine Competence

- Talking in a way young people understand
- Recognizing the cognitive development of adolescence
- No more lectures!!!!!!
You fight, but she uses her knife first

You fight, but she uses her knife first

You fight, and kill her

You don’t fight

How long are you angry?

How long are you happy?

No job

No education

Die poor, with no family

Your mom is ashamed

You have kids

You finish school

Your mom is proud

You are killed

You are maimed and left in a wheelchair

You are stabbed in the back

You are stabbed in the heart

You are killed

You fight and kill her

Jail 20 years

You don’t fight

You are happy?

Happy?

Your mom is ashamed

Your mom is proud

You have kids

You finish school

You have education

You have a job

You are rich

You are proud

You are happy

You are happy

You are happy

Resilience

- Is about learning to cope, in a positive way with life’s inevitable stressors

- We might do our greatest good by raising youth with a wide repertoire of positive coping strategies
You Feel Awful!!!

Stress → Discomfort

Relief

Positive Coping Strategies

Negative Coping Strategies

You Feel Awful!!!

Discomfort

You Feel Awful!!!

Discomfort

Relief

Positive Coping Strategies

Negative Coping Strategies
Connection is the most important coping strategy

Defining the Stressor

Distinguishing Paper Tigers from Real Tigers
Knowing When Bad Things are Temporary
Knowing When Good Things are Permanent
The Worst thing is not to be stressed . . . it is to be NUMB

Breathe, again

(Because this is not easy)
We cannot and must not fall back on the defense mechanisms that allow others to ignore the realities we bear witness to every day.

There is no “other”

There is only US
If we are to be this open to reality, without falling back on toxic defense mechanisms . . .

We must have strategies and supports that allow us to remain whole while serving youth in a loving way.

Something We Who Serve Others Rarely Speak About

Us
How do we define success?

To touch many lives over a lifetime of service and connection with others
Burnout Prevention

Stress is usually something people are acutely aware of, whereas burnout can present insidiously.

When you are stressed, you care too much, but when you are burned out, you don’t see any hope of improvement. You are numb.
The Worst thing is not to be stressed . . . it is to be NUMB

Stress

Characterized by over engagement
Emotions are overreactive
Produces urgency and hyperactivity
Loss of energy
Stress

Leads to anxiety disorders
Primary damage is physical
May kill you prematurely
Activated, sometimes paralyzed

Burnout

Characterized by disengagement
Emotions are blunted
Produces helplessness and hopelessness
Loss of motivation, ideals, and hope
Burnout

Leads to detachment and Depression

Primary damage is emotional

May make life seen not worth living

Depleted

Workplace Factors that lead to burnout:

• Cultures that normalize extending oneself beyond physical, or emotional capacities.
• Cultures that confuse over-functioning with ambitiousness and blur the boundary between professional and personal lives.
• Coercive or punitive rules
• Work that causes you to violate your personal values
Individual Factors that lead to burnout:

- Individuals who have unmet personal needs or have conflicting needs
- Individuals whose self definition is too tightly tied to work
- Setting unrealistic goals for yourself or having them imposed on you
- Being expected to be too many things to too many people

The Universal Factor that may lead to our burnout:

Those who spend their work lives attending to the needs of others, especially if their work puts them in frequent contact with the dark or tragic side of human experience.
What does burnout do to our relationships and work environment?

May make us less likely to engage

May send a message to eager coworkers that they are over-functioning, setting an overall lower standard as part of the “welcoming” or orientation process

May make more energetic coworkers misjudge seasoned colleagues as unfeeling or uncaring, when, in fact, the problem is that they have cared too much

Serving Over a Lifetime
The “Solution” on One Slide
(The premise is ridiculous)

1. Boundaries

2. Knowing (and experiencing) that what we do matters

3. Self-Care

Boundaries

• Not the easy stuff. How do you love and still remain whole?
• Knowing our buttons
• Being trauma-informed
• Knowing who is the expert
• Avoiding the rescue fantasy
• Giving control back
• Planting seeds
Boundaries

The Rescue Fantasy

Love without boundaries is not safe for anyone

How much can you give each person? The warm handoff

Knowing (and experiencing) that what we do matters
Who’s the expert?

Who’s the facilitator?

Turning off the lecture

Restoring control to the person who needs it

Self Care: The Greatest Gift You Can Give Those You Serve
The importance of **Connection** can not be overstated...

- Family
- Spirituality
- Community
- **Mission**

Writing a personal mission statement
### Is balance possible?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urgent</th>
<th>Urgent枝</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Important</td>
<td>Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Urgent</td>
<td>Not Urgent枝</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Important</td>
<td>Important (at least to you!)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### What is High Yield

- What is irreplaceable?
- Where are you irreplaceable?
One last breath . . .

How will we judge our success?  
(not in ways that are easy to measure!!!)

- Through easy measurements: extrication from exploitation, housing, meals, jobs, graduations, reunifications.
- By proving adolescents are capable of healing from trauma
- By helping our young people experience that people are worthy of trust
- By helping our young people know they are worthy of being loved
- By making it more likely that our youth will be able to “pass along” our love to their children, and then break the cycle of trauma and oppression.
How will we judge our success?

• By making it so our young people can feel again

• By creating the kind of environment where staff never forgets how to feel

Do we view our colleagues, and even ourselves, through the same strength-based lens with which we commit to see the young people we serve?