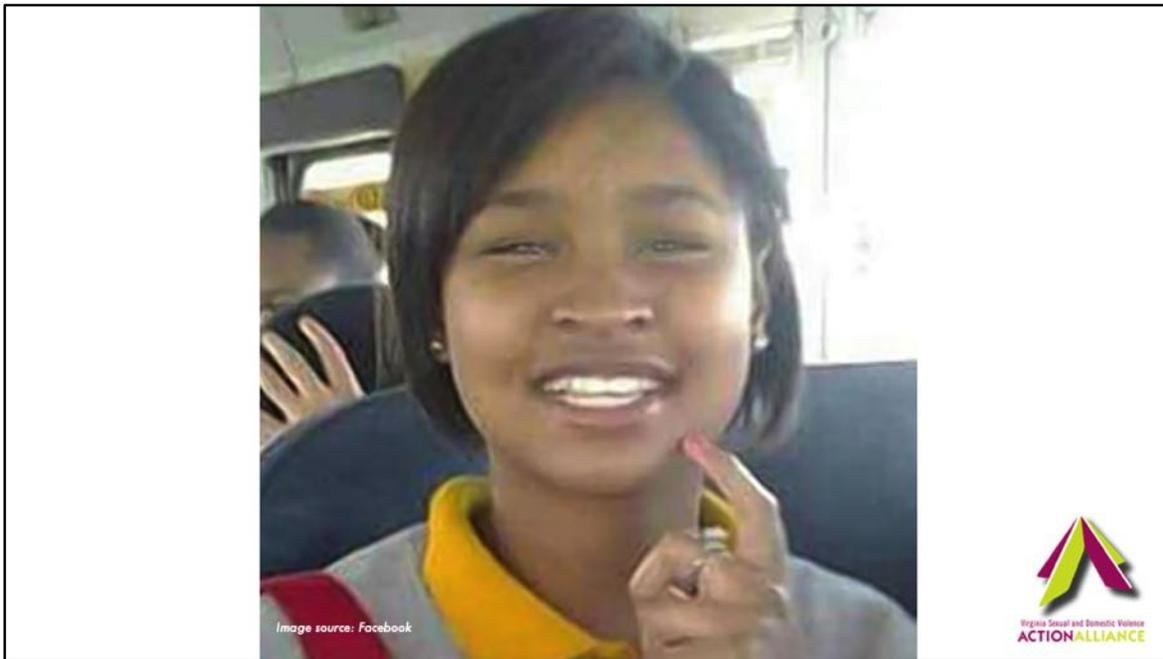




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INTRODUCE YOURSELF AND YOUR AGENCY.



Gynnya (GIN-YA) McMillen was 16 years old when she [died in her sleep](#) while in custody at a juvenile detention center in Kentucky. (2016)

This was the first night she had ever spent in detention. She had been arrested on a misdemeanor assault charge on a family member. Guards used a martial arts-style restraint on Gynnya when she refused to remove her sweatshirt as part of the facility's search and booking procedure; she was found dead in her cell 24 hours later.

The tragic death of Gynnya McMillen raises critical questions about how she was treated in the detention facility and what exactly caused her death. Her story also raises broader questions about the [extreme and overly punitive ways](#) in which we approach children and teens of color whom we deem “non-compliant”.

**The U.S. detains and incarcerates girls of color at [staggering rates](#).** African-American girls constitute 14% of the general population nationally, yet make up an astounding 33% of girls detained and committed.<sup>1</sup> Native American girls are also disproportionately involved in the juvenile justice system: they are 1 percent of the

general youth population but 3.5 percent of detained and committed girls.<sup>2</sup>

**The vast majority of detained and incarcerated girls are trauma survivors.** According to [a study](#) conducted by the Human Rights Project for Girls, the Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality, and the Ms. Foundation for Women, **more than 80% of the girls in some states' juvenile detention centers have been sexually or physically abused prior to incarceration.**

# ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES STUDY (ACES)

## What are ACES?

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is the term given to describe all types of abuse, neglect, and other traumatic experiences that occur to individuals under the age of 18. The landmark Kaiser ACE Study examined the relationships between these experiences during childhood and reduced health and well-being later in life.



Gynnya had spent time at “Home of the Innocents”, one of Kentucky’s largest [emergency placement centers](#) for children who have been removed from their homes because of abuse, abandonment or neglect.

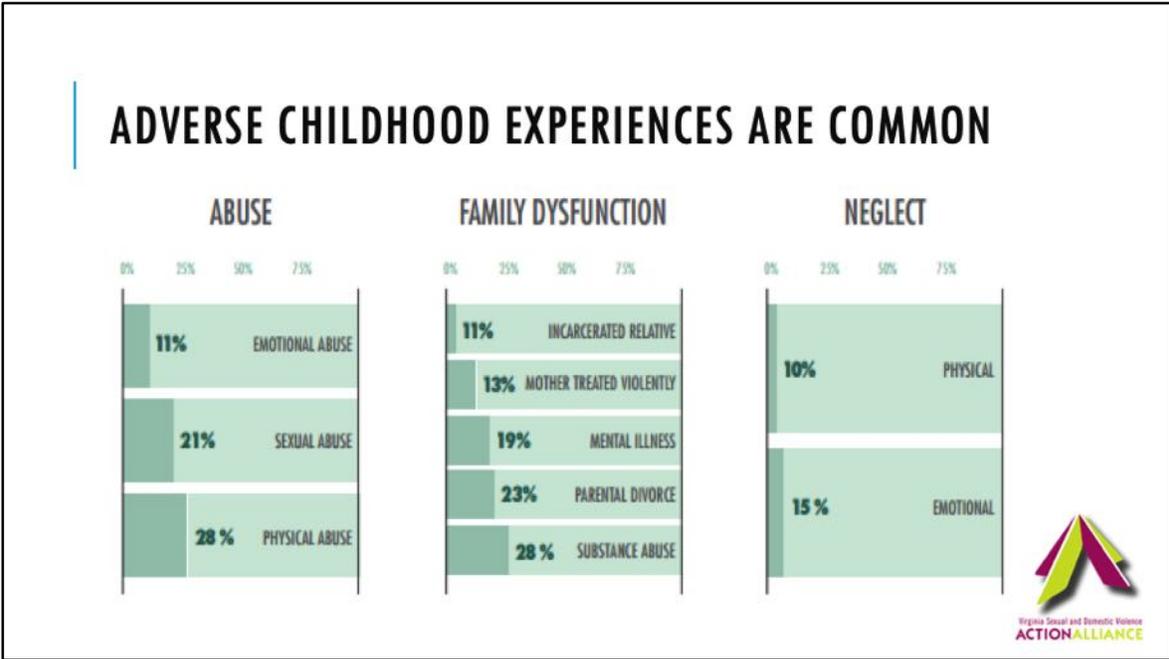
**Gynnya was one of millions of kids who experience what’s known as Adverse Childhood Experiences, a host of types of abuse and neglect, and other traumatic experiences in childhood that affect their well-being in childhood and throughout their entire lives.**

How many of you have heard of the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study or “ACEs”?

### **Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (or ACEs).**

- About 20 years ago in San Diego, public health practitioners were puzzled by constant patient drop out from obesity programs. They decided to investigate whether there were any shared underlying factors among those affected. They were shocked to find out that those who dropped out almost all had one thing in common: sexual abuse in childhood.
- This led them to another question - were there other areas of poor health in adulthood or social outcomes where the people affected had largely been victims of childhood adversity?

- The result of this investigation was a longitudinal *Adverse Childhood Experiences Study* referred to as the ACEs Study. This study involved more than 17,000—mostly middle-aged and middle-class West-coasters in the US, through a collaboration of Kaiser Permanente clinics and the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta.
- Each study participant completed a confidential survey that contained questions about childhood maltreatment and family dysfunction, as well as items detailing their current health status and behaviors.



The findings of this study, which offered a whole-life perspective, revealed a shocking prevalence of 10 classified types of ACEs which were broken down into three areas:

- Abuse: Sexual, physical, emotional;
- Neglect: Failure to meet basic physical needs, leaving a child uncared for, or unloved;
- Family/household dysfunction: Witnessing, addiction, crime, parent-to-parent violence, mental illness etc.

Of course, there are many other types of childhood trauma -- such as witnessing a sibling being abused, witnessing violence outside the home, witnessing a father being abused by a mother, being bullied by a classmate or teacher – but only 10 types were measured. They provide a useful marker for the severity of trauma experienced. Other types of trauma may have a similar impact.

Respondents were given an “ACE Score” of 1 to 10. For every adverse experience they said “yes” to, that resulted in 1 point.

An overwhelming two-thirds of respondents had experienced at least one ACE and 12% of respondents had an Ace Score of 4 or more. 20% had been victims of child sex abuse. People who identified as women were 50% more likely than people who identified as men to have a score of 5 or more.

## TRAUMA AND TOXIC STRESS

Some children experience ACEs as trauma.

Trauma = when a child is threatened by an event that he or she has experienced or witnessed.

Sometimes ACEs are more than one-time events, and are experienced as toxic stress.

Toxic Stress = unremitting stress caused by extreme poverty, neglect, abuse, or severe parental depression.



**The impact of ACEs on the brain can lead to changes in physical, emotional, and behavioral health.**

ACEs are:

- Common
- Highly interrelated
- Pile up and have a cumulative impact
- Account for a large percentage of health and social problems

**The higher the ACE score, the higher the risk.**

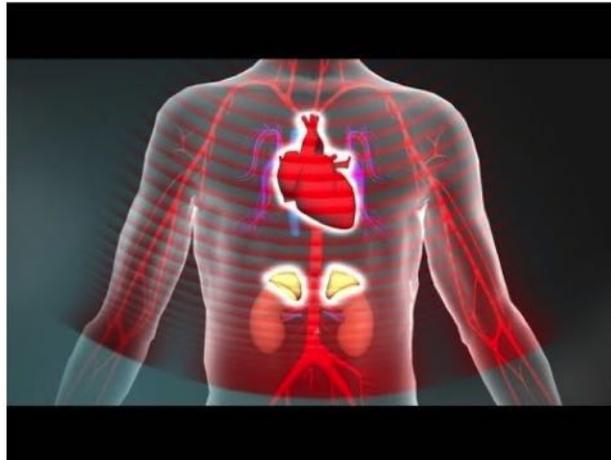
**One in ten children nationally has experienced three or more ACEs. (source: <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/prevalence-adverse-childhood-experiences-nationally-state-race-ethnicity>). In Virginia, 1 in 5 children have at least 2 ACEs**

**Some ACEs are traumatic experiences, some ACEs lead to toxic stress.**

# TRAUMA AND TOXIC STRESS

## Toxic Stress Derails Healthy Development

Permission to use granted by: Center  
on the Developing Child at Harvard  
University:  
<http://developingchild.harvard.edu>



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=109&v=rVwFkcOZHJw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=109&v=rVwFkcOZHJw)



## What do we mean by trauma and toxic stress? *Video (length 1:52)*

**Toxic stress response** can occur when a child experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity—such as physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, caregiver substance abuse or mental illness, exposure to violence, and/or the accumulated burdens of family economic hardship—without adequate adult support. This kind of prolonged activation of the stress response systems can disrupt the development of brain architecture and other organ systems, and increase the risk for stress-related disease and cognitive impairment, well into the adult years.

When toxic stress response occurs continually, or is triggered by multiple sources, it can have a cumulative toll on an individual's physical and mental health—for a lifetime. The more adverse experiences in childhood, the greater the likelihood of developmental delays and later health problems, including heart disease, diabetes, substance abuse, and depression. Research also indicates that [supportive, responsive relationships](#) with caring adults as early in life as possible can prevent or reverse the damaging effects of toxic stress response.

Source: *Toxic Stress Derails Healthy Development*:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=109&v=rVwFkcOZHJw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=109&v=rVwFkcOZHJw)

*From: Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University*

**THE VAST MAJORITY OF KIDS IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM ARE SURVIVORS OF TRAUMA AND HAVE ENDURED YEARS OF TOXIC STRESS.**

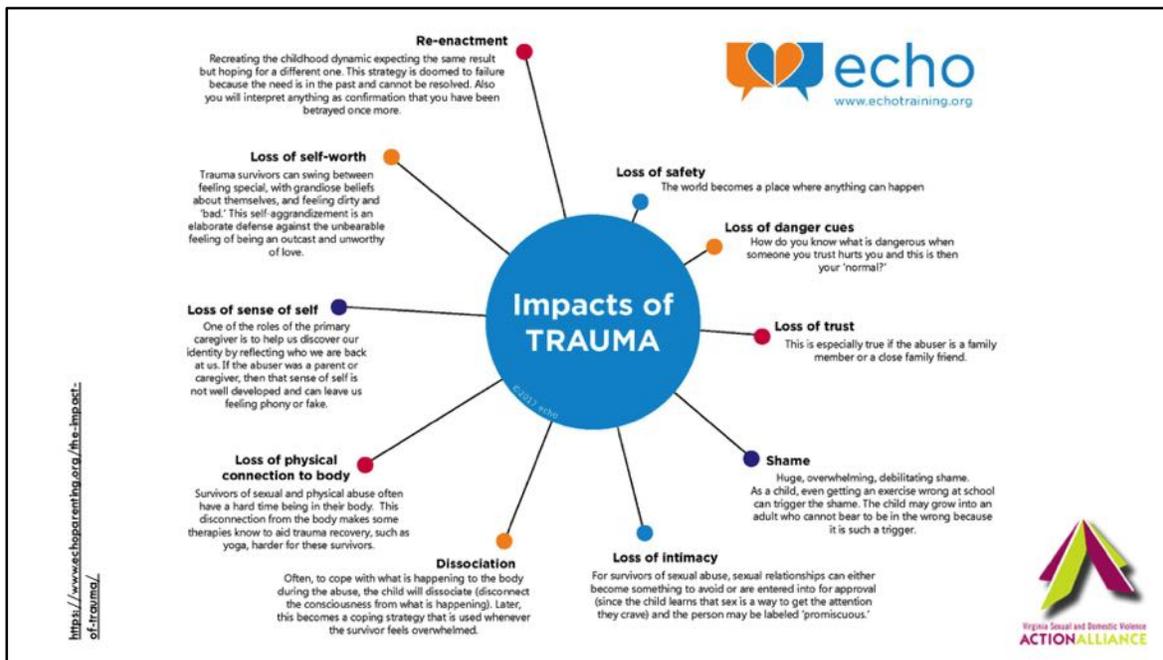


**The vast majority of kids in the juvenile justice system are survivors of trauma and have endured years of toxic stress.**

More than 1 in 3 children experience violence or trauma before the age of 18.

Most participants in one study (conducted by the National Institutes of Health), of about 1,000 youth in juvenile detention (92.5%) had experienced one or more traumas (mean = 14.6 incidents, median = 6 incidents). Significantly more males (93.2%) than females (84.0%) reported at least one traumatic experience; 11.2% of the sample met criteria for PTSD in the past year. Over half of the participants with PTSD reported witnessing violence as the precipitating trauma.

*(source <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2861915/>)*



**Trauma can have far-reaching, wide-ranging impacts on people.**

**Loss of safety:** The world becomes a place where anything can happen.

**Loss of danger cues:** How do you know what is dangerous when someone you trust hurts you and this is then your 'normal?'

**Loss of trust:** This is especially true if the abuser is a family member or a close family friend.

**Shame:** Huge, overwhelming, debilitating shame. As a child, even getting an exercise wrong at school can trigger the shame. The child may grow into an adult who cannot bear to be in the wrong because it is such a trigger.

**Loss of intimacy:** For survivors of sexual abuse, sexual relationships can either become something to avoid or are entered into for approval (since the child learns that sex is a way to get the attention they crave) and the person may be labeled 'promiscuous.'

**Dissociation:** Often, to cope with what is happening to the body during the abuse, the child will dissociate (disconnect the consciousness from what is happening). Later, this becomes a coping strategy that is used whenever the survivor feels overwhelmed.

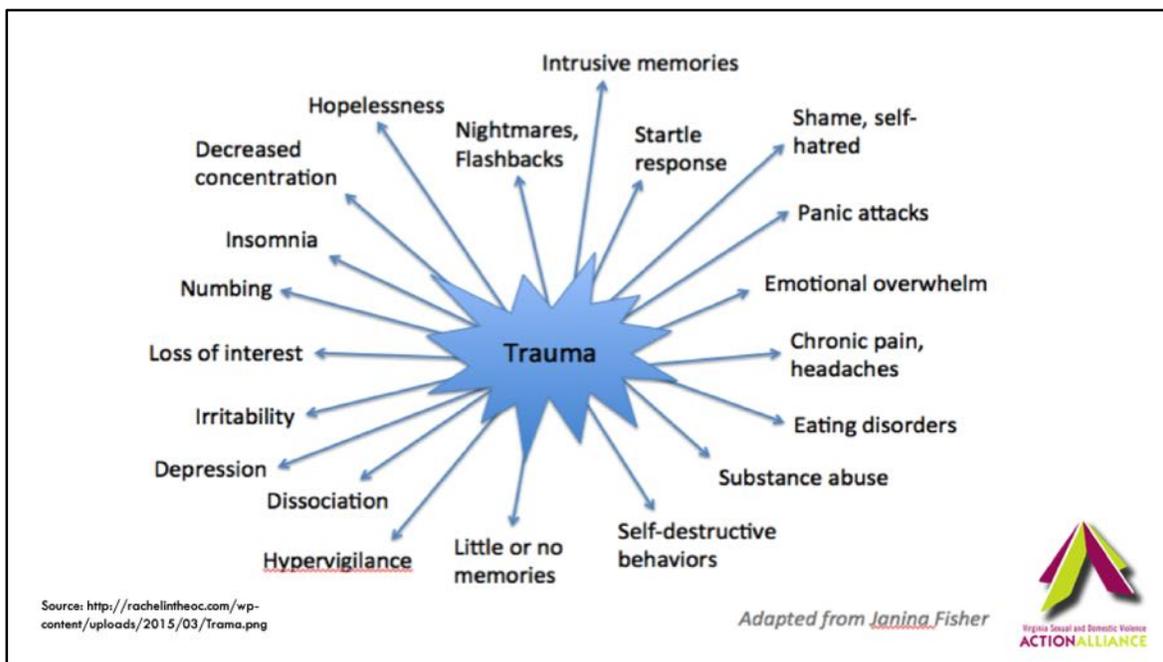
**Loss of physical connection to body:** Survivors of sexual and physical abuse often have a hard time being in their body. As [Bessel van der Kolk says in \*The Body Keeps the Score\*](#), at some level they consider that their body let them down and so turn the volume down on physical sensations. For example, survivors may go for a long time before they realize they need to use the bathroom. This disconnection from the body makes some therapies known to aid trauma recovery, such as yoga, harder for these survivors. Trauma-informed yoga avoids some of the potential triggers and helps participants get back in touch with their bodies.

**Loss of sense of self:** One of the roles of the primary caregiver is to help us discover our identity by reflecting who we are back at us. If the abuser was a parent or caregiver, then that sense of self is not well developed and can leave us feeling phony or fake.

**Loss of self-worth:** Trauma survivors, especially survivors of sexual abuse, can swing between feeling special, with grandiose beliefs about themselves, and feeling dirty and 'bad.' Trauma survivors *are* special – they have a PhD in survival – but this self-aggrandizement is an elaborate defense against the unbearable feeling of being an outcast and unworthy of love.

**Re-enactment:** Recreating the childhood dynamic expecting the same result but hoping for a different one, such as anticipating and even provoking your partner's 'betrayal' but wanting badly for it to be different this time, and thus resolve your childhood dilemma. This strategy is doomed to failure because the need is in the past and cannot be resolved. Also, you are setting up the other person because you are always waiting for the other shoe to drop and will interpret anything as confirmation that you have been betrayed once more.

Source: <https://www.echoparenting.org/the-impact-of-trauma/>



**We all respond to trauma and toxic stress differently. The impact of trauma can show up in a variety of emotions and behaviors.**

Reactions to a trauma and toxic stress may include:

- Feeling hopeless about the future
- Feeling detached or unconcerned about others
- Having trouble concentrating or making decisions
- Feeling jumpy and getting startled easily at sudden noises
- Feeling on guard and constantly alert
- Sleep disturbances
- Having memories or flashbacks
- Irritability
- Having work or school problems

Source: <http://rachelintheoc.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Trama.png>

## YOUNG SURVIVORS OF TRAUMA BEHAVE IN WAYS THAT SHOW THEY ARE SUFFERING.

### IN SCHOOL, THIS MAY LOOK LIKE:

- **Irritability, refusing to participate**
- **Sleepiness**
- **Not being able to focus, difficulty with memory**
- **Lack of interest**
- **A nervous system on high alert**



**Young survivors of trauma and toxic stress often behave in ways that show they are suffering.**

In school, trauma reactions may look like:

- **Irritability, refusing to participate**
- **Sleepiness**
- **Not being able to focus, difficulty with memory:** being distracted in class, excessive use of cell phone, “checking out”.
- **Lack of interest:** missing assignments, not studying for tests, reduced effort.
- **A nervous system on high alert:** difficulty staying calm, quick temper, being argumentative.

## PAIR SHARE

- HAVE YOU SEEN ANY OF THESE BEHAVIORS AMONG STUDENTS IN YOUR SCHOOL?
- WHAT WAS DONE ABOUT IT?
- DID THE INTERVENTION ADDRESS THE PROBLEMATIC BEHAVIOR ONLY, OR DID IT ALSO ADDRESS THE UNDERLYING CAUSE OF THE BEHAVIOR?



**Let's talk a little bit about your experiences: what have you noticed about what happens in school?**

Pair share:

- Have you seen any of these behaviors among students in your school?
- What was done about it?
- Did the intervention address the problematic behavior only, or did it also address the underlying cause of the behavior?

WHAT DOES SCHOOL CRIME LOOK LIKE?	
CRIMINAL CHARGE	STUDENT BEHAVIOR
Disrupting school	Spraying perfume; <sup>201</sup> fake burping; <sup>202</sup> fake fart spray; <sup>203</sup> fake fart spray (again); <sup>204</sup> fake fart spray (and again); <sup>205</sup> refusing to change a t-shirt depicting a hunting rifle; <sup>206</sup> not following instructions; <sup>207</sup> criticizing a police officer <sup>208</sup>
Disorderly conduct	Kicking a trashcan; <sup>209</sup> cursing; <sup>210</sup> refusing to leave the lunchroom; <sup>211</sup> arguing; <sup>212</sup> documenting bullying <sup>213</sup>
Assault	Throwing a paper airplane; <sup>214</sup> <u>throwing a baby carrot</u> ; <sup>215</sup> throwing skittles; <sup>216</sup> fake fart spray (one more time) <sup>217</sup>
Weapons	Science experiment (volcano); <sup>218</sup> science experiment (clock); <sup>219</sup> paring knife; <sup>220</sup> children's knife <sup>221</sup>
Battery on a police officer	Five year-old with ADHD had a tantrum <sup>222</sup>
Terroristic threats	Eight year-old with a disability made a threatening statement to a teacher <sup>223</sup>
Drug possession	Carrying a maple leaf <sup>224</sup>
Petit larceny	Taking a milk carton <sup>225</sup>
Felony forgery	Buying lunch with a fake \$10 bill <sup>226</sup>
Indecent exposure	Wearing saggy pants <sup>227</sup>

<https://wtvr.com/2015/10/22/baby-carrot-assault-charge/>



Source: BULLIES IN BLUE The Origins and Consequences Of School Policing. American Civil Liberties Union. April 2017

**Zero-tolerance policies combined with an increased police presence in schools have criminalized student (mis)behavior.**

“Over the past 50 years, schools—particularly in poor Black and Latino communities—have become sites of increased criminalization of young people. Coupled with the rise of mass incarceration came a punitive turn toward adolescents and the extension of youth policing from neighborhood block to street corner, to playground, and finally, to the classroom.

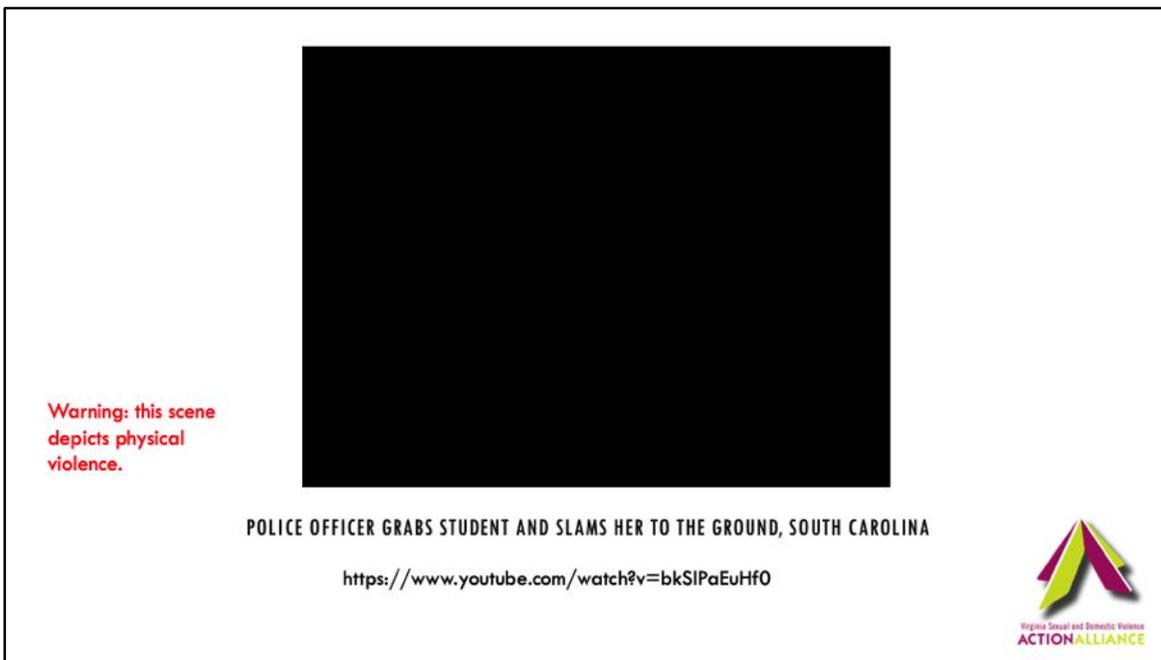
Later, fears of another Columbine massacre misguidedly drove the expansion of infrastructure that ensured the permanent placement of police in schools.

Police in schools are first and foremost there to enforce criminal laws, and virtually every violation of a school rule can be considered a criminal act if viewed through a police-first lens.”

Source: *BULLIES IN BLUE The Origins and Consequences Of School Policing*. American Civil Liberties Union. **April 2017**

**Example video from Virginia-related case:  
Teen faces assault charges for throwing baby carrot at middle school teacher (Henrico,**

**VA):** <https://wtnv.com/2015/10/22/baby-carrot-assault-charge/>



**Minor issues in a classroom, combined with a police response, can have dire and devastating consequences.**

(2015) Shakara was 16 years old, living in foster care, when her high school teacher told her to put her cell phone away. When she did not put it away, the teacher told her to go to the discipline office. When she did not do that, the teacher called in the school resource officer, Ben Fields. When Fields told her to leave the class and she did not, he dragged her out of her desk and across the floor, arresting her for disturbing the classroom.

Fields had previously been named as a defendant in a 2013 federal lawsuit that claims he “unfairly and recklessly targets African-American students with allegations of gang membership and criminal gang activity.”

Niya Kenny, another girl in the room, who spoke out against the officer’s actions, was also arrested and spent 8.5 hours in the police station that day before she was bailed out. After this incident, she did not return to high school and graduate with her friends, instead opting for a GED.

The officer was fired, but did not face criminal charges.

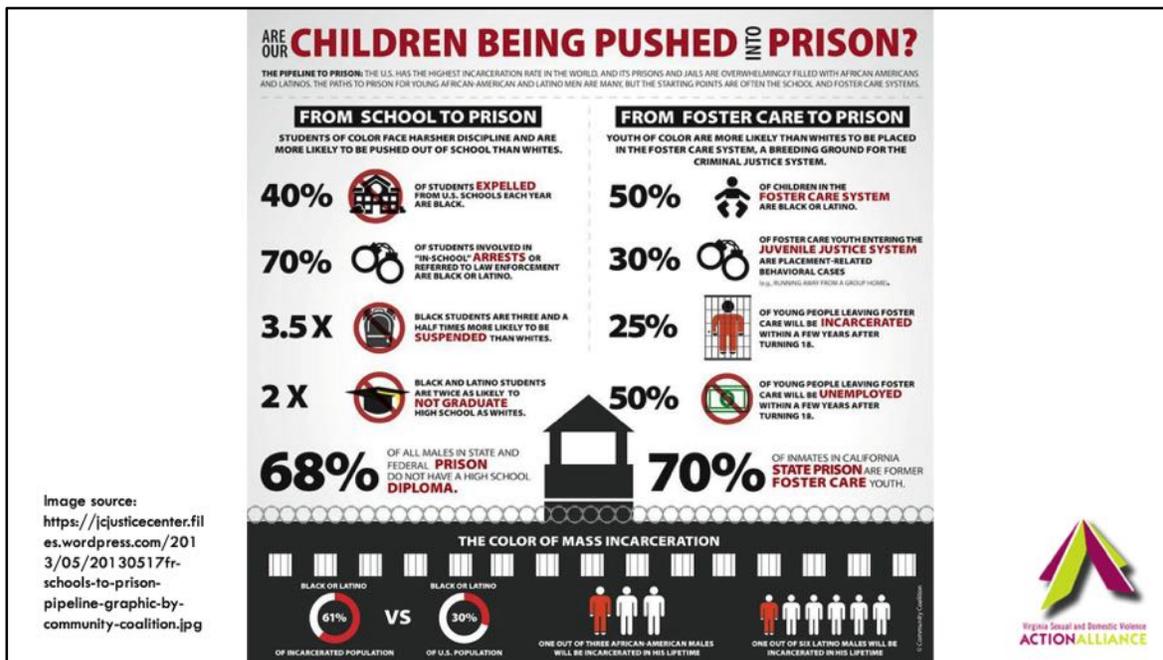
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Both girls faced misdemeanor charges of “disturbing schools,” which carries a fine of up to \$1,000 and up to 90 days in jail.

Niya spent 8 1/2 hours in a detention center Monday. When she met up with Shakara at their attorneys' office on Tuesday, she said, her classmate was quiet and gave short, monosyllabic answers.

“She’s shaken up. She’s traumatized,” Niya Kenny said.

*Source: <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-girl-thrown-punishment-unfair-20151029-story.html>*



The “school-to-prison pipeline,” is a disturbing national trend wherein children are funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

Many of these children have learning disabilities, are children of color, and/or have histories of poverty, abuse, or neglect, and would benefit from additional educational and counseling services. Instead, they are isolated, punished, and pushed out.

“Zero-tolerance” policies criminalize minor infractions of school rules, while cops in schools lead to students being criminalized for behavior that should be handled inside the school. Students of color are especially vulnerable to push-out trends and the discriminatory application of discipline.

The Action Alliance calls this the “Trauma-to-prison” pipeline because we believe it accurately describes the dynamics present.

Statement from the Action Alliance:

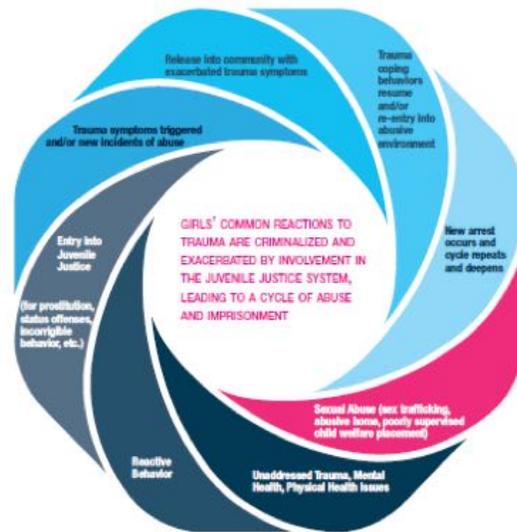
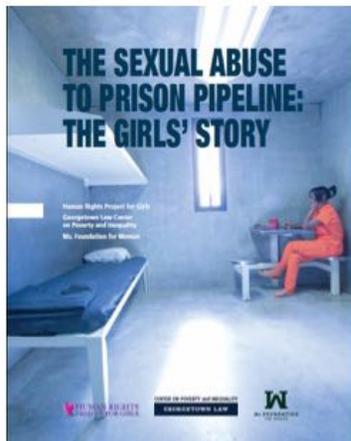
*The Trauma-to-Prison-Pipeline fails young people who are experiencing high levels of toxic stress by responding in overly punitive ways to youth who exhibit normal reactions to trauma and toxic stress.*

*Youth of color and youth with disabilities are particularly targeted for disproportionately high levels of heavy-handed disciplinary responses to vague and subjective infractions in school, such as “defiance of authority”, or “classroom disruption”. Viewed from a trauma-informed lens, these same behaviors may signal youth who are suffering and struggling with ongoing effects of trauma.*

*The Action Alliance believes that everyone deserves racially equitable responses that are compassionate and trauma-informed, and which build individual and community assets.*

*Image source: <https://jcjusticecenter.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/20130517fr-schools-to-prison-pipeline-graphic-by-community-coalition.jpg>*

# TRAUMA-TO-PRISON PIPELINE



The trauma-to-prison pipeline (also called “sexual abuse to prison pipeline”) is the result of the absence of a trauma-informed response, in conjunction with unequal application of ostensibly race-neutral policies.

This image illustrates how unaddressed trauma leads to reactive behavior (this is a normal reaction), which, when met with a punitive response, leads to punishment, worsening reactive behavior, and harsher punishment.

The Human Rights Project for Girls, along with the Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality and the Ms. Foundation for Women, released “[The Sexual Abuse to Prison Pipeline: The Girls’ Story](#)” (pdf), a report that exposes how girls, specifically girls of color, are arrested and incarcerated as a result of sexual abuse.

**The juvenile justice system typically fails to address, and often exacerbates, trauma that caused girls to be there.**

“When schools fail to support girls who are victimized by gender-based violence and harassment on campus, girls no longer feel safe and as a result may disengage, become truant, or exhibit challenging behaviors that are rooted in the trauma they have experienced. Yet instead of being viewed as victims of sexual violence, these girls are often disciplined, including being suspended, expelled, or referred to law enforcement.”

“Girls of color are particularly affected by this trend. Although rates of overrepresentation vary significantly by jurisdiction, the national trends are revealing. African-American girls constitute 14

percent of the general population nationally but 33.2 percent of girls detained and committed.

Native American girls are also disproportionately involved in the juvenile justice system: they are 1 percent of the general youth population but 3.5 percent of detained and committed girls.”



*Image source: <http://voiceofdetroit.net/2012/07/02/nations-high-court-ends-mandatory-life-without-parole-sentences-for-youth/>*

HOW WE DEFINE THE PROBLEM  
DETERMINES HOW WE WORK ON THE PROBLEM.



**How we define the problem determines how we respond to and work on the problem.**

Do we see problematic behavior in kids as evidence that they are bad kids? Criminals?  
Or do we see problematic behavior in kids as a sign of suffering and needing help and support?

## HOW ARE WE DESCRIBING THE PROBLEM?

- Non-compliant
- Defiant
- Disruptive

VS.

- Overwhelmed
- Traumatized
- Fearful

WHICH DESCRIPTIONS ARE MORE HELPFUL WHEN ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSE?



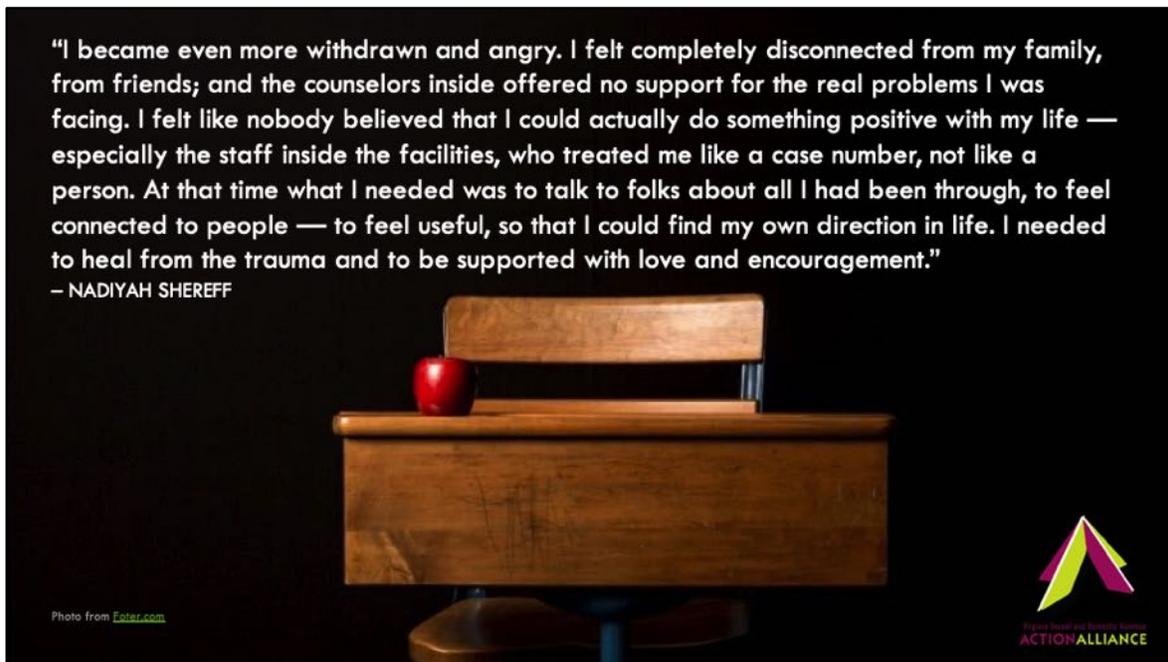
### So how are we describing the problem?

Many schools use terms like “non-compliant, disruptive, disobedient, defiant”, which is a subjective interpretation of a student’s BEHAVIOR.

What if we used terms that actually described the PROBLEM? The problem being that the student is suffering and is feeling overwhelmed, traumatized, fearful, etc.

"I became even more withdrawn and angry. I felt completely disconnected from my family, from friends; and the counselors inside offered no support for the real problems I was facing. I felt like nobody believed that I could actually do something positive with my life — especially the staff inside the facilities, who treated me like a case number, not like a person. At that time what I needed was to talk to folks about all I had been through, to feel connected to people — to feel useful, so that I could find my own direction in life. I needed to heal from the trauma and to be supported with love and encouragement."

– NADIYAH SHEREFF



**Nadiyah describes to us the process by which her initial trauma became worsened as the result of an inadequate response.**

Source: [http://rights4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/r4g/2015/02/2015\\_COP\\_sexual-abuse\\_layout\\_web-1.pdf](http://rights4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/r4g/2015/02/2015_COP_sexual-abuse_layout_web-1.pdf)

Photo on [Foter.com](http://Foter.com)



Family doesn't just mean  
being related.

It means  
feeling like you belong.

Credit: Performing Statistics (performingstatistics.com)

**WHAT IF OUR SCHOOLS AND  
COMMUNITY RECOGNIZED  
TRAUMA AND SUFFERING IN  
OUR CHILDREN...  
AND RESPONDED TO THEM  
WITH COMPASSION?**



Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence  
**ACTION ALLIANCE**

**What if we gave students like Nadiyah what they are asking for?**

What if our schools and community recognized trauma and suffering in our children...  
And responded to them with compassion?

	Traditional Discipline	Restorative Justice
<b>Focuses &amp; Goals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retribution and punishment for the offender</li> <li>• Enforce rules</li> <li>• Address offender</li> <li>• React swiftly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address harms</li> <li>• Healing, learning, and growth for all involved</li> <li>• Build relationships and community</li> <li>• Prevention and meaningful process</li> </ul>
<b>Questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What rule was broken?</li> <li>• Who broke the rule?</li> <li>• What punishment is warranted?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who was harmed and what harm was done?</li> <li>• What are the needs and responsibilities of all affected?</li> <li>• How do all affected parties address needs and repair harms?</li> </ul>
<b>Results</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exclusion and isolation</li> <li>• Stigmatization and alienation</li> <li>• Offender accepts punishment</li> <li>• Mental health problems for offender</li> <li>• Victim not heard/has less satisfaction</li> <li>• High recidivism</li> <li>• Lower attendance and graduation rates</li> <li>• Larger disparities</li> <li>• Damage to school climate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusion and connectedness</li> <li>• Repaired, restored, and strengthened relationships</li> <li>• Offender takes responsibility</li> <li>• Social and emotional learning for all involved</li> <li>• Victim heard/has more satisfaction</li> <li>• Lower recidivism, suspensions, and court referrals</li> <li>• Higher attendance and graduation rates</li> <li>• Reduced disparities</li> <li>• Improved school climate</li> </ul>

  
 Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence ACTION ALLIANCE

Source: Suspended Progress | JustChildren Program | Legal Aid Justice Center | May 2016

**Let’s talk a little bit about how we can respond differently to students, looking first at our current “traditional” responses...**

**Traditional discipline focuses on addressing the offender, enforcing rules, and often punishment.**

The questions we ask in traditional discipline are: “what rule was broken? What punishment is warranted?”

The results are often exclusion and isolation, perhaps stigmatization of the offender, while victim has not been heard. Long-term consequences often include lower attendance and graduation rates, larger disparities, and recidivism.

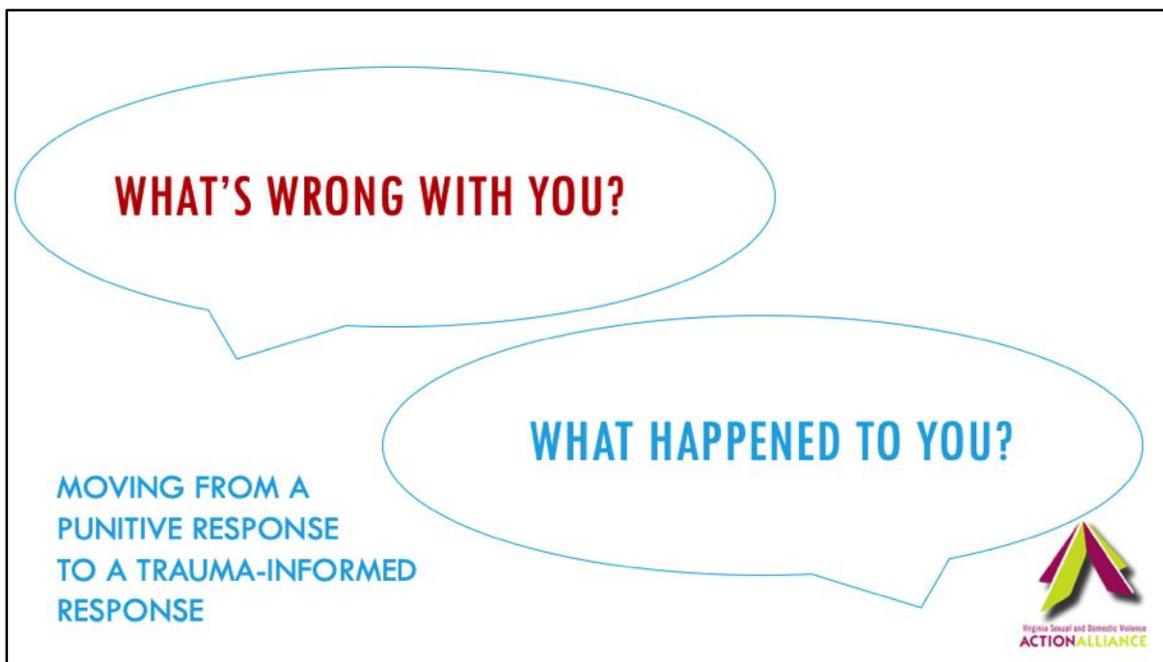
**Restorative practices focus on addressing the harm, building relationships and community, and healing and growth for all involved.**

The questions we ask in restorative practices are: “What harm was done? How do we repair the harm?”

The results of are often inclusion and connectedness, reparations and strengthened relationships, the person who committed the harm taking responsibility, the person who was harmed having a chance to be heard, and social and emotional learning.

Long-term consequences include improved school climate, lower suspensions and recidivism, higher attendance and graduation rates, and reduced disparities.

**Restorative practices are one example of a trauma-informed approach.**



**One simple way to respond to kids who are acting out is to shift our question from “What’s wrong with you?” to “what happened to you?” This is a simple example of a trauma-informed response.**

Examples of restorative questions for those who have committed harm include:

- “What happened?”
- “What were you thinking about at the time?”
- “What have you thought about since the incident?”
- “Who do you think has been affected by your actions?”
- “How have they been affected?”

And questions for those who have been harmed include:

- “What was your reaction at the time of the incident?”
- “How do you feel about what happened?”
- “What has been the hardest thing for you?”
- “What would be the best outcome?”



**We have the tools to give kids what they need.**



# CREATING A TRAUMA-INFORMED CLASSROOM

- Safety
- Trust + Transparency
- Peer Support + Mutual Self-Help
- Collaboration
- Empowerment, Voice + Choice
- Understanding of Cultural, Historical + Gender Issues



**HANDOUT:** Trauma-informed resources for teachers (the lightning bolt on the slide is the facilitator’s cue to reference/distribute a handout)

**One way to give kids what they need to is think about changes we can make in the classroom setting.**

**Safety** - Throughout the school, staff and students feel physically and psychologically safe.

**Trustworthiness and transparency** - School operations and decisions are conducted with transparency and the goal of building and maintaining trust among staff, students, families, and larger community

**Peer support and mutual self-help** - key vehicle for building trust, establishing safety, and empowerment.

**Collaboration and mutuality** - There is true partnering and leveling of power differences between staff and students and among organizational staff from teachers to administrators. There is recognition that healing happens in relationships and in the meaningful sharing of power and decision-making. The school recognizes that everyone has a role to play in a

trauma-informed approach. One does not have to be a therapist to be therapeutic.

**Empowerment, voice, and choice** - Throughout the school and among the students individuals' strengths are recognized, built on, and validated and new skills developed as necessary. The school aims to strengthen the staff's, students', and family members' experience of choice and recognize that every person's experience is unique and requires an individualized approach. This includes a belief in resilience and in the ability of individuals, organizations, and communities to heal and promote recovery from trauma. This builds on what students, staff, and communities have to offer, rather than responding to perceived deficits.

**Cultural, historical, and gender issues** - The school actively moves past cultural stereotypes and biases (e.g., based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, geography), offers gender responsive services, leverages the healing value of traditional cultural connections, and recognizes and addresses historical trauma

- Historical trauma in Virginia includes the fact that this was the capital of the confederacy, that black youth often attend schools named after confederate generals every day
- Historical can also be yesterday → ICE raids or police brutality in communities, larger events happening around the world (because of social media our communities expand and we are impacted by these events in varying ways)

## TRAUMA-INFORMED SCHOOL PRACTICES

- Safety
- Belonging
- A sense of competency
- Choice
- Empowerment
- De-escalation



**On a larger, school-wide scale, the following practices help develop a more trauma-informed environment.**

### **Safety**

- Establish a safe spot in the classroom, direct teach and remind student how to use this; reinforce and praise student for using it; ensure a calm and reassuring presence
- Direct teach and practice calming/relaxation strategies.
- Consistency of expectations, procedures and routines creates safety (remind student frequently of these); make student aware as much as possible of changes in schedule, routine, etc.
- Respect student's physical boundaries. Many students who have been traumatized may react strongly to touch, feeling cornered or restricting their movement.
- Have built in breaks for movement (movement is regulating). Many students who have been traumatized get overwhelmed easily and movement allows them to get rid of excessive energy and regulate.
- Give student breaks if you notice overwhelm building or agitation

### **A sense of belonging**

- Have specific times of day to check in with student;

- Include student in small group with peers
- Provide opportunities for student to be involved in
- Class / school (class job, run errands, etc.)
- Verbal / non-verbal praise often
- Smile often at them and help them feel connected to you

#### **A sense of competency**

- Provide many opportunities for student to be successful in non-academic activities
- Label student's feelings often ("You worked hard on your math test. You must feel proud.")  
Traumatized students often have difficulty labeling/recognizing feelings
- Allow student opportunity to express concerns/frustrations and help student problem-solve
- Praise efforts to communicate needs

#### **Choice**

- Supporting control over student's own choices, where possible

#### **Empowerment**

- Identify strengths, prioritize building skills that promote healing and growth

#### **De-escalation**

- Being aware of our tone and body language when a student becomes activated (see handout on de-escalation)

Source: <http://ciscentraltexas.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Trauma-Training-Toolkit-8-29-2016.pdf> (pg 25)

## MEET MICHAEL

Michael is 15 and repeating the ninth grade. He's in your world history class and habitually tilts his chair back and drums annoyingly on his desk with a pencil. This morning, he was doing it—again—while you were trying to teach.

A punitive response might mean taking away the pencil, kicking Michael out of class, or even referring him for disciplinary action.

A trauma-informed response would shift the reaction in important ways. It would mean adopting a social emotional lens and shifting thinking to consider *what might be causing the behavior.*



### SO LET'S TALK ABOUT HOW A TRAUMA-INFORMED RESPONSE IN SCHOOL DIFFERS FROM A ZERO-TOLERANCE, PUNITIVE RESPONSE.

#### MEET MICHAEL

Michael is 15 and repeating the ninth grade. He's in your world history class and habitually tilts his chair back and drums annoyingly on his desk with a pencil. This morning, he was doing it—again—while you were trying to teach.

What do you do? A punitive teacher might take the pencil away, kick Michael out of class, or even refer him for disciplinary action. But there's always the opportunity to reflect and be more responsive.

Trauma-informed teachers shift their reactions in important ways.

- 1) They adopt a social emotional lens: What does Michael's tapping say about his mood? Is he bored or frustrated? Does the tapping bother other students, or just me?
- 2) It's also important to know students and develop cultural competency. Has something happened in Michael's community that might be contributing to his behavior?
- 3) The third shift calls for planning and delivering effective student-centered instruction. For

instance, what kinesthetic or rhythmic learning strategies might engage Michael?

4) Move the paradigm from punishment to development by determining what initial expectations Michael can meet--like not drumming for 10 minutes.

5) Finally, resist the criminalization of school behavior. Consider the consequences Michael will face if he misses class because he is suspended.

These five responsive shifts in teacher thinking apply even as a student's behavior escalates—and they can be the key to rerouting the school-to-prison pipeline.

## IN SMALL GROUPS...



Think through examples of trauma-informed responses to Michael's behavior (see handout).

Record your responses on the handout and identify a spokesperson to report back.

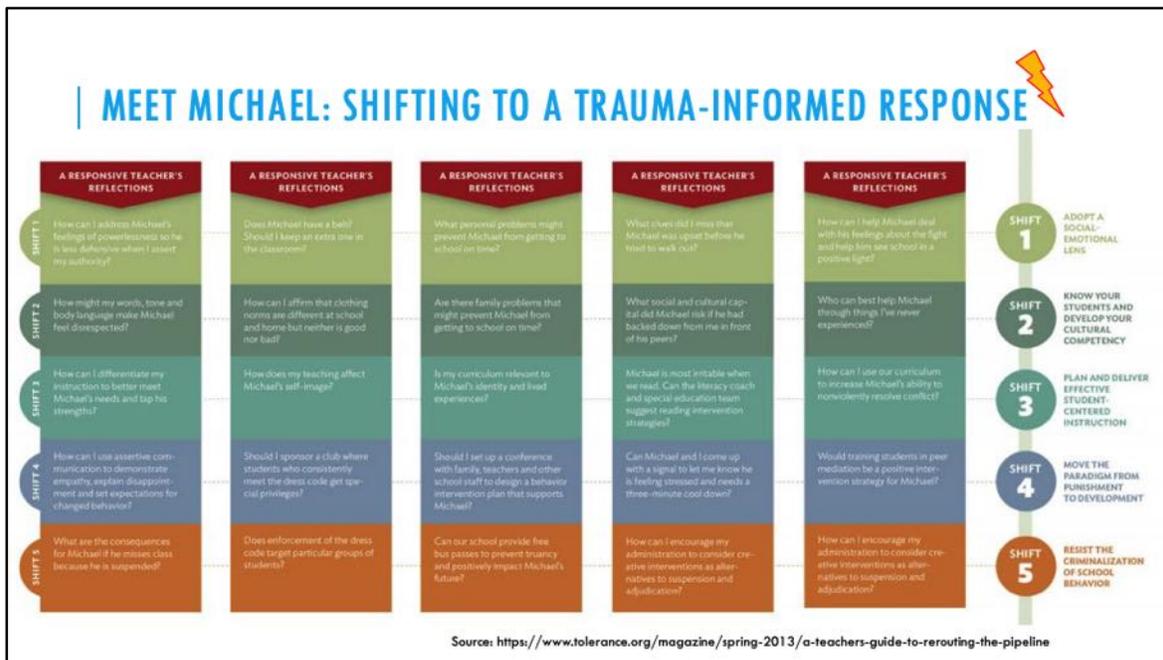


**Divide into 4 small groups. Each group takes 1 type of behavior to address.**

Think through examples of trauma-informed responses to Michael's behavior (see handout "Small group exercise: Punitive or responsive?—fill this out).

Record your responses on the handout and identify a spokesperson to report back.

**HANDOUT: Meet Michael: worksheet**



### HANDOUT: Meet Michael: worksheet

*Michael is 15 and repeating the ninth grade. He's in your world history class and habitually tilts his chair back and drums annoyingly on his desk with a pencil. This morning, he was doing it—again—while you were trying to teach.*

### WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

A **punitive response** might mean taking away the pencil, kicking Michael out of class, or even referring him for disciplinary action.

A **trauma-informed response** would shift the reaction in important ways. It would mean adopting a social emotional lens and shifting thinking to consider what might be **causing** the behavior, rather than simply reacting to the behavior itself.

### DIRECTIONS

In small groups, think through examples of trauma-informed responses to Michael's behavior. Identify a recorder and a spokesperson to report back.

### A. TYPE OF BEHAVIOR: Verbal Disrespect

Michael is defiant and uses inappropriate language when verbally redirected.

**PUNITIVE REACTION:** Argue with Michael, kick him out of class or refer him for disciplinary action.

**TRAUMA-INFORMED RESPONSE:**

**Adopt a social-emotional lens:** How can I address Michael's feeling of powerlessness so he is less defensive when I redirect him?

**Know your students and develop your cultural competency:** How might my words, tone, and body language make Michael feel respected or disrespected?

**Plan and deliver effective student instruction:** How can I differentiate my instruction to better meet Michael's needs and tap into his strengths?

**Move the paradigm from punishment to development:** How can I use direct and gentle communication to demonstrate empathy, explain disappointment, and set expectations for changed behavior?

**Resist the criminalization of school behavior:** What are the consequences for Michael if he misses class or gets suspended?

**B. TYPE OF BEHAVIOR: Dress Code Violation**

Michael comes to class without a belt on, pants sagging.

**PUNITIVE REACTION:** Lecture Michael about the dress code in front of classmates, kick him out of class or refer him for disciplinary action.

**TRAUMA-INFORMED RESPONSE:**

**Adopt a social-emotional lens:** Does Michael have a belt? Should I keep an extra one in the classroom?

**Know your students and develop your cultural competency:** How can I affirm that clothing norms are different at home and at school, but neither is good nor bad?

**Plan and deliver effective student instruction:** How does my teaching affect Michael's self-image?

**Move the paradigm from punishment to development:** Should I sponsor a dress code where students who consistently meet the dress code are given special privileges?

**Resist the criminalization of school behavior:** Does enforcement of the dress code target particular groups of students?

**C. TYPE OF BEHAVIOR: Lateness or Truancy**

Michael is frequently absent from or tardy to his first-period class and is failing.

**PUNITIVE REACTION:** Lock the door after the bell rings and give Michael zeros with no make-up option for work he missed.

**TRAUMA-INFORMED RESPONSE:**

**Adopt a social-emotional lens:** What barriers might prevent Michael from getting to school on time?

**Know your students and develop your cultural competency:** Are there family issues that might prevent Michael from getting to school on time?

**Plan and deliver effective student instruction:** Is my curriculum relevant to Michael's identity and lived experiences?

**Move the paradigm from punishment to development:** Should I set up a conference with family, teachers, and other school staff to design a behavior intervention plan that supports Michael?

**Resist the criminalization of school behavior:** Can our school provide free bus passes to prevent

truancy and positively impact Michael's future?

**D. TYPE OF BEHAVIOR: Aggressive Physical Behavior**

Michael shouldered his teacher out of the way when she blocked the classroom door as he tried to leave.

**PUNITIVE REACTION:** Argue with Michael, call the school resource officer, bar him from class or press assault charges.

**TRAUMA-INFORMED RESPONSE:**

**Adopt a social-emotional lens:** What clues did I miss that Michael was upset before he tried to walk out?

**Know your students and develop your cultural competency:** What social capital did Michael risk if he had backed down from me in front of his peers?

**Plan and deliver effective student instruction:** Michael is most irritable when we read. Can the literacy coach and special education team suggest reading intervention strategies?

**Move the paradigm from punishment to development:** Can Michael and I come up with a signal to let me know he's stressed and needs a 3-minute cool down?

**Resist the criminalization of school behavior:** How can I encourage my administration to consider creative interventions as alternatives to suspension and adjudication?

**E. TYPE OF BEHAVIOR: Fighting**

Michael got into a fight in the hallway during first period. There were no serious injuries.

**PUNITIVE REACTION:** Avoid involvement or request that Michael not be allowed back in class because he poses a threat.

**TRAUMA-INFORMED RESPONSE:**

**Adopt a social-emotional lens:** How can I be a trusted adult to Michael so he will be more likely to talk to me about what was at the root of the fight?

**Know your students and develop your cultural competency:** Who can best help Michael through things I've never experienced?

**Plan and deliver effective student instruction:** How can I use our curriculum to enhance Michael's ability to resolve conflict without violence?

**Move the paradigm from punishment to development:** Would training students in peer mediation be a positive intervention for Michael?

**Resist the criminalization of school behavior:** How can I encourage my administration to consider creative interventions as alternatives to suspension and adjudication?



**These hopes are expressed by a young person who is currently incarcerated.  
What if we believed the possibility of change, redemption, learning from one's mistakes?**

What if we thought of kids, even kids who act up, who do harm, as needing protection and understanding, rather than punishment and control?

What if created that world where all children are nurtured, especially when they act in ways that tell us they need us?

This is possible.

**"How can we keep kids free?"** By Anthony

Video created at ART 180, as part of the Performing Statistics project.

Incarcerated youth worked with local filmmakers OK Keyes, Elizabeth Williams, Ben Surber, and Craig Zirpolo to create a short video public service announcement to respond to the question, "How can we keep kids free?"

Find out more information at: [performingstatistics.org](http://performingstatistics.org)



<https://vimeo.com/channels/keepkidsfree/180653709>



**Finally, it's important for us to hear from kids themselves about why they need...**

**Powerful films produced, written, directed, and filmed by 14-17 year olds incarcerated at the Richmond Detention center.**

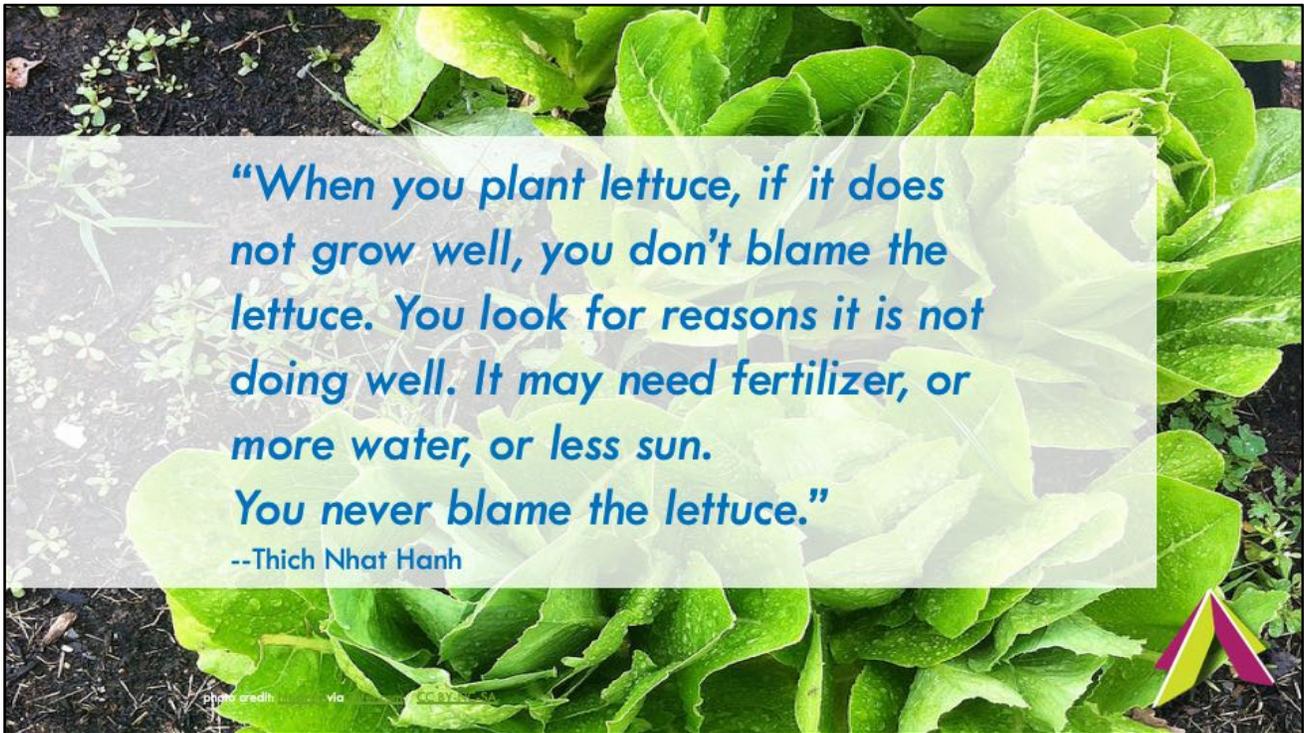
In the summer of 2016 at ART 180, as part of the Performing Statistics project, incarcerated youth worked with local filmmakers OK Keyes, Elizabeth Williams, Ben Surber, and Craig Zirpolo to create a short video public service announcement.

Each teen's film responds to the question, "What can keep kids free?"

Each short film is each youth's own story. From reflections on family members that are incarcerated to families struggles with money, to the need to get jobs to help support their loved ones, these films move in powerful and personal ways.

Find out more information at: [performingstatistics.org](http://performingstatistics.org)

<https://vimeo.com/channels/keepkidsfree/180653709>



**When we slip back into punitive habits, Thich Nhat Hanh may help us re-frame our thinking: *“When you plant lettuce, if it does not grow well, you don’t blame the lettuce. You look for reasons it is not doing well. It may need fertilizer, or more water, or less sun. You never blame the lettuce.”***

What if when we noticed that kids weren’t thriving in school that we didn’t blame the kids? That instead we looked at the environment, the things that were happening to the kids...and thought to ourselves, “How do we make those things better”?

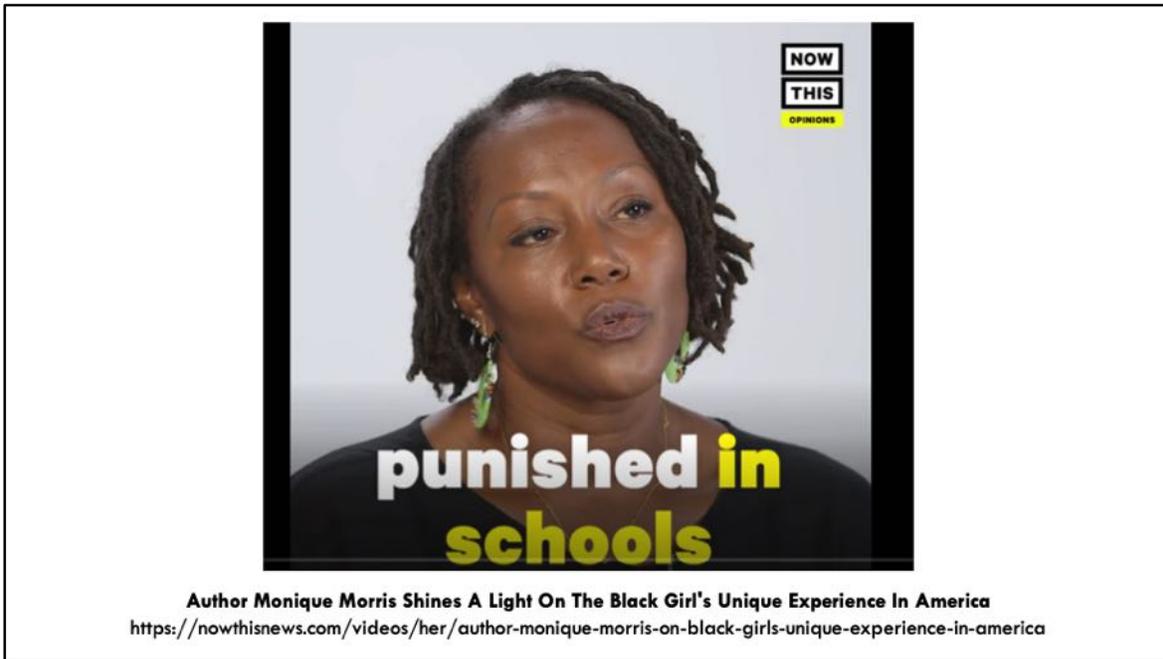
**Thich Nhat Hanh** is a Vietnamese monk, a renowned Zen master, a poet, and a peace activist.

Lettuce photo credit: [htomren](#) via [Foter.com](#) / [CC BY-NC-SA](#)



END OF TRAINING IN A BOX  
ENTER YOUR NAME, EMAIL, AND WEBSITE

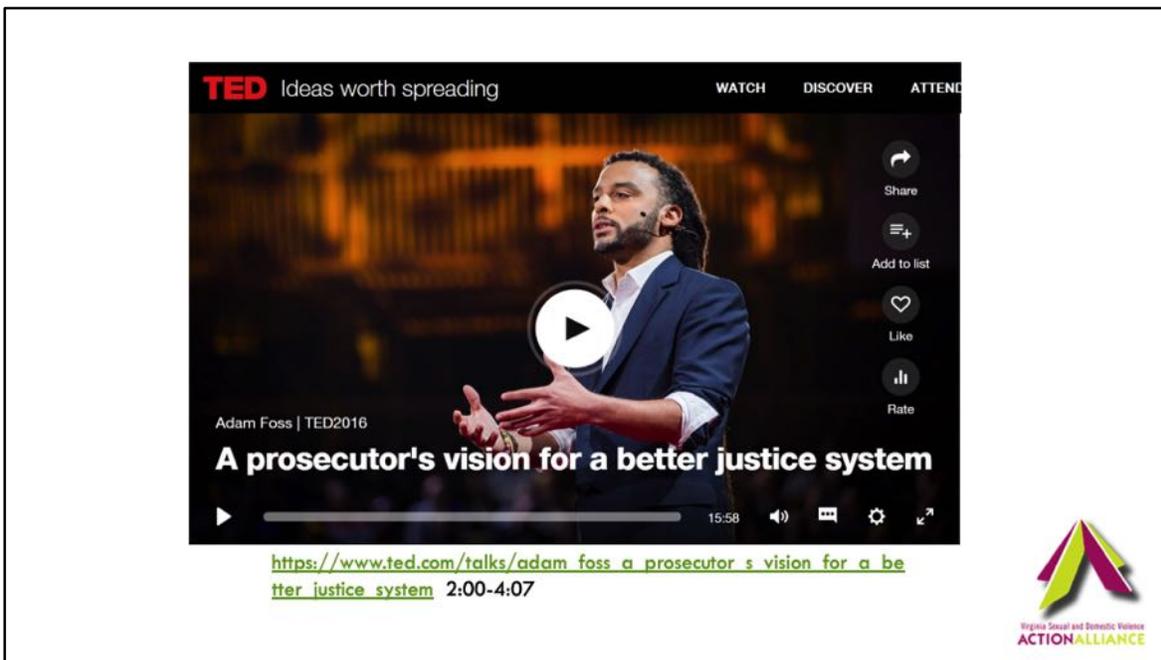




**Author Monique Morris Shines A Light On The Black Girl's Unique Experience In America**

**Clip length: 4:52**

<https://nowthisnews.com/videos/her/author-monique-morris-on-black-girls-unique-experience-in-america>



Video: A prosecutor's vision for a better justice system. Source:  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/adam\\_foss\\_a\\_prosecutor\\_s\\_vision\\_for\\_a\\_better\\_justice\\_system](https://www.ted.com/talks/adam_foss_a_prosecutor_s_vision_for_a_better_justice_system)

**Adam Foss, a prosecutor with the Suffolk County District Attorney's Office in Boston, makes his case for a reformed justice system that replaces wrath with opportunity, changing people's lives for the better instead of ruining them.**

([https://www.ted.com/talks/adam\\_foss\\_a\\_prosecutor\\_s\\_vision\\_for\\_a\\_better\\_justice\\_system](https://www.ted.com/talks/adam_foss_a_prosecutor_s_vision_for_a_better_justice_system))

#### **WATCH 2:00-4:07**

*Transcript: Near the end of my first year of law school, I got an internship in the Roxbury Division of Boston Municipal Court. I knew of Roxbury as an impoverished neighborhood in Boston, plagued by gun violence and drug crime. My life and my legal career changed the first day of that internship. I walked into a courtroom, and I saw an auditorium of people who, one by one, would approach the front of that courtroom to say two words and two words only: "Not guilty." They were predominately black and brown. And then a judge, a defense attorney and a prosecutor would make life-altering decisions about that person without their input. They were predominately white. As each person, one by one, approached the front of that courtroom, I couldn't stop but think: How did they get here? I wanted to know their stories. And as the prosecutor read the facts of each case, I was*

*thinking to myself, we could have predicted that. That seems so preventable... not because I was an expert in criminal law, but because it was common sense.*

*Over the course of the internship, I began to recognize people in the auditorium, not because they were criminal masterminds but because they were coming to us for help and we were sending them out without any.*

*My second year of law school I worked as a paralegal for a defense attorney, and in that experience I met many young men accused of murder. Even in our "worst," I saw human stories. And they all contained childhood trauma, victimization, poverty, loss, disengagement from school, early interaction with the police and the criminal justice system, all leading to a seat in a courtroom. Those convicted of murder were condemned to die in prison, and it was during those meetings with those men that I couldn't fathom why we would spend so much money to keep this one person in jail for the next 80 years when we could have reinvested it up front, and perhaps prevented the whole thing from happening in the first place. (stop at applause) 4:07*

**Question for group after video: DO YOU THINK ANY OF THE KIDS ADAM FOSS CAME ACROSS WERE DEALING WITH ACES OR TOXIC STRESS?**



Video: WHEN SCHOOLS HAVE MORE COPS THAN COUNSELORS (length: 3:25)

**So, we know that the majority of middle and high schools, and now many elementary schools, employ School Resource Officers (SROs); what is the impact of having SROs in school?**

An investigation by watchdog group, “The 74 million” finds that 4 of America's top 10 school districts hire more security officers than counselors — and that there are no federal laws governing special training for these school cops.

The problem of the trauma-to-prison pipeline does not lie solely with the number of school resources officers currently installed in schools, but it is a significant piece of the puzzle.

## 5 KEY PRINCIPLES OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

1. Focus on the harms and consequent needs of the victims, as well as the communities and the offenders;
2. Address the obligations that arise from those harms;
3. Use inclusive, collaborative processes;
4. Involve those with a legitimate stake in the situation;
5. Seek to put right the wrongs.

Source: The Little Book of Restorative Justice by Howard Zehr, 2002.



1. Focus on the harms and consequent needs of the victims, as well as the communities and the offenders;
2. Address the obligations that arise from those harms (obligations of offender, as well as community's and society's)
3. Use inclusive, collaborative processes;
4. Involve those with a legitimate stake in the situation, including victims, offenders, community members, and society
5. Seek to put right the wrongs.
6. (note; importance of being connected in community with the people in the circle—do they look like me?)

Source: The Little Book of Restorative Justice by Howard Zehr, 2002.

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**Restorative practices function from the belief that human beings respond best to**

**decision making processes and authority when their voices are heard and they've had meaningful input.** This is true for both youth and adults. The restorative model combines high levels of control with high levels of support, engaging people in processes that are done *with* them rather than *for* them or *to* them. The goal is to have participants exercise their own agency and make good choices for themselves, not simply punish them or take action for them.

*Source: Defining Restorative (link to resource <http://www.iirp.edu/pdf/Defining-Restorative.pdf>) by Ted Wachtel, International Institute for Restorative Practices*

## RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IS NOT...

1. ...primarily about forgiveness and reconciliation;
2. ...mediation;
3. ...a particular program or blueprint;
4. ...primarily intended or comparatively "minor" offenses or first-time offenders;
5. ...a new development.

Source: The Little Book of Restorative Justice by Howard Zehr, 2002.



### ***RJ is not...***

1. **...primarily about forgiveness and reconciliation;**
  - This is a choice that is entirely up to the participants.
2. **...mediation;**
  - Many RJ programs are designed around the possibility of a facilitated meeting between victims, offenders, and sometimes community members...however and encounter is not always chosen or appropriate. Even when parties meet, mediation does not fit because with mediation both parties are assumed to be on a level playing field, often with shared responsibilities on all sides. Also, the neutral language of mediation may also be misleading/offensive in many cases.
3. **...a particular program or blueprint;**
  - RJ is a compass, not a map. All models are to some extent culture-bound, so RJ should be built by communities from the bottom-up, by communities in dialogue assessing their needs and resources and applying the principles to their own situations.
4. **...primarily intended or comparatively "minor" offenses or first-time offenders;**
  - It may be easier to get community support for programs that address so-called "minor" cases. However, RJ approaches may have the greatest impact on more severe cases. **Domestic violence remains, however, the most**

**problematic area of application and here great caution is advised.**

**5. ...a new or North American development.**

- **The modern RJ movement owes a great debt to the Native people of North America and New Zealand. The roots of restorative justice connect back to a wide variety of indigenous and religious practices** such as the Mohawk Nation of Akwesasne band council in Canada, which has established a indigenous people's court according to Mohawk principles. Likewise, the Jewish practice of Teshuva, or atonement, has been linked not only to punishing the offender but also to a holistic reparation of the relationship between offender and victim. (*source: The Nation: <https://www.thenation.com/article/what-is-prison-abolition/>*)

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***Is this just about sitting around talking in a circle?***

**NO. There is a spectrum of restorative practices from informal to formal.**

The most critical function of restorative practices is restoring and building relationships. Because informal and formal restorative processes foster the expression of affect or emotion, they also foster emotional bonds.

At the informal end are practices such as making **affective statements** such as “When you disrupted class, it impacted me in this way...” and asking **affective questions** “What was your intention when you did that?” Affective questions and statements can be used on a day to day basis to develop more open lines of communication and deeper understandings.

At the more formal end are restorative circles and conferences, which are typically used when some infraction has occurred. Circles bring together offenders, victims, and other people that have been impacted to discuss what happened, identify underlying issues, and develop solutions that repair harm and hold people accountable.

Circles can also be used more informally and in impromptu circumstances as a way to discuss a topic in class, get people's input on issues in school, or just check in with how people are doing.

*Source: Defining Restorative*