

## **Children Who Fail at School But Succeed at Life**

### **Advances in Our Understanding of Human Resilience and of the Limits of Emotional Endurance**

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**Mark Katz, Ph.D.**

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## **Children Who Fail at School But Succeed at Life**

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- Part I: Introduction: *Why Do People Keep Asking the Wrong Question?*
- Part II: Advances in Our Understanding of Human Resilience and of the Limits of Emotional Endurance
- Part III: *"To Have Erroneous Perceptions and to Reason Correctly From Them"*
- Part IV: What Can Be

## **Part I: Introduction**

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### *Why Do People Keep Asking the Wrong Question?*

## **Resilience Through the Life Span**

- Why is it that some people exposed to multiple childhood risks and adversities "beat the odds" and manage to go on to lead meaningful and productive lives?
- Why is it that others succumb then rebound decades later?
- Is it because those who "beat the odds" are more resilient?
- Are we sure?
- Might some who succumb to adversity be every bit as resilient as those who endure, or even more so? (Might some adults?)
- Have we been focusing on the wrong question?

## **Resilience Through the Life Span**

- What could cause otherwise resilient people to succumb to risk and adversity?
- And why do a number then rebound decades later?
- Resilience Through the Life Span Project
- Current focus: People who fail at school but succeed in life

## **PART II**

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### **Advances in Our Understanding of Human Resilience,**

### **And of the Limits of Emotional Endurance**

## **Resilience Through the Lifespan**

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- Resilience: strength under adversity
- Emmy Werner – following children exposed to 4 or more risks, now in their 40s. Significant # who succumbed through age 18 rebounded by their early 30s. Still doing well in their 40s.

## **Are There Limits to Emotional Endurance? Long Term Multiple Risk Exposure**

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- Risks can co-occur
- “A man with one watch always knows what time it is, a man with two is never really sure.”
- Risks can co-occur and can also persist (ACES can co-occur and can also persist)
- Protective processes that can offset multiple prolonged risk exposure (Werner and Smith, 2001)

## **Protective Influences**

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Events, Experiences, Conditions  
That Can Outweigh or Neutralize  
the Effects of Exposure  
to Known Risk Factors

## **ACE Study**

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- Introducing protective processes, including programs and practices, that can outweigh the effects of multiple childhood risk exposure may do more than reduce the risk of serious learning, behavioral, emotional and life adjustment problems down the road.
- We may prevent/reduce incidence of major health consequences decades later.

## **Protective Processes That Researchers Feel Can Offset the Effects of Multiple Childhood Risks**

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(Werner et al, 2001)

1. Experiences That Reduce the Impact of Prevailing Risks:
  - A. Learning to see adversities in a new light
  - B. Reducing the amount of exposure to the risks of adverse conditions (role of context); buffers
2. Preventing a Chain Reaction of Negative Life Events; Creating Safety Nets
3. Experiences That Promote a Sense of Mastery (Mastery to meaning connection)
4. Opening the Door to Turning Point Experiences or Second Chance Opportunities

## **Part III**

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*“To Have Erroneous  
Perceptions and to Reason  
Correctly From Them”*

## Part III

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*“What is Madness? To Have  
Erroneous Perceptions and to  
Reason Correctly From Them”*

Voltaire

### *“To Have Erroneous Perceptions and to Reason Correctly From Them”*

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- Paradoxically uneven learning, behavioral and emotional profiles (sometimes observed in children exposed to multiple risks and adversities)
- Can they lead caring people with the best of intentions to several entirely understandable yet erroneous perceptions?
- Can these erroneous perceptions over-ride protective processes that for some could outweigh exposure to multiple risks and adversities?
- 5 erroneous perceptions

### **Erroneous Perception #1**

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- Anyone capable of performing exceptionally well on intellectual, creative or artistic tasks that most others find very difficult, is necessarily capable performing equally well or better on academic or behavioral tasks that most others find very easy.
- It's all simply a matter of trying harder.

### **For Whom the Bell Curve Tolls**

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- Individual strengths and talents –
  - Possible to be strong (sometimes extremely so) in complex intellectual areas, and/or areas that involve creativity and inventiveness,
  - And weak (sometimes extremely so), in areas that most others in one's age range can master with little effort.
  - Trying harder in these weak areas may not allow one to do much better.

### For Whom the Bell Curve Tolls (cont)

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- This profile is common among children/youth/adults who experience various learning disabilities/differences
- Examples...

### **Erroneous Perception #2**

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- Anyone who knows what they're supposed to do in a given situation can be expected to predictably, consistently and independently do what they know, one hundred percent of the time.
- It's all about willpower.

## The Role of Executive Function

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- It's possible for someone to know what to do, yet have problems consistently, predictably and independently doing what they know.
- Learning/behavioral profile is consistent with individuals (children, youth, adults) with executive function challenges  
(Barkley, 2010; 2002)

## The Role of Executive Function

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- To complete tasks, reach goals, solve problems and get along well with others we rely on executive function – a family of mental processes
- These mental processes work in harmony.
- It's our ability to coordinate these processes that allow us to plan, organize, manage and emotionally regulate our lives.
- Experts in the field use different metaphors to this coordinating role – Our brain's orchestra conductor, air traffic controller, or chief executive officer

## Examples of Mental Processes Under the EF Umbrella

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- Self-Control – Behavioral Inhibition
- Emotional Self-Regulation
- Organization, Time Management, Planning (OTMP)  
(Howard Abikoff et al., 2014)
- Mental Flexibility
- Self-Monitoring
- Working Memory

## The Role of Executive Function (Cont)

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- Executive function: Allows us to take what we know and govern ourselves with this knowledge.
- Executive function delays/weaknesses impact our ability to do what we know.

## The Role of Executive Function (Cont)

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- What can cause EF challenges?

Learning/behavioral profile  
(neurodevelopmental profile)

Prolonged traumatic stress exposure  
(Perry, 2002)

Both, in combination

Other conditions?

## Interpersonal Trauma and Executive Functioning

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- Among those suffering the effects of traumatic stress, neuroimaging studies reveal decrease in activation in brain regions associated with executive functioning (van der Kolk, 2006).

### **Executive Function Challenges: Possible Sources of Confusion**

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1. Children (and adults) with EF challenges can know what to do yet have difficulty consistently, predictably and independently doing what they know (Barkley, 2010; Goldstein, 2001). Will respond better to reminders, cues, prompts, strategies at the point of performance.
2. May exhibit exceptional strengths in intellectual, creative and/or other areas, yet struggle at tasks most would consider simple, if not automatic.
3. May do far better (and sometimes very well) in situations they find stimulating and interesting.

### **Executive Function Challenges : Possible Sources of Confusion**

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4. When they finally do successfully complete a particularly lengthy assignment, they may be so mentally exhausted that they're less able to complete their current assignment (unless they re-fuel their emotional self-regulation fuel tank) Self-regulation, it turns out, is a depletable resource.
5. When assessed, many will meet dx criteria for ADHD – Dx will confuse some since they will pay attention very well when they're interested in what they're doing.

### **Erroneous Perception #3**

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- The single measure of human intelligence is school performance. Those who do very well in school, therefore, are very smart, and those who don't do very well in school, therefore, are not.

### **Learning to See Abilities in a New Light (cont)**

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- It's not how smart are we, but rather, how are we smart?
- Howard Gardner, Ph.D. - Diverse intellectual strengths
  - linguistic
  - logical-mathematical
  - musical
  - kinesthetic
  - spatial
  - naturalist
  - interpersonal
  - intrapersonal

### **Learning to View Abilities in a New Light: "Successful Intelligence" – Robert Sternberg, Ph.D.**

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- Successful intelligence: To be able to draw upon the abilities we need to succeed in life based upon our personal notion of success (Sternberg).
- Acting upon our environment in a way that maximizes our opportunities for success.
  - May require that we try to change conditions so they match more closely with our strengths.
  - May mean seeking out entirely different environments that provide new and better opportunities for success.
  - Or it may require that we adapt to current conditions as best we can.

### **Erroneous Perception #4**

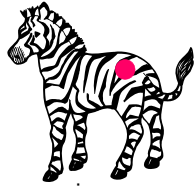
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- Individuals, school age children included, can be expected to think and act the same way in situations they perceive as safe, friendly and within their ability to control as they do in situations they perceive as dangerous, threatening and beyond their ability to control.

### **Portraits of Resilience- In Context**

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- Resilience and context are inseparable
- In an environment that you perceive as dangerous and threatening, it makes no sense, from a survival point of view, to appear conspicuously vulnerable



### **The Impact of Social Climate On Emotional Well Being and Quality of life**

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- Numbers of children/teens who won't accept help – because they feel stigmatized
- Repelled by special placements
- Won't speak to counselors
- Would rather suffer in silence than be target of ridicule

### **The Impact of Social Climate (cont)**

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- Numbers of adults in the workplace or elsewhere who won't accept help – because they feel stigmatized
- Won't speak to doctors or counselors
- Would rather suffer in silence than be target of ridicule

### **Erroneous Perception #5**

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Believing as we do in erroneous perception #4, it follows that resilience and success are one and the same. Those who succeed at school are resilient. Those who fail are not, logically speaking.

Programs that draw from those who “beat the odds” in an effort to help those who succumb.

### **Are There Limits to Emotional Endurance?**

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- The impact of prolonged inescapable stress
- Can we inadvertently create these conditions?
- Can misperceptions result in believing that our challenges (adversities) as permanent, pervasive and personal?

### **Perceiving Adversities To Be Permanent, Pervasive & Personal**

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(Seligman, 1992)

- **Permanent** – the perception that things will never change
- **Pervasive** – problems are evident not just in one life area, they're pervasive
- **Personal** – It's all your fault.
- Learning to see adversities in these 3 ways increases the likelihood of psychological problems; may also weaken our immune system
- Start young, may be especially impairing

### **Perceptions That Foster Resilience**

(Seligman, 1998; 1992)

- Adversities are temporary – the perception that things will get better
- Adversities are limited – Things may not be going well in one area but they are going well in others areas
- Not personal – Doing the best we can under the circumstances

## **Part IV**

### **What Can Be**

### **Changing the Odds**

- Perceptions > processes > practices
- New perceptions = greater access to protective processes and programs/practices that can foster them
- Contextual influences (protective processes contextually expressed)

### **Perception #1**

- It's indeed possible that some people can be capable of doing difficult things easy yet find easy things difficult for reasons that can have nothing to do with laziness or a person's moral character.

### **Perception #2**

It's entirely possible for someone to know what to do yet have difficulty consistently, predictably and independently doing what they know, in part, because they call into play different skills (Barkley, 2010; Goldstein 2001).

### **Perception #3**

There are many different ways of being smart, some of which can't be measured by how well one does in school.

#### **Perception #4**

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Resilient people, school age children included, sometimes think and act differently in places they find threatening and dangerous as opposed to places they find warm and friendly, particularly when those threatening and dangerous places are also perceived as stigmatizing, inescapable and beyond their ability to control or influence.

#### **Perception #5**

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It's these contextual influences that can determine whether we endure in the face of adversity or are stretched to our limits of emotional endurance, which helps to explain why some of the most resilient people we will ever have the pleasure of meeting may struggle significantly just to get through a typical day, school-age children included.

#### **Can You Guess?**

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- It can make you look virtue-less or virtuous, utterly blind or remarkably kind.
- It's character's best friend, or sometimes its worst enemy.
- It fuels prejudice, and human understanding.
- It can propel us to kill one another, allow us to love one another, and help us to heal one another.

#### **Can You Guess?**

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- And while few things are more important in improving the quality of our lives and curing our major social ills, in the final analysis, it may also be impossible to measure.
- What is it?

#### **Virtuous or Virtue-less, Utterly Blind or Remarkably Kind**

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- Classic study dating back to the 1970's - Princeton Seminary students asked to deliver a presentation on the parable of the Good Samaritan.
- On a Tuesday morning in August, 2001, Seattle motorists notice a distraught, 26 year-old Tacoma-area woman, sitting on the southbound railing of the Interstate 5 Ship Canal Bridge

#### **Character's Best Friend, or It's Worst Enemy**

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- Zimbardo Prison Experiment - had to be discontinued after several days when the Stanford students acting as prison guards began acting in sadistic and inhumane ways, and some of the Stanford students acting as prisoners started showing signs of extreme distress.



### **It Fuels Prejudice, and Human Understanding**

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- In a small mining town in West Virginia, underground integration was the norm for African American and White coal miners who worked side by side. But the norm above ground was segregation.
- It seemed not a matter of personal feelings or of deep-seated animosity, but rather whether you spent time together underground or above ground (Aronson, 1995).

### **It Can Propel us to Kill One Another, Allow Us to Love One Another, Help Us to Heal One Another**

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- Before leaving for work each morning, military personnel living in Las Vegas say goodbye to their wives and children, then drive off to nearby Nellis Air Force Base where they fly drones over Iraq, skillfully guiding the aircraft to their designated targets, then releasing bombs that ultimately kill people. When the workday ends, they return home to their families (Sapolsky, 2009).

### **It Can Propel us to Kill One Another, Allow Us to Love One Another, Help Us to Heal One Another**

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- A CBS news interviewer asked a Jewish surgeon working at the Hadassah Medical Center in Jerusalem: *"What if a terrorist bomber was seriously injured and brought to Hadassah Medical Center in Jerusalem for treatment that could save his life?"*
- The surgeon replied that he would work as hard to save the person's life as he would to save the life of an Israeli child injured in a terrorist attack.
- *"What if you encountered the terrorist on the street,"* asked the interviewer. Replied the surgeon, "I would shoot him." (Hewitt, 2003)

### **Examples of Some of Its Many Other Hidden Powers**

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- Researchers asked study subjects to solve a series of arithmetic problems, then divided them into two groups, one assigned the label "boss," the other "assistant." Group members were given tasks to perform appropriate to their roles, then again asked to solve a series of arithmetic problems. "Assistants" performed about half as successfully as they did previously, while bosses performed as well as before (Langer, 1989; Langer & Benevento, 1978).

### **Examples of Some of Its Many Other Hidden Powers**

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- If a large coconut costs 76 cruzeiros, and a small one costs 50 cruzeiros, how much do the two cost together? In other words, how much is 76 plus 50? It's the same problem, just phrased a little differently.
- Or is it? When researchers asked both questions to uneducated Brazilian children working as street vendors, 98 percent could solve the first problem successfully, but only 37 percent could solve it when presented the second way (Carraher, Carraher & Schliermann, 1985).

### **Examples of Some of Its Many Other Hidden Powers**

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- Researcher Ellen Langer, Ph.D. had her students ask their friends to do either 100 jumping jacks or 200 jumping jacks, then to ask each one when they began getting tired. Both groups reported getting tired two thirds of the way through the activity, even though one group exercised twice as much (Langer, 2009).

### Examples of Some of Its Many Other Hidden Powers

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- After comparing two schools in the same economically disadvantaged neighborhood, British psychiatrist Michael Rutter, M.D. found that one school had a delinquency rate three times higher than the other, as well as more truancy problems and more behavioral and academic difficulties. The schools drew from the same population of students. The schools were different, not the students that attended them (Rutter, 1979).

## Can You Guess?

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### Can Be Our Greatest Problem, or Greatest Solution

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- What can represent a risk factor in one situation can serve as a protective factor in another. Our greatest problem can also be our greatest solution. It's all a matter of context.
- And while few things are more important when it comes to improving the quality of our lives and curing our major social ills, in the final analysis, we may be limited in our ability to recognize this - to truly appreciate the influence of context.

### Contextual Influences That Can "Change the Odds"

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- A framework for exploring how contextual influences help us rise above adverse childhood experiences
- Social Context
- Life experiences – In Context
- Relationships – In Context

### Contextual Influences That Can "Change the Odds"

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- **Social Context** = The ability to successfully seek out, change and/or accommodate to social contexts where we enjoy socially valued roles and responsibilities, and the opportunity to contribute significantly.
- **Life experiences – In Context** = Learning to see strengths, challenges, and adverse experiences in a hopeful new light.
- **Relationships – In Context** = While resilience is typically viewed through the lens of individual journeys, research suggests that our greatest source of strength may actually be each other.

### Contextual Influences

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- Contextual influences linked directly to protective processes that can potentially offset multiple childhood risk exposure (Werner et al 2001)
- (contextually expressed protective processes)
- See attached figure

### **Social Context**

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1. The opportunity to do what we love to do and also do well: The transforming power of meaningful work
2. Raising the bar and leveling the playing field
3. A change of scenery: The value of a fresh start

### **Life Experiences – In Context**

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4. Personal pathways to a sense of mastery
5. Learning to see human intelligence in a new light
6. When difference no longer signals danger
  - a. More labels, not less
  - b. Learning to see abilities as malleable, not fixed
  - c. Learning to see challenges in historical context
7. Translating the pain of our past into meaningful action on behalf of others

### **Relationships – In Context**

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8. "Beating the odds" thanks to those who "changed the odds"
  - a. Safety nets
  - b. Connecting to those who legitimize rather than stigmatize
9. Growing closer and stronger as a result of difficult or traumatic life events
  - a. Relationships as malleable, not fixed
10. Our greatest source of strength – Each other:  
A closer look at turning points

### **Social Context**

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1. The opportunity to do what we love to do and also do well: The transforming power of meaningful work
  - Providing meaningful roles and responsibilities
  - Jigsaw Classroom (project based learning?)  
[www.jigsawclassroom.org](http://www.jigsawclassroom.org)
  - PeaceBuilders [www.peacebuilders.com](http://www.peacebuilders.com)
  - Heroic Imagination Project  
[www.heroicimagination.org](http://www.heroicimagination.org)
  - PAX Good Behavior Game  
([www.goodbehaviorgame.org](http://www.goodbehaviorgame.org))

### **Social Context**

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2. Raising the bar and leveling the playing field
  - Raising the bar = raising expectations
  - Leveling the playing field = learning to use tools, strategies, technologies, supports, accommodations that can help us reach our goals

### **Leveling the Playing Field Helpful Technologies**

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- Pulse Smartpen [www.livescribe.com](http://www.livescribe.com)
- Docupen - portable scanner  
[www.docupen.com](http://www.docupen.com)
- Watchminder [www.watchminder.com](http://www.watchminder.com)
- Audiobooks [www.rfbd.org](http://www.rfbd.org) (866) RFBD-585
- Voice activated software
- Software programs that turn written text into audio material (e.g. Kurzweil's Program)

### **Raising the Bar**

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- Mentoring relationships
- Eye to Eye [www.eyetoeyenational.org](http://www.eyetoeyenational.org)
- WhyTry [www.whytry.org](http://www.whytry.org)
- Active Minds [www.activeminds.org](http://www.activeminds.org)
- Change the View youtube videos  
[www.youtube.com/user/changetheview2011\\_11](http://www.youtube.com/user/changetheview2011_11)
- Other ideas.....

### **Social Context**

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3. A change of scenery: The value of a fresh start –

Changing the Social Climate – Classroom

Changing the Social Climate – School-wide

### **Social Context as Protective Influence**

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- We can be very different people in very different contexts.  
A child who fails in one classroom or one school, then another classroom or another school, can be successful in the next classroom or next school.
- A person who struggles in one work setting, then another work setting, can be successful in the next work setting
- The context within which our life experiences unfold can vary.
- As adults we have the opportunity to alter/change/escape the context within which our life experiences are unfolding.

### **Changing the Social Climate**

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- How do you change a social climate?
  - Buy-in
  - Focusing on strengths
  - Making a significant contribution
  - Legitimizing, validating differences
  - Modeling
  - The role of bystanders

### **Changing Bystander Behavior**

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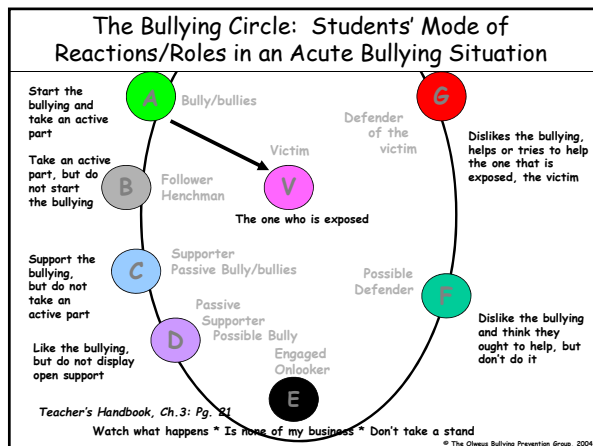
- Key ingredient in changing the social climate of a classroom and of a school
- Key ingredient in preventing and reducing bullying
- Key ingredient in preventing stigma
- Can be key ingredient in helping those impacted by stigma to overcome its effects
- Public awareness is one thing, taking action on behalf of others is quite another
- Creating a context (social climate) where what we believe in is more powerful than what we are afraid of

### **Changing Bystander Behavior**

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**"In the end we will remember not the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends."**

Martin Luther King, Jr.



## Interpersonal Trauma

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- Spousal abuse
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Verbal abuse
- Bullying

## Bullying Prevention

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- 4 reasons why it can be so hard to prevent and reduce bullying at school:
  - We may not realize who's doing the bullying
  - Bullies do their bullying in the shadows
  - The target of the bullying might be scared to death to tell anyone (or may have tried to no avail).
  - Others who see the bullying don't know what to do. They're bystanders.
- Changing bystander behavior

## Social Context

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3. A change of scenery: The value of a fresh start

Changing the social climate – classroom

- PAX Good Behavior Game [www.goodbehaviorgame.org](http://www.goodbehaviorgame.org)
- Concentration Game
- Jigsaw [www.jigsawclassroom.org](http://www.jigsawclassroom.org)
- Other ideas

## Social Context

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3. A change of scenery: The value of a fresh start

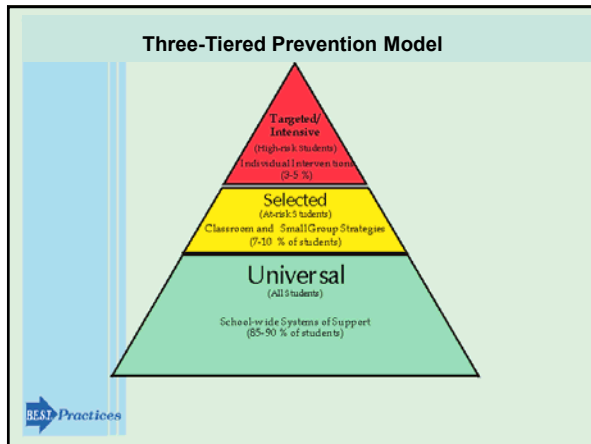
Changing the social climate – School-wide

- Restorative Practices (IIRP) <http://www.iirp.edu/>
- PeaceBuilders [www.peacebuilders.com](http://www.peacebuilders.com)
- Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) BEST Behavior, Jeff Sprague, Ph.D. IVDB University of Oregon [www.voyagersopris.com](http://www.voyagersopris.com)

## Public Health Model

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- PBIS - Public health model for preventing and treating serious behavioral, emotional and learning problems in school-age children.
- Effective practices at the secondary (selected) and tertiary (targeted/intensive) levels include practices that work at the primary (universal level). The difference is that at the secondary and tertiary levels they occur at much higher doses.



**Social Context**

3. A change of scenery: The value of a fresh start

Changing the social climate – School-wide

- Heroic Imagination Project (HIP)  
[www.heroicimagination.org](http://www.heroicimagination.org)
- Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) [www.violencepreventionworks.org](http://www.violencepreventionworks.org)
- [www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov)

**Life Experiences – In Context**

4. Personal pathways to a sense of mastery
5. Learning to see human intelligence in a new light
6. When difference no longer signals danger
  - a. More labels, not less
  - b. Learning to see abilities as malleable, not fixed
  - c. Learning to see challenges in historical context
7. Translating the pain of our past into meaningful action on behalf of others

**Protective Processes:  
Experiences That Promote a Sense of Mastery**

**“There’s never anything  
so wrong with us that’s  
what right with us  
can’t fix.”**

**Mastery to Meaning Connection**

- Not only can new beliefs lead to new successful actions (new meaning – new mastery), but new successful actions (new mastery) can also lead to new beliefs (new meaning)
- Meaning to Mastery
- Mastery to Meaning

**Fostering a Sense of Mastery**

- Highlighting, nurturing and expressing strengths and talents, and things you feel passionate about
- To feel you’re making a contribution: Required Helpfulness; Meaningful roles and responsibilities
- Success experiences are to mastery as failure (over and over) is to learned helplessness
- “What does it mean to be smart?” Valuing effort (Carol Dweck, Ph.D.)
- Mistake jar; struggle jar

### **Fostering a Sense of Mastery**

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- Teacher coaches the child/youth before class about questions that will be asked during class. The student gets to answer them correctly in front of other students.
- A couple of times a week, the parents/caregivers get a “great news” postcard/e-mail/text letting them know about their child’s accomplishments/successes.
- Parents/caregivers send postcard/e-mail/text to teachers thanking them for all they’re doing to help their child.

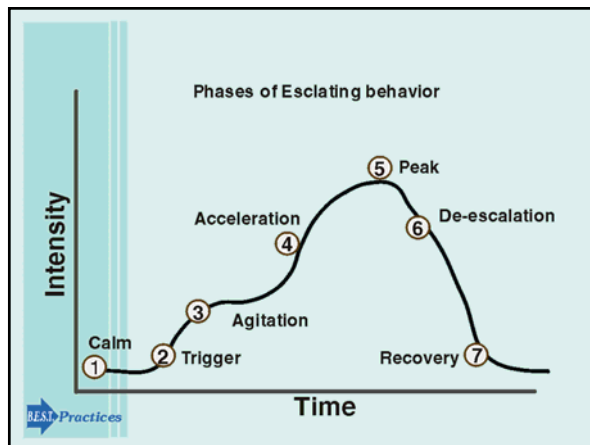
### **Fostering a Sense of Mastery: Improving Emotional Self-Regulation**

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**“A crisis is a terrible  
thing to waste”**

**“Our explanation will guide  
our intervention”**

Ross Greene



### **Fostering a Sense of Mastery: Improving Emotional Self-Regulation**

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- Before school and after school aerobic exercise opportunities
  - Aerobic exercise – studies show that it improves attention, self-control, among other areas.
  - *“A bout of exercise is like taking a little bit of Prozac and a little bit of Ritalin.”*
- John Ratey, M.D.

### **Improving Self Control/Emotional Self-Regulation: Programs and Practices (short list)**

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- PAX Good Behavior Game  
[www.goodbehaviorgame.org](http://www.goodbehaviorgame.org)
- BOKS – Building Our Kids Success  
[www.bokskids.org](http://www.bokskids.org)
- Collaborative and Proactive Solutions  
Ross Greene, Ph.D. [www.livesinthebalance.org](http://www.livesinthebalance.org)
- Irvine Paraprofessional Program (IPP)  
[www.learningdevelopmentsservices.com](http://www.learningdevelopmentsservices.com) (click What's New – see promising practices articles)

### **Improving Self Control/Emotional Self-Regulation: Programs and Practices (short list)**

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- Regional Intervention Program [www.ripnetwork.org](http://www.ripnetwork.org)
- Organizational Skills Training (OST)  
(see [www.learningdevelopmentsservices.com](http://www.learningdevelopmentsservices.com) promising practices articles)
- First Step to Success  
[www.firststepstosuccess.org](http://www.firststepstosuccess.org)
- Tools of the Mind [www.toolsofthemind.org](http://www.toolsofthemind.org)
- Sesame Workshop Curriculum – Starring Cookie Monster (see promising practices articles)

**Promising Practices (short list)**

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- Social thinking model – Michelle Garcia Winner  
www.socialthinking.com
- Zones of Regulation  
www.zonesofregulation.com
- *Mindfulness Prescription for Adult ADHD*  
Lidia Zylowska, M.D.

**Fostering a Sense of Mastery:  
Replenishing the Executive Function  
“Fuel Tank”**

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- Self-Regularity Strength is a Limited Resource Pool
  - the more you tax emotional self-regulation/self-control the more you deplete the resource; why after a day of school or work, person can feel depleted.
  - Need to replenish this fuel tank.
- What works

**Replenishing the Executive Function  
Fuel Tank**

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- Break tasks into smaller units and take breaks - 10 and 3 rule 10 minutes of work, 3 minute break
- Relaxation strategies; Mindfulness practices
- Positive emotions
- Aerobic exercise (May be among best strategies for refueling and increasing tank)

**Replenishing the Executive Function  
Fuel Tank**

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- Refueling the executive function fuel tank;
  - Sipping not gulping glucose in fluid form - gets in brain very quickly - Gatorade
  - We thought sugar made things worse, actually it can help when having to perform task requiring sustained executive function

**Fostering a Sense of Mastery:  
Increasing Stimulation/ Reducing Boredom**

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- Accommodating problems associated with repetitive, uninteresting yet important routines
- Creating extra stimulation through a different sense modality – Different strategies work for different children/youth/adults
- Listening to music when working on a visual task (homework); working standing up; fidget toys; chewing gum; for lengthier tasks – working in changing/novel settings; brain breaks; aerobic exercise; study buddy – body double

**Increasing Stimulation/Reducing Boredom**

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- Accommodating homework
- Children who spend hours on assignments that should take 15 minutes, then forget to turn it in
- Creating context where child is more likely to complete homework



### **Increasing Stimulation/ Reducing Boredom**

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- Break tasks up into smaller parts
- Project based tasks; school tasks = stimulating, meaningful and challenging

### **Fostering a Sense of Mastery**

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- Structure, brevity, variety (Clare Jones, 2004;2000)
  - *Structure* = consistent routine, specific daily schedules - visual, reviewed (changing appearance to keep interest), well defined transitions (with extra cues when necessary)
  - *Brevity* = brief activities - breaking long multi-step tasks into smaller solvable chunks (modifying seatwork, long term projects, etc)
  - *Variety* = introducing novelty into activities, combating problems resulting from repetition, boredom, stimulation seeking behavior

### **Fostering a Sense of Mastery**

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- Self Monitoring Strategies
- Peer organizer/coach meets for a few minutes before and after school - before school goes over "to-do" list, helps organize; after school checks to see if homework was turned in, assignments written down and right books coming home

### **Fostering a Sense of Mastery**

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- Photo album of accomplishments
- Positive Behavioral Momentum
- Foreshadowing
- Body Double

### **Life Experiences – In Context**

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5. Learning to see human intelligence in a new light
  - Brainology [www.mindsetworks.com](http://www.mindsetworks.com)
  - Multiple Intelligences Theory (Howard Gardner, Ph.D.)

### **Life Experiences – In Context**

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6. When difference no longer signals threat and danger
  - Access to a language (vocabulary) that allows us to interpret experiences in a new light.
  - Connecting with others who endured similar risk exposure and who are doing well
  - Can assessment results be a vehicle for highlighting our unique strengths and that provide a new way to understand struggles and differences?

### Life Experiences – In Context

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#### 6. When difference no longer signals danger (cont.)

- Brainology [www.mindsetworks.com](http://www.mindsetworks.com)
- Shut Up About Your Perfect Kid  
[www.shutupaboutyourperfectkid.com](http://www.shutupaboutyourperfectkid.com)
- Active Minds [www.activeminds.org](http://www.activeminds.org)
- Heroic Imagination Project (Phil Zimbardo, Ph.D.)  
[www.heroicimagination.org](http://www.heroicimagination.org)

### Life Experiences – In Context

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#### 6. When difference no longer signals danger (cont.)

- Children's Mental Health Ontario (CMHO) -  
[www.kidsmentalhealth.ca](http://www.kidsmentalhealth.ca) Change the View Video Contest  
[www.youtube.com/user/changetheview2011](http://www.youtube.com/user/changetheview2011)
  - Reaches out to youth to create videos that can help remove the stigma from the lives of children/youth with mental health challenges. First prize = \$2000.
  - Videos focus on these questions: *"How can we help our friends instead of turning our backs on them?"* *"How do we talk about it?"* *"How do we show everyone that any problems can be worked out with a little kindness and understanding?"*

### Life Experiences – In Context

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#### 6. When difference no longer signals danger (cont.)

- Eye to Eye [www.eyetoeyenational.org](http://www.eyetoeyenational.org)
- WhyTry Program [www.whytry.org](http://www.whytry.org)
- Montgomery County GT/LD Model  
[www.gtlidnetwork.org](http://www.gtlidnetwork.org)
- Research on vocationally successful adults with LD and ADHD: stages of reframing – action phase (Paul Gerber)

### Life Experiences – In Context

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#### 6a. More labels, not less

- **Important Jobs and Responsibilities:** To feel we matter and have something important to contribute
- **Computer Specialist:** Assists students in operating computer programs.
- **Audio-Visual Specialist:** Assists staff in setting up audio visual equipment for presentations.
- **Master of Ceremonies:** Reads list of activities for the day, or special events.

### Life Experiences – In Context

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#### 6a. More labels, not less (continued)

- Important jobs and responsibilities
- **School/Grade Ambassador:** Greets visitors to class or school, takes them on tours.
- **Student Resource Specialist:** Takes extra notes for students who have difficulty copying from the board;
- Keeps homework hotline updated daily; provides organizational assistance and/or coaching to younger students before and after school.

### Life Experiences – In Context

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#### 6. When difference no longer signals danger

#### 6b. Learning to see abilities as malleable, not fixed

- Mindset Works [www.mindsetworks.com](http://www.mindsetworks.com)  
Brainology

#### 6c. Learning to see challenges in historical context

- Staying abreast of recent advances, new practices/resources

### **Life Experiences – In Context**

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7. Translating the pain of our past into meaningful action on behalf of others

- Mentoring others growing up exposed to similar adversities/impacted by similar challenges
- “Change the View” youtube videos
- Eye to Eye
- Active Minds
- LETS (Lets Erase the Stigma)
- Other examples

### **Relationships – In Context**

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8. “Beating the odds” thanks to those who “changed the odds”

8a. Safety nets

- Wraparound services  
Naomi Tannen study - 7 categories of service
- Preventing/reducing compassion fatigue

### **Compassion Fatigue**

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**“Suffering is half pain  
and half being alone  
with the pain.”**

Edwin Shneidman

### **Preventing/Reducing Compassion Fatigue**

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- The price one can sometimes pay for caring so much and working so hard to improve the lives of others who are suffering.
- “We hurt too much because we’re empathic, and it wears us down.” “It fatigues us.” “We’re tired.” “We’ve lost our energy.” Frank Ochberg, M.D.
- Lose our spark, our sense of hope and optimism, our humor. “We aren’t sick, but we aren’t ourselves.”  
Frank Ochberg, M.D.

### **Preventing/Reducing Compassion Fatigue**

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- Compassion fatigue = can take its toll on spouses, partners, parents, teachers, anyone who feels deep compassion for the suffering of others, is trying to help as best they can, and who may be growing emotionally depleted as a result

### **Compassion Fatigue: Characteristics**

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- Exhaustion – emotional, physical or both
- Signs, symptoms known to vary from person to person
  - Feeling a sense of futility or a sense of hopelessness that better days lie ahead
  - Questioning our abilities or even our worth
  - Losing patience and our ability to control our emotions

### **Compassion Fatigue: Characteristics**

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- Signs, symptoms known to vary from person to person (continued)
  - Avoiding strong emotions, numbing ourselves to the content at work
  - Difficulty sleeping, feeling tired and not quite ourselves
  - Losing our spark, losing our sense of humor
  - Other characteristics.....

### **Compassion Fatigue**

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- Emotions are contagious – FSU study
- Researchers identified different brain wave patterns when viewing a painful scene versus a non-painful scene. Why weren't similar differences found in doctors?
- Might some professions need to calibrate compassion in order to function more effectively?
- Compassion as a depletable resource

### **Compassion Fatigue: When Are We at Risk?**

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- When caring for others obscures our need to also care for ourselves. When we lose the balance.
- Are all caregivers at risk? Only those with the ability to empathize with and feel compassion for those whose suffering they are trying to alleviate.
- If you lack empathy and compassion you don't have to worry about compassion fatigue.
- On the other hand, administrators not directly in the line of fire can experience compassion fatigue if the necessary ingredients are present.

### **Compassion Fatigue**

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## **How to work in the field of mental health without losing our mental health**

Mark Katz, Ph.D. 2016

### **Overcoming Compassion Fatigue: Awareness, Balance, Connections**

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#### Remembering our ABC's\*

- A = Awareness
- B = Balance
- C = Connections

\*Angie Panos:<http://www.giftfromwithin.org/html/Compassion-Fatigue-Dont-Forget-About-Self-Care.html>

### **Awareness: Self-Awareness**

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- Being aware of our stress levels, aware of how our body signals stress
- Aware of how our past experiences influence our present functioning
- Do we react or over-react to some situations as a result of our past experiences?
- What are our stress triggers?
- Do we sabotage our own self-care strategies?
- Do we seek short term stress reduction solutions that may have long term negative health consequences? Drinking, smoking, over-eating

## Balance

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- Self care plans that include activities that bring us joy, hope, laughter, gratitude
- Self care plans that weave into our day activities that calm and soothe us, and that allow us to keep perspective
- Self care plans that help us monitor our emotional temperature so that we are more aware of times when our ongoing exposure to the pain of others is starting to impact us in potentially unhealthy ways

## Compassion Fatigue: Is it the “C” in ABC That Matters Most?

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- Have we been looking for remedies within us rather than between us?
- Self care plans important, but not enough
- Our greatest source of strength is each other.
- We're all in this together.

## Working in Mental Health Without Losing Our Mental Health

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- Just as mental health professionals need to learn how best to meet the mental health needs of others, they also need to know how not to ignore their own physical and mental health needs in the process.
- Devoting one's professional life to helping others should enhance our sense of purpose and value, not detract from it.
- Those who work in the field of mental health can grow stronger and wiser a result of the work they do.

## Compassion Fatigue

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- Can entirely understandable yet erroneous perceptions regarding the learning and behavioral profile of a loved one impact the quality of that relationship? (SSNR)
- “Relational devaluation”
- “Magnitude Gap” Is this why forgiveness can be so hard? (Baumeister)

## Relationships – In Context

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8. “Beating the odds” thanks to those who “changed the odds”
- 8a. Safety nets
- For children/youth at risk for serious emotional, behavioral, learning and later life adjustment problems, can simply going to school each day actually protect them from these negative outcomes years down the road?
  - Schools can be protective – examples
- [www.traumasensitiveschools.org](http://www.traumasensitiveschools.org)
- After school time can be protective – examples
  - Neighborhoods can be protective - examples

## Relationships – In Context

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8. “Beating the odds” thanks to those who “changed the odds”
- 8b. Connecting to those who legitimize rather than stigmatize
- Hope is contagious  
Naomi Tannen

### **Relationships – In Context**

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9. Growing closer and stronger as a result of difficult or traumatic life events
- 9a. Relationships as malleable, not fixed
  - Mindset Works [www.mindsetworks.com/](http://www.mindsetworks.com/)
  - Social Thinking (Michelle Garcia Winner)
  - Other practices
10. Our greatest source of strength – Each other: A closer look at turning points

### **Protective Influences: 4. Opening the Door to Turning Point Experiences**

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- Individuals, who as children and teenagers succumbed to adversity, but who, in adulthood, are doing well:
- Life experiences they cited as important turning points (Werner and Smith, 2001):
  - Marriage or entry into a long term committed relationship
  - The birth of a first child
  - Establishing themselves in a career or a job

Protective Influences:  
Opening the Door to Turning Point Experiences

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- Life experiences they cited as important turning points: *continued*
  - Obtaining further education, such as through a community college
  - Joining the armed forces as a way to gain educational or vocational skills
  - Becoming active in a church or religious community

### **Turning Points**

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- *“Are there things that count that can’t be counted?”*
- it’s impossible to predict, with absolute certainty, any one person’s life course.
- It’s among the mysteries in life that makes you a believer in turning point experiences, in second, third and fourth chance opportunities, and in knowing that lives can change for the better at any point in time, sometimes in response to completely unanticipated and unpredictable events.

### **Turning Points: Two Questions**

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- Can you think of turning points in your life where your life began to change for the better?
- When you think of your turning points, are there any people who come to mind, people who you feel a debt of gratitude to for these turning points

### **Turning Points: Lessons Learned**

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Our greatest source of strength = each other.

### **Overcoming Contextual Blind Spots**

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- Fundamental attribution error (aka context deficit disorder)
- Cognitive dissonance
- Self-views – perceiving incoming information in ways that support how we view ourselves
- Resilience – in context
- Evidence based practices – in context; treatment needs versus human needs

### **Individuals Exposed to Multiple Risks Who Succumbed, Then Rebound Decades Later**

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- We are more resilient than we realize
- There are limits to emotional endurance even for the most resilient among us, school-age children included
- You and I have more influence than we realize in determining who endures and who succumbs

### **Those Who Succumb, Then Rebound Decades Later**

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- The meaning we attach to the adversities of others can influence the meaning they attach to these same adversities
  - Human understanding can play an important role in rising above a difficult past, human misunderstanding can play a very significant role in prolonging one
- New meaning can lead to new mastery, new mastery can lead to new meaning

### **Those Who Succumb, Then Rebound Decades Later**

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- While our differences can render us at a serious disadvantage at one stage of our life, they may provide us at an advantage at another stage.
- The role of strengths and talents and how they foster a sense of mastery
- Life outcome can be very different than tx outcome

### **Those Who Succumb, Then Rebound Decades Later**

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Are there things that count  
that can't be counted?

And do the things we count, count?