

RELATIONSHIP, RESPONSIBILITY, AND REGULATION

.....

Trauma-Invested Practices for Fostering Resilient Learners

Acknowledgments.....	VI
Preface.....	VIII
Introduction.....	1
Part 1: Building the Nest.....	9
1. A Culture of Safety.....	12
2. Systems of Meaning.....	29
3. Need Versus Behavior.....	47
Part 2: The New Three Rs.....	65
4. Relationship.....	77
5. Responsibility.....	115
6. Regulation.....	151
Conclusion.....	189
Bibliography.....	197
Index.....	199
About the Authors.....	204

Introduction

Create a safe nest for students so that they learn and thrive and, when they eventually fly, they soar.

The above sentence is my new mission for schools. It's not that unreasonable or outside the realm of possibility, is it? As educators, we have an obligation to provide an opportunity for all students—every single one of them—to learn and grow and become the best they can be. I want every adult in education to see all kids (and one another) as competent, special, and *awesome*.

Unfortunately, the demands on educators and others in the helping and caregiving professions are ridiculously high. Many of us would agree that our societal systems are less than ideal; indeed, some might argue that they're downright broken. Although they are well-intentioned, these systems—education, mental health, medical, family services, legal, and others—are not equipped with the resources or the vision and permission to truly achieve what is needed. No matter which of these fields you're in, I'm betting your job, while hopefully rewarding, is also difficult and challenging and, at times, overwhelming. Your hard work may go underappreciated and unacknowledged. That can get old fast.

I am here to tell you that we can change that. We may not be able to change systems overnight, but we can make a difference every day in the lives of those we serve.

This Book Is for You

As a mental health provider, I learned early in my career that there just weren't enough resources in place to meet the need for services. For that reason, I decided to partner with education. School is the one place kids are guaranteed to go, and I knew, based on the prevalence of childhood trauma, that many students were falling through the cracks and being misunderstood. I knew educators were not equipped with the knowledge or the skill set to truly understand how disruptive trauma could be to the learning process. So, I made it my mission to connect with education professionals and help them provide trauma-sensitive environments that would enhance student learning. It is through that training and outreach that I met Pete.

Since the publication of *Fostering Resilient Learners* in 2016, Pete and I have received a tremendous response from our readers. I am so humbled. When I set out to write that book, I had no idea that recording the lessons I've learned, the information I've gathered, and the strategies I've employed during the last two decades would have such a profound effect on my colleagues and partners in the field. It has been amazing, validating, and, honestly, quite overwhelming! We have received personal notes and feedback from thousands of educators and caregiving professionals from around the world, sharing the impact our book has had.

During the last two years, Pete and I have been fortunate to be able to work with school districts, provide consulting services to scores of educator teams, and speak at education and other professional conferences throughout the United States. There is such a need for professional development, continued learning, and mindset shifting—and we are committed to helping however we can. Together, we work with systems dedicated to helping humans in positive, healthy ways.

Now, based on reader requests—or should I say reader demands—I bring you this new guide to providing trauma-invested practices for your students and families. This book is for students, parents, education professionals, mental health providers, coaches, support staff, administrators, and anyone else who has a passion for helping humans.

As you travel on this journey with me, I will challenge you as a professional to enhance your own understanding of your beliefs, your mission, your perspective, and the influence you have on the settings in which you work. I look at the importance of self-care and maintaining a healthy work-life balance, and I weave examples and stories throughout the text to give you insights into the many challenges we all face and ways to overcome them.

The Focus of This Book

In *Fostering Resilient Learners*, Pete and I focused solely on the professional—on enhancing your self-awareness to help you be the best you can be for your students and families. Our thesis was simple: you've got to build awareness of the issues and take care of yourself in order to help others. This emphasis was meant to help you see that although you cannot stop trauma from happening, you can create a setting that is safe for students.

We refer to this setting as a *positive learning environment*: one that addresses the whole child so that teaching and learning can flourish.

But a question we hear time and time again from professionals is this: “OK, I've learned about adverse childhood experiences. I believe in each of my kids. I understand my mission, and I can keep myself grounded amid chaos. Now what do I do about the student in

my classroom who is having an incredibly difficult time, right now, right in front of me? I've got strategies to help *me*, but how can I help this child?"

Does this ring true for you? If so, you're in the right place. This book will challenge your beliefs and inspire deeper and different ways of thinking about your roles in teaching, youth development, and situations involving students. Pete and I believe the tenets of ASCD's whole child approach are five critical pieces of the puzzle that helps kids to learn, grow, and develop successfully. By providing environments where kids and adults are *healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged*, we can meet our mission to help kids soar. Without these five components, we'll remain grounded, confined, and unfulfilled—as professionals, as students, as educators, and as human beings.

We all know the original three *Rs*: reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic. Now, with a trauma-informed lens, we are going to look at three new *Rs*: relationship, responsibility, and regulation. These overarching ideas shape the positive learning environments we are establishing. They enhance the focus on the whole child. Student success—by whatever metric we use to define it—is going to be determined by the degree to which we can infuse these three components into the day-to-day operation of our classrooms, learning spaces, offices, and schools.

In the chapters that follow, I talk about the value of each of the new three *Rs* and provide strategies to support your students and families. In actual scenarios provided by educators, I identify a student's unmet needs; examine the situation from each of five perspectives (student, parent/caregiver, teacher, support staff, and leader); and suggest interventions to support the student. Then I offer opportunities for reflection and pose guiding questions that allow you to dive deeper into your own thinking, actions, and approaches with all the stakeholders in each young person's life.

As in our first book, Pete supports and augments the findings and practices I share with timely insights from the school perspective. His “Pete’s Practice” sections are woven into every chapter and help bring the strategies to life.

Although *Fostering Resilient Learners* (Souers & Hall, 2016) is not a prerequisite, Pete and I highly recommend reading it before embarking on this book, as it provides a thorough grounding in childhood trauma and its prevalence and lays a solid foundation for the strategies offered here. That said, in this book I do define key concepts and terms introduced in my first book so that you won’t be lost if this is new territory. Having a knowledge base in this topic will be helpful. We in education tend to jump into strategies and try to find the fastest route to success. When we truly commit to a trauma-invested practice, however, our own self-awareness and knowledge of student needs are crucial to designing effective interventions.

As I explained in *Fostering Resilient Learners*, it is important to acknowledge five fundamental truths:

1. Trauma is real.
2. Trauma is prevalent. In fact, it is likely much more common than we care to admit.
3. Trauma is toxic to the brain and can affect development and learning in a multitude of ways.
4. In our schools, we need to be prepared to support students who have experienced trauma, even if we don’t know exactly who they are.
5. Children are resilient, and within positive learning environments they can grow, learn, and succeed. (pp. 10–11)

As an educator, you can be the change agent for children and families. You have a unique opportunity to influence their lives, their

attitudes, and their futures. And because this is so, *so* important, I want to do what I can to support you in fostering your own health and well-being, so you can be present, safe, and empowering to those you serve. It is my goal to equip you with the knowledge, awareness, and skills to support student success.

All students deserve an education, but to learn, they need to feel safe. You can provide that safe place for them.

© Hawker Brownlow Education