

The Trauma-Sensitive Classroom

Building Resilience with Compassionate Teaching



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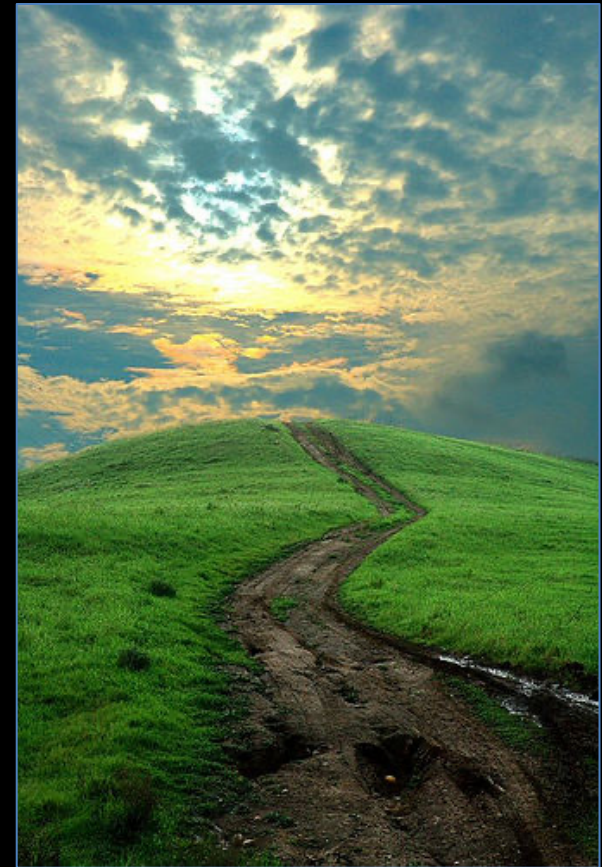


UNIVERSITY
of VIRGINIA

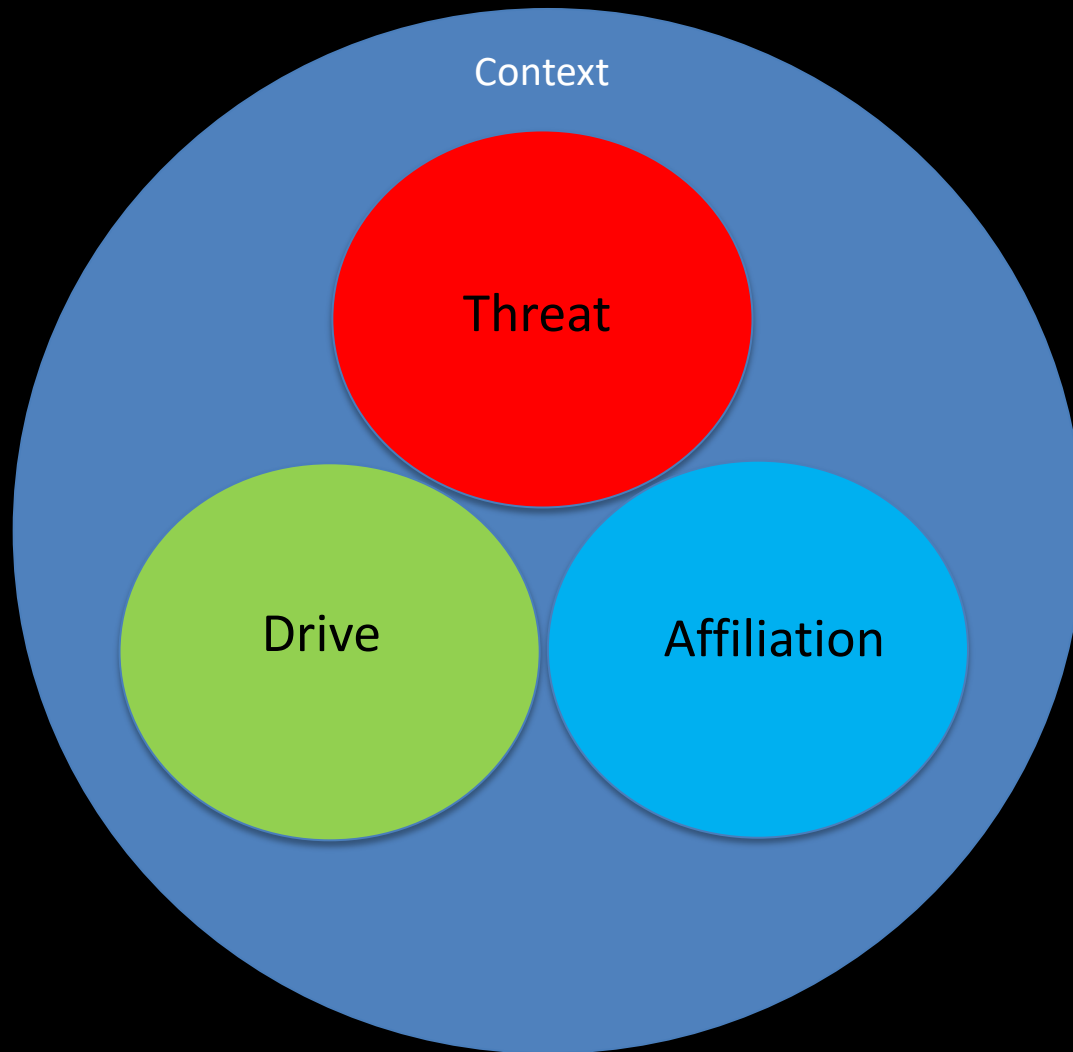
SCHOOL *of* EDUCATION
and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Roadmap

- 3 Survival Systems
- Understanding Stress-Adaptation
- 3 Keys to Compassionate Teaching
 - Cultivating supportive relationships
 - Creating safe spaces
 - Building on strengths by supporting adaptation
- Building Resilience with Mindful Compassion



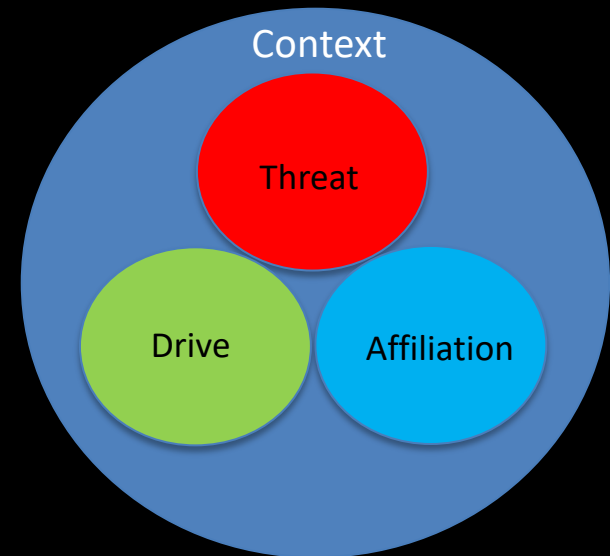
3 Survival Systems



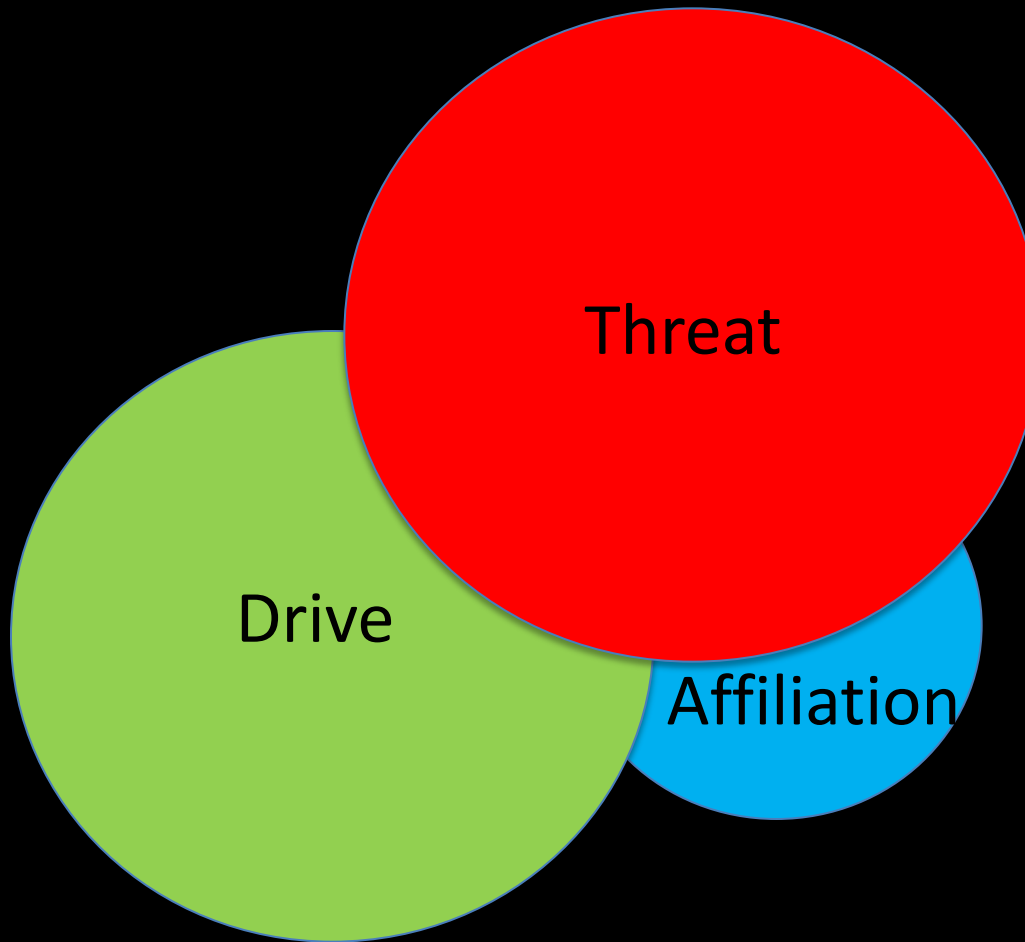
3 Survival Systems

- **Threat**
 - Fight, flight, or freeze
- **Drive**
 - Competition or achievement
- **Affiliation**
 - Attachment, soothing, compassion

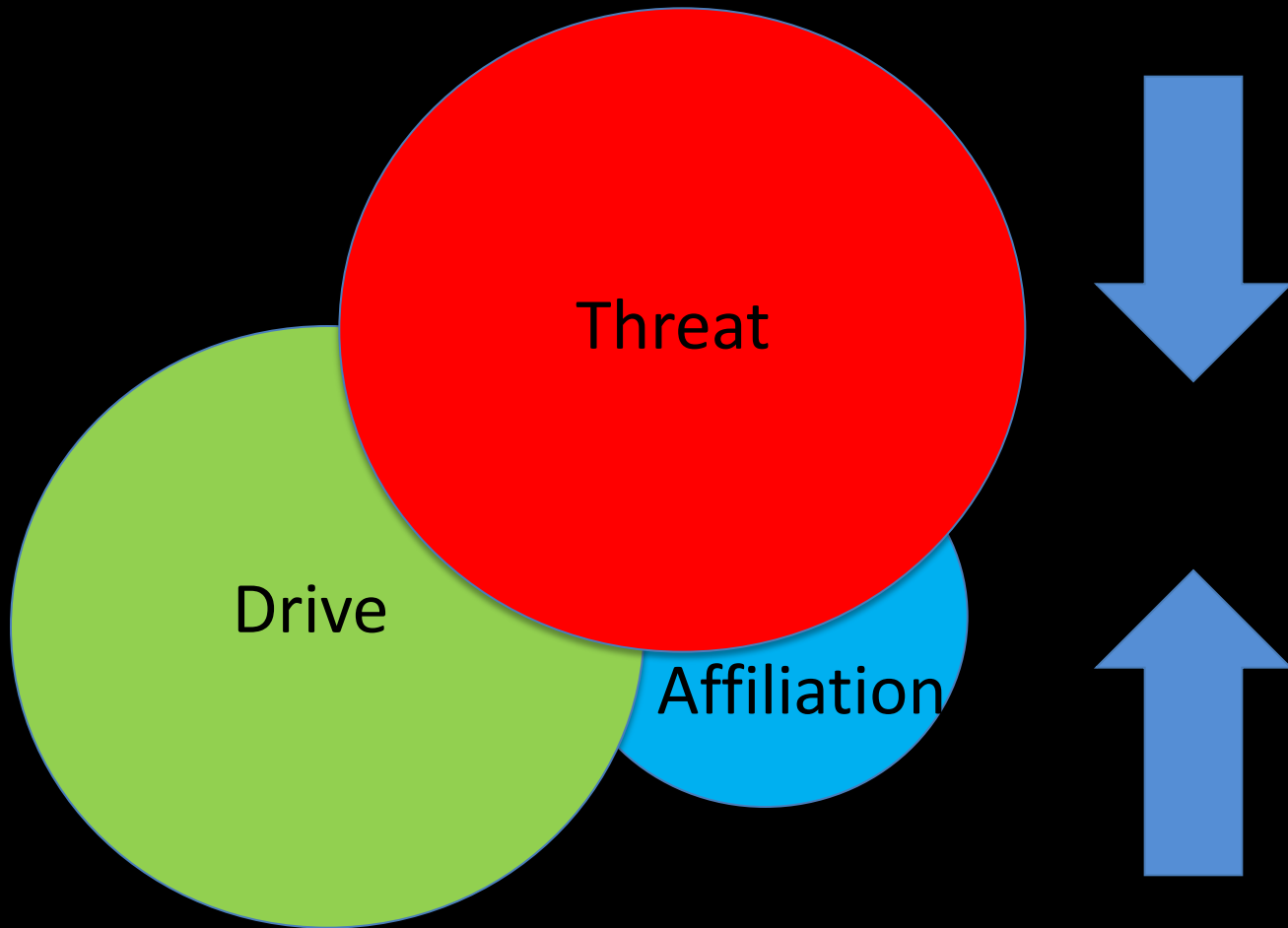
(Gilbert, 2015)



3 Survival Systems



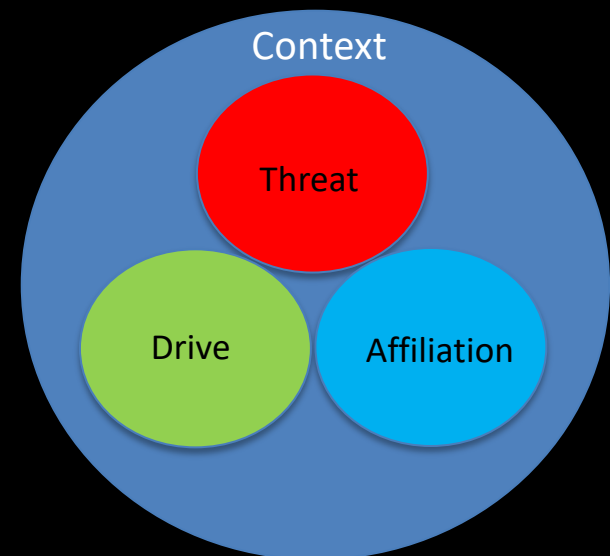
3 Survival Systems



Leadership: Prosocial vs Coercive

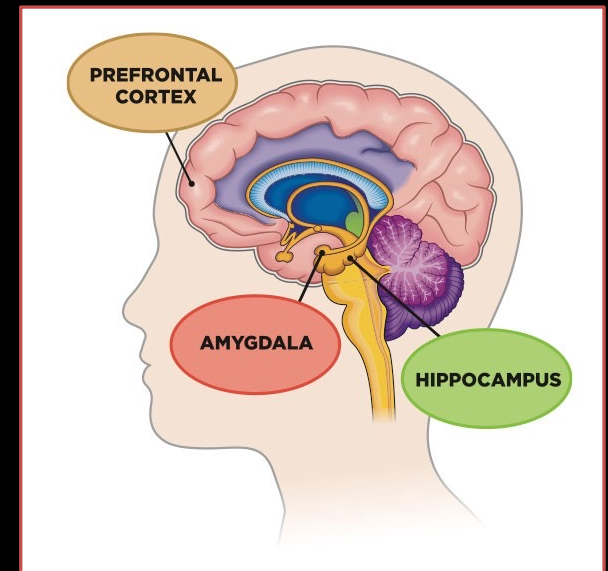
- **Coercive**
 - Threat of punishment
 - Drive to compete
- **Prosocial**
 - Social connectedness
 - Compassion
 - Collective efficacy

(Jennings et al., 2021)



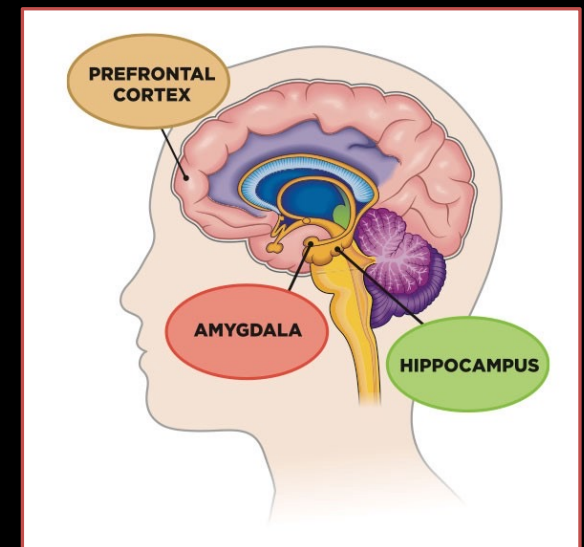
Learning and the Brain

- Pre-Frontal Cortex (PFC)
 - Regulates: Inhibits, focuses, modulates attention
 - Executive functions: planning & goal setting (working memory)
 - Social decision-making: perspective taking, mentalizing
 - Develops in context



Stress and the Brain

- Stress may affect the development of self-regulation
- Interferes with learning in school context
- Over time may cause learning and behavior problems
- Especially for those exposed to risk factors
- Social support may be protective
- Teacher stress affects students



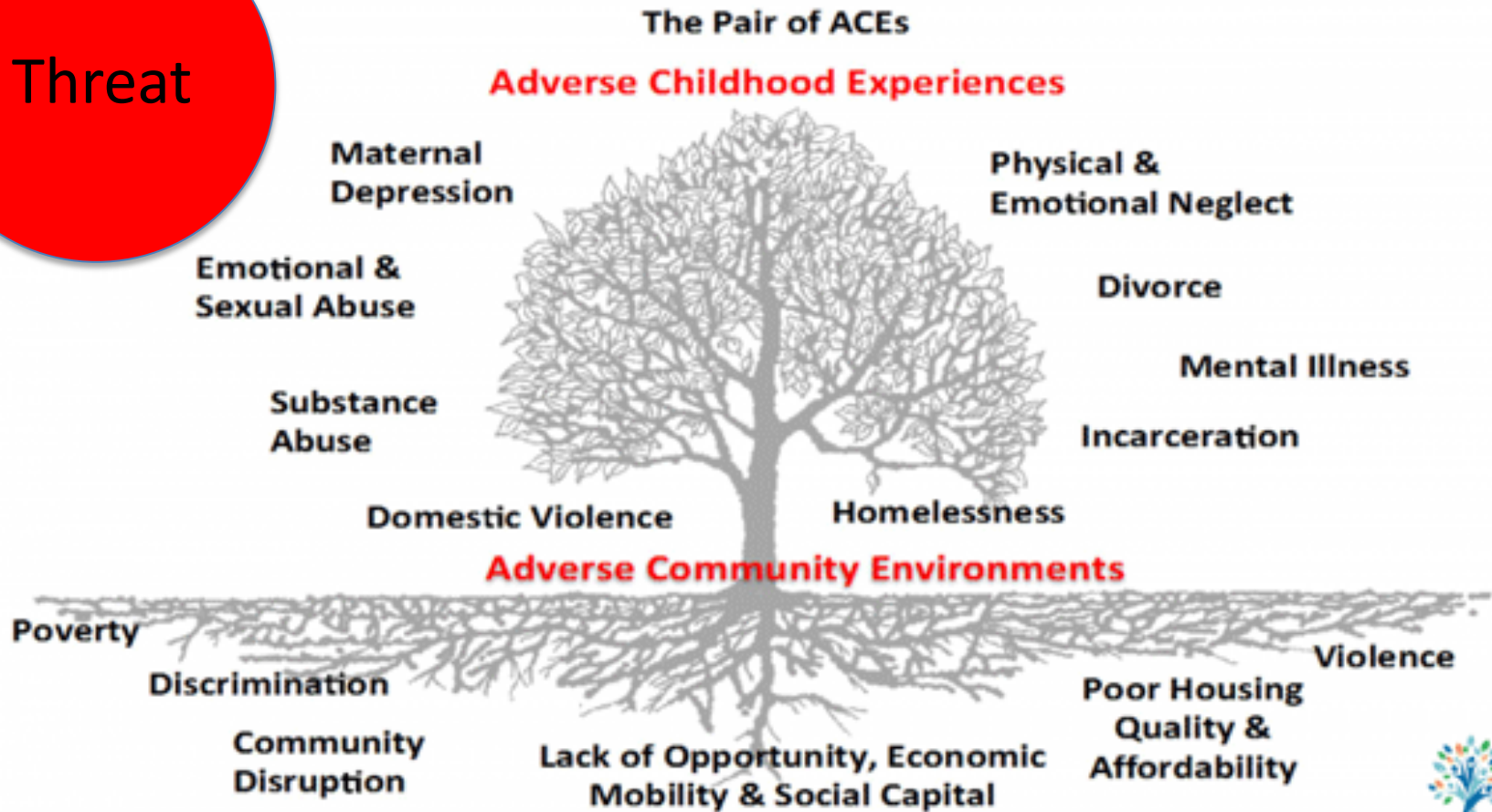
Trauma, Chronic Stress, Toxic Stress

- A single incident
- Ongoing adversity
- Individual differences in impacts
 - Personality
 - Health
 - Age
 - Poverty, racism, inequity compound effects



Trauma, Chronic Stress, Toxic Stress

Threat

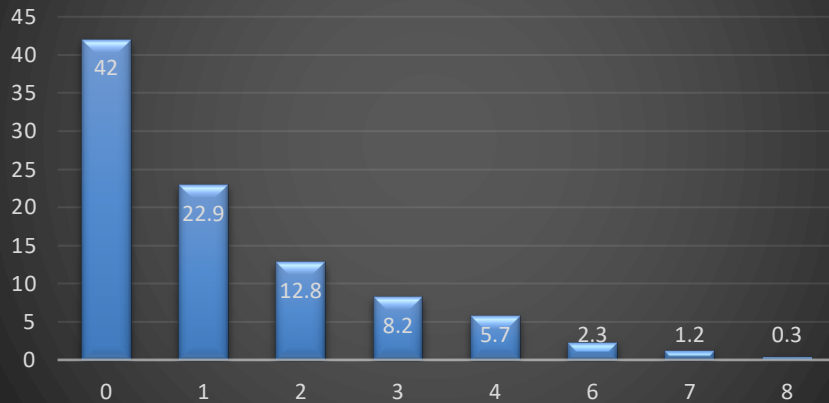


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Trauma, Chronic Stress, Toxic Stress

**Adverse Childhood Experiences:
US Prevalence Rates (%)**



8 ACEs: emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, household substance use, household mental illness, parental separation/divorce, and household members who are incarcerated

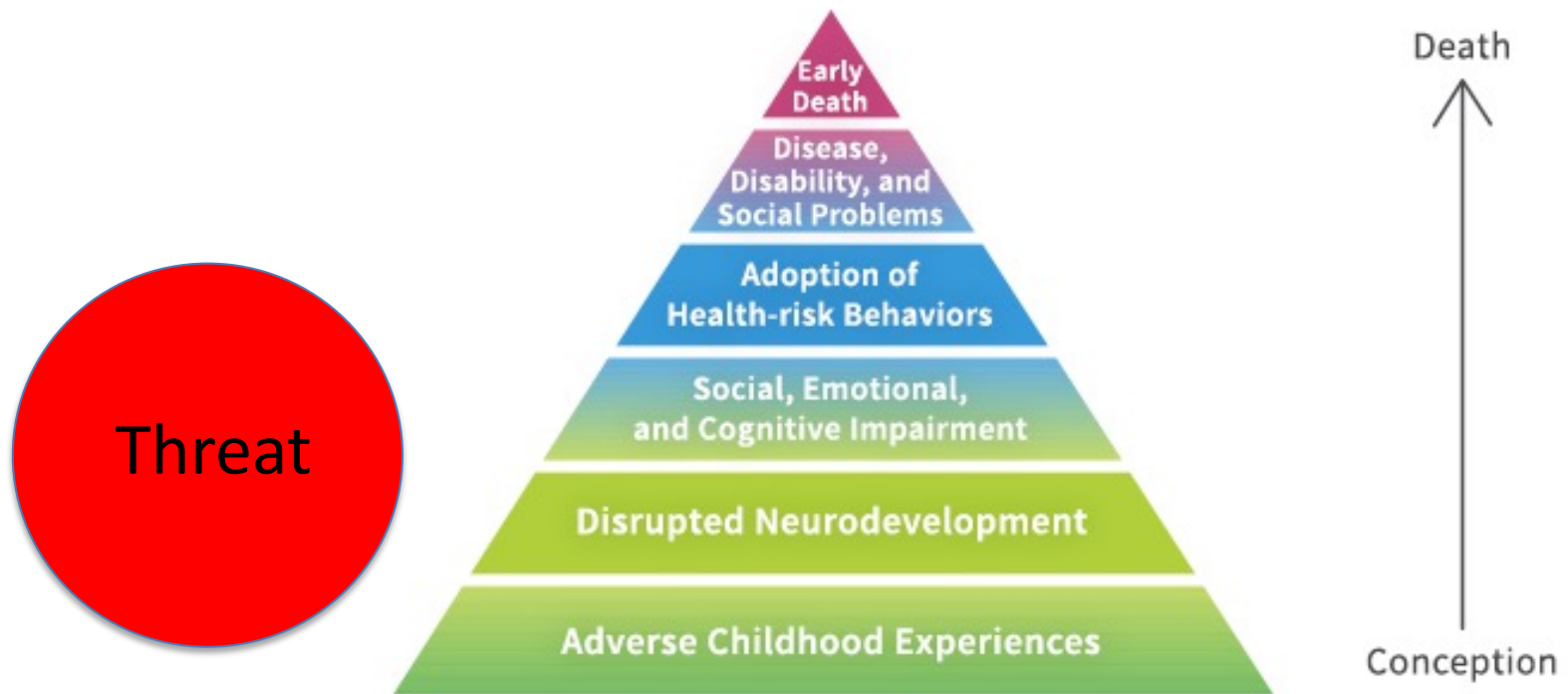


Prevalence of ACEs in US



Trauma, Chronic Stress, Toxic Stress

Mechanism by Which Adverse Childhood Experiences Influence Health and Well-being Throughout the Lifespan



Trauma, Chronic Stress, Toxic Stress

- Adaptations to Context of Trauma
 - Hyperarousal
 - Avoidance/Dissociation
 - Negative thoughts/beliefs
 - Re-experiencing
 - Insecure attachment

Threat



Shifting the Perspective:

“What’s Wrong With Him?” to “What Happened to Him?”



3 Keys to Compassionate Teaching

- Cultivating supportive relationships
- Creating safe spaces
- Building on strengths by supporting adaptation



Affiliation



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Affiliation



Affiliation System

- Critical importance of belonging to human survival and flourishing
 - Basic human need based in the parent-child bond
 - Feel seen and accepted for who you are
 - Given opportunities to make valuable contributions to the community
 - Having one's contributions valued
 - Recognizing and honoring the value of diverse facets of humanity



Help Students Build Relationships

- Model respectful behavior
- Cultivate respectful peer relationships
- Build relationships with families
 - Home visiting
- Help students transition to new program
- Give transient students time to adjust



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Affiliation



Create Safe Spaces

- Requires whole-school approach
- Promoting physical and psychological safety
- Trustworthiness and transparency
- Peer support
- Collaboration and mutuality
- Empowerment, voice, and choice
- Cultural, historical & gender issues

(SAMHSA, 2014)



Affiliation

Review Discipline Policies

- Balance between accountability and sensitivity
- Proactive: focus on building skills
- Distinguish between:
 - Coercive/harsh punishment
 - Reinforcing positive expectations to ensure safety for their benefit
- Avoid approaches that trigger feelings of powerlessness, fear, and shame



Affiliation

3 Keys to Compassionate Teaching

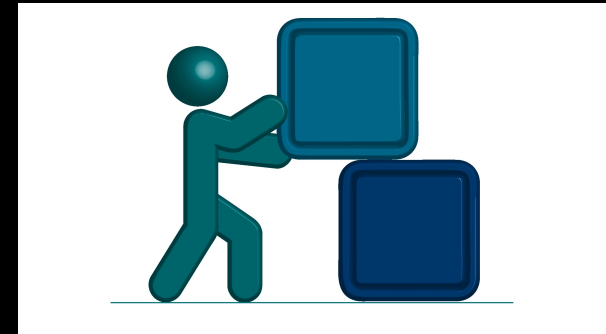
- Cultivating supportive relationships
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Affiliation



Build Upon Strengths

- Identify students' existing strengths
- Help students become aware of their strengths
- Honor, value, and acknowledge these strengths
- Build instructional programming that boosts social ties and networks by drawing from students' strengths



Affiliation

How Can We Do This?

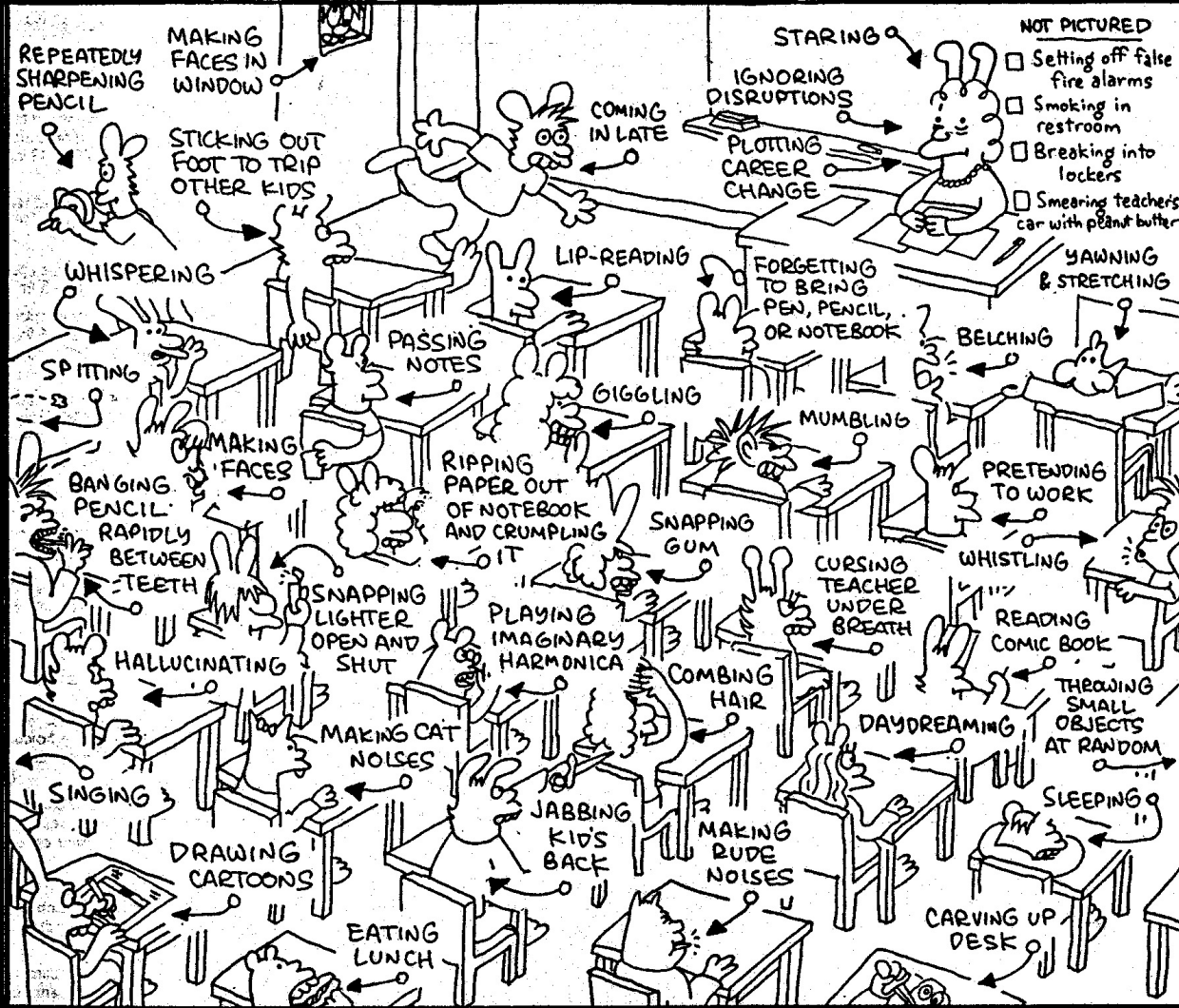


Building Resilience with Mindful Compassion

- Understanding context
- Building resilience
 - Self-care
 - Emotional mastery
- Practicing mindfulness
- Cultivating compassion



The Context: Cognitive & Emotional Demands



Physical vs Psychological Threat



What is Resilience?

- The ability to
 - Flourish in the face of adversity, ambiguity, and rapid change
 - Creatively respond to challenges
 - Grow and learn to adapt quickly
 - Recognize the constantly changing nature of reality



Critical Importance of Self-Care

- Physical
- Emotional
- Psychological
- Spiritual



“Self-care is never a selfish act - it is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on earth to offer others. Anytime we can listen to true self and give the care it requires, we do it not only for ourselves, but for the many others whose lives we touch.”

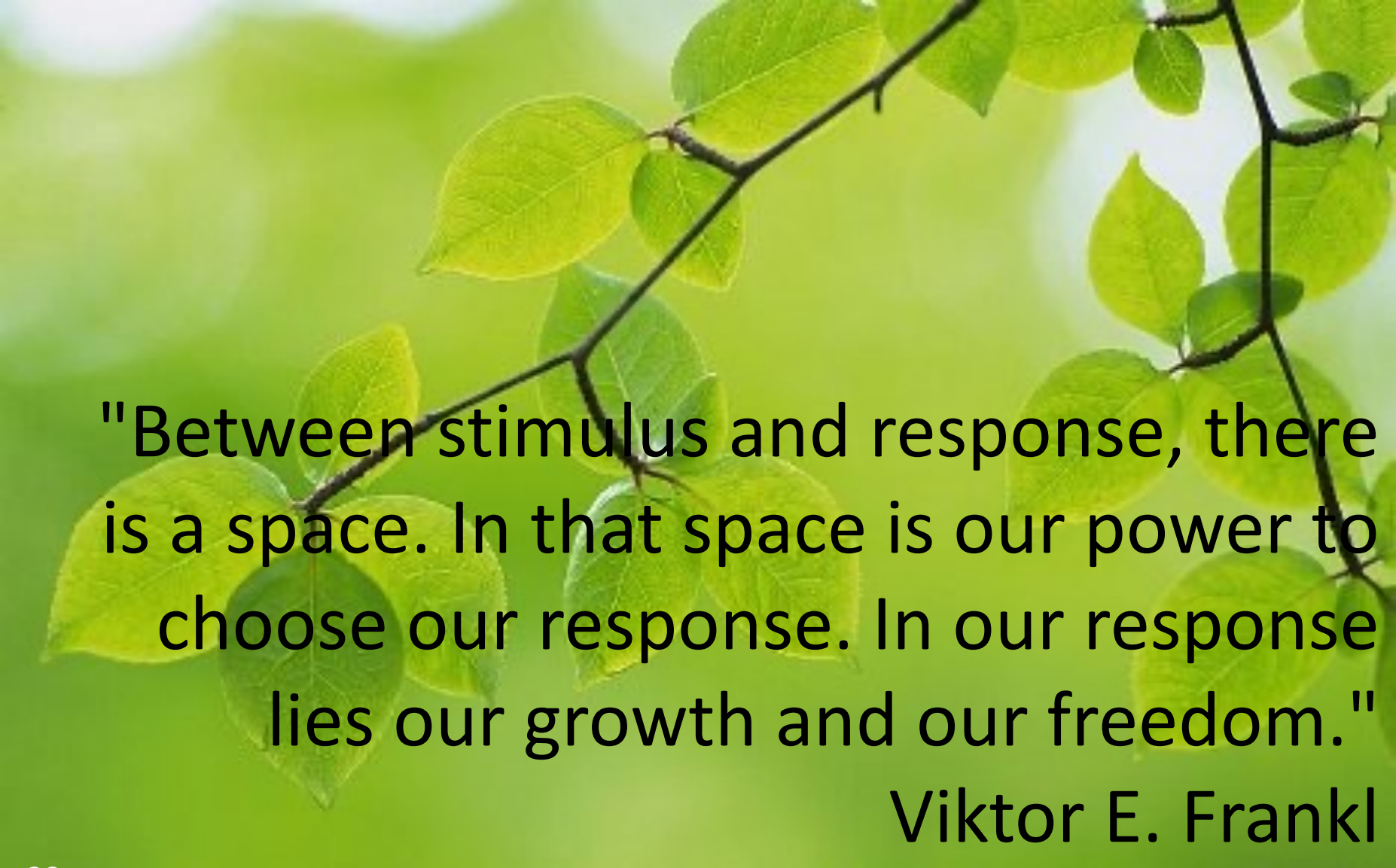
— Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*

Critical Importance of Self-Care

- Poll: How often do you currently practice self-care?



Giving Ourselves Space



"Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."

Viktor E. Frankl

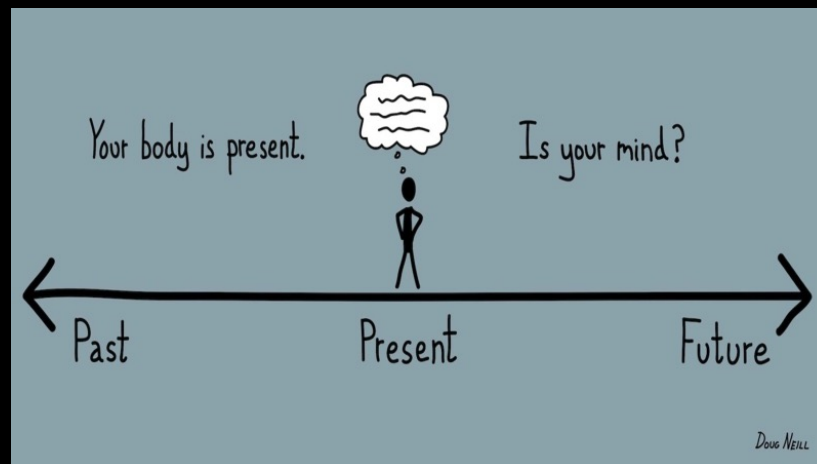
Accepting How Things Are Now

- Realities of COVID
 - Living with uncertainty
 - Huge stressor for everyone
 - Especially difficult time for school leaders, teachers, students and their families
 - Facing the realities of the disparity in access to resources
 - In US 6 in 10 say that they've experienced strong negative emotions
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
 - Loneliness
 - Hopelessness
- (NORC @University of Chicago)
- **Recovery will take time!**



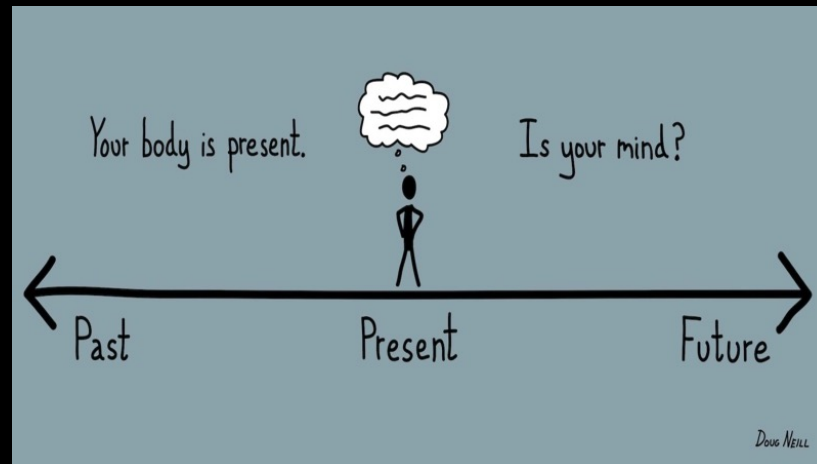
Mindfulness

- A state of mind, a personal trait, and a practice
- Directing attention to the present moment
- Attitude of acceptance and curiosity
- Being with difficult feelings



Mindfulness

- Poll: What's your experience with mindfulness?



Breath Awareness Practice



Reflection

- How was that?
- Were you able to focus your attention on your breath?
- Did you notice when you became distracted?
- Did the experience change over time? If so, how?



Emotions & the Brain

- Emotions are adaptive functions that engage biological, cognitive and behavioral processes designed to promote survival



Function of Emotions

- “Negative,” unpleasant or uncomfortable
 - Trigger stress response
 - Narrow focus
 - Reinforce negative perception with thoughts
 - Limited, conditioned reactivity
- “Positive,” pleasant or comfortable
 - Build resources (relationships, resilience)
 - Broaden focus
 - Openness, awareness of others’ perspectives and context
 - Creative responses

Negativity Bias and Survival



Cultivating & Savoring Positivity



Cultivating & Savoring Positivity

- Positive emotions “undo” the effects of negative emotions
- By savoring moments of love, joy, inspiration, gratitude, awe, and other positive emotional states we build resilience.



Gratitude Practice



Calming & Focusing



Empowering Ourselves

- Build our internal capacity to recover and thrive
- Recognize our mindsets and dispositions
- Cultivate
 - Agency
 - Resilience
 - Creativity
 - Persistence

From Survive to
Thrive



Collective Efficacy

- THE most influential factor in promoting student achievement
- Much higher than students'
 - socioeconomic status
 - prior achievement
 - quality of their home & parental support
 - student motivation
 - concentration
 - persistence
 - engagement (Hattie, 2016)



“a group’s shared belief in its conjoint capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment” (Bandura, 1997)

How to?

- Connection with community
- Groups of diverse stakeholders with a common cause to solve challenges
- Value and honor group achievement



“a group’s shared belief in its conjoint capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment” (Bandura, 1997)

Compassion

- Mindful awareness of another's suffering
- Empathy (cognitive & emotional)
- Generating feeling of caring for other
- Cultivating motivation to help



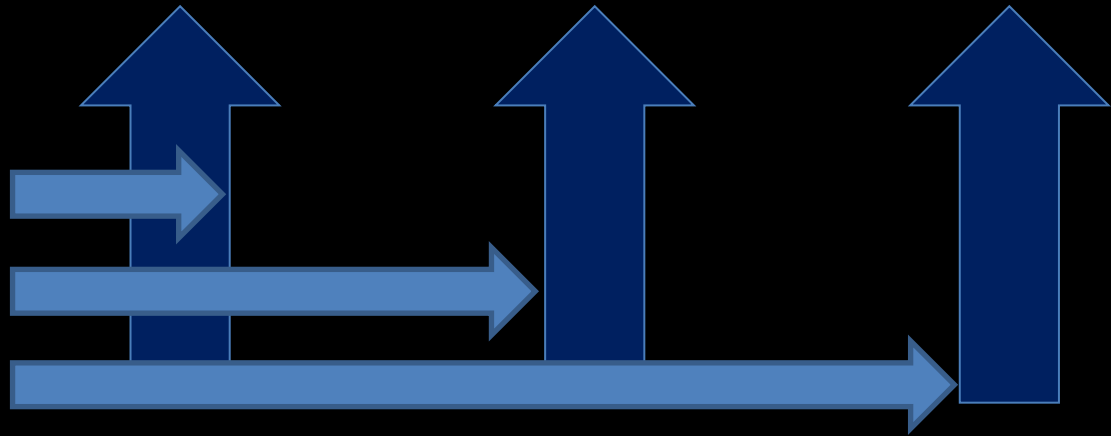
How Do We Know it Will Work?





- Self Care
- Emotion Awareness
 - Didactic lessons on nature of emotion
 - Emotions in relation to teaching & learning
 - Experiential exercises to promote emotional awareness
- Mindfulness
 - Mindful awareness practices
 - Mindful walking
- Empathy & Compassion for self and other
 - Caring practice (*metta*)
 - Mindful listening exercises
- Applications of these to teaching through discussion and role plays





224 Elementary teachers in 32 NYC public schools randomly assigned to CARE or waitlist control

Teacher Improvements



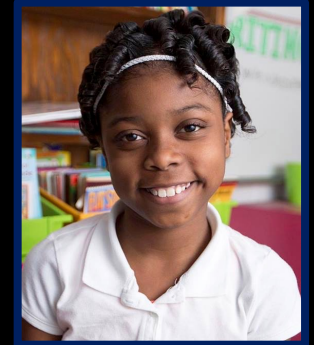
Psychological Distress
Time Urgency
Mindfulness
Emotion Regulation

Classroom Improvements



Emotional Support

Student Improvements



Engagement

Jennings et al., (2017, 2019)
Brown et al., (2017)

Teacher Improvement

- The CARE program
 - promotes teachers' emotion regulation, mindfulness
 - reduces psychological distress and time urgency
- Long-term impacts on emotion regulation, mindfulness, psychological distress



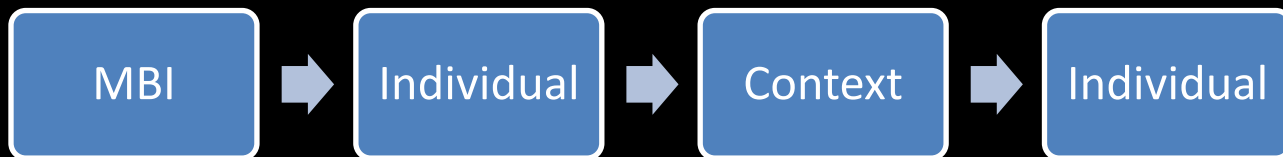
Classroom Improvement

- Mindfulness-based interventions delivered to individuals may have “downstream” effects on the classroom social environments
- CARE resulted in observable improvements in the quality of classroom interactions
 - More emotionally positive
 - Greater sensitivity to students’ needs
 - Greater productivity



Student Improvement

- CARE has a direct positive impact on teacher-reported student engagement
- Students with low social skills at baseline showed improvements in reading competence & motivation



Mindfulness for Teachers

SIMPLE SKILLS for
PEACE and PRODUCTIVITY
in the CLASSROOM



Patricia A. Jennings

The Mindful School

Transforming School Culture
through Mindfulness and
Compassion



edited by Patricia A. Jennings
associate editors: Anthony A. DeMauro and Polina P. Mischenko

THE TRAUMA-INFORMED CLASSROOM



BUILDING RESILIENCE WITH
COMPASSIONATE TEACHING

PATRICIA A. JENNINGS

Mindfulness in the PreK – 5 Classroom



HELPING STUDENTS STRESS LESS AND LEARN MORE

Patricia A. Jennings

PATRICIA A. JENNINGS

TEACHER BURNOUT TURNAROUND



STRATEGIES FOR
EMPOWERED EDUCATORS

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New!