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TANYA FRITZ ○ 2/1/19 @ 8:43 AM



Words like trauma-informed and resiliency get thrown around a lot these days. And for many, the visions they call up are a bit too glossy. You see resiliency and trauma-informed aren't always pretty. Resiliency can look like closing the bathroom door and collapsing in tears... but then washing your face and going back into the world, carrying the belief that you can survive and the hope that things will get better. It looks like begrudgingly going on that walk with a friend, when the little voice inside is yelling at you to just grab a bag of chips and curl up on the couch with Netflix. Heck, you might even go back to the couch after the walk. It means saying the wrong thing, then being brave enough to go back and apologize. Resiliency doesn't mean that life doesn't get you down, that you don't still stumble, or that you don't sometimes still make the wrong choice. Resiliency means that all of that happens, and through support and self-regulation, you are able to continue to keep moving forward. Even if every day isn't always better than the last, your overall trajectory is still forward. Resiliency is a journey full of twists and turns. We make get off track, but we ultimately know where we are headed.

The same is true with trauma-informed. It is not a magic wand that instantly changes everything. When we envision a trauma-informed school, we may imagine children laughing, meditating, and doing regular check-ins on their emotional and mental health. And all of these are beautiful examples of a trauma-informed school. But you'll also see other things. You will likely still see teachers getting frustrated at times, you may hear kids fighting or swearing, and you will probably still see children struggling with lots of things. This doesn't mean trauma-informed isn't working... it is simply a reminder that being trauma-informed is a choice we make over and over again. The first time a child doesn't respond the way we hope, we do not give up. We understand that mistakes will be part of the journey. We use our own resiliency

skills to continue to focus on the long-term goal and to take care of ourselves. We remember our goal isn't to fix the behavior in front of us, but rather to create safety and calmness where the person can heal. Trauma-informed is a marathon, not a sprint. It takes determination to keep it going, even when some days are really hard.

This message really struck me as I watched the film *Paper Tigers* again this week. This movie follows a group of students and staff at an alternative high school in Walla Walla, Washington. After learning about how stress and trauma can impact the brain, staff commits to implementing a trauma-sensitive approach within the school. They focus on building relationships, they bring in wrap-around medical and mental health services, they teach their students about trauma and how it can impact them, and ultimately they get to know the individual strengths and challenges of their students. They see their behaviors as a reflection of the pain they are experiencing, rather than simply oppositional or disrespectful. They do all this.... and the kids still get in fights. They still go through periods where they don't come to school. They still struggle with choices around drugs and sexuality. If you simply walked into the school, you may see these things and wonder if they are making a difference. But they are. Trauma-informed care isn't about "fixing" the kid in front of you. It's about supporting them as they grow. Trauma-informed is the complicated act of staying in the moment so that the long-term goals can be met. When you look at the school through this lens, you see a different picture. You see teachers going beyond the rough veneer to find the loveable child inside each of their students. You see them ignoring the behavior in front of them, and instead focusing on the relationship. This is evident in a powerful text exchange where a student is clearly struggling. He is avoiding school and attempts to push the teacher away with swearing and insults. The teacher responds, letting the student know he is simply worried about him and cares about him and hopes he returns. This student does return to school, knowing he will be accepted. He goes on to graduate. Would have the story been different if the teacher had first attended to the "disrespectful" language, rather than reassuring the student? This is such a powerful example of how we can use our own self-regulation to keep us on course and attend to the emotions we are seeing and feeling, rather than simply addressing the behavior. Ultimately, the school is successful. Graduation rates increase, fights decrease, and test scores go up. Most importantly, the students graduate high school understanding themselves better and feeling like they belong. They leave with hope.

Resilient individuals come in all shapes and sizes. Sometimes they look like they have it all together. Sometimes they have piercings, they may have blue hair, and at times may seem a little rough around the edges. Trauma-informed care doesn't change the way these individuals look, it changes the way we see them. Honestly, I like this messy version of resiliency and trauma-informed care. It's real and reminds us how hard it is to stay focused and calm. It gives hope to those who are struggling. It paints a true picture of what living with trauma looks like. We don't need filters or Photoshop... just the right lens and good focus. This work is authentic. And it is beautiful. #nofilter

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PEER VAN DER HELM ○ 13 HOURS AGO

Nice piece, I always tell the teachers (special education) trauma is not like a broken leg.