Emotions and Learning- we need them!

Emotions are often viewed as irrational and unruly, associated with acting out of control. Given this, we often expect our students to leave emotions outside of the classroom, because if we make decisions without emotions, "purely rationally," we become more sophisticated thinkers and decision-makers.

Research indicates that thinking is influenced by emotions, which in turn affect areas such as attention, learning, memory, reasoning, and problem-solving.

Emotion, thinking, and learning go hand in hand.

As teachers, we want our kids to learn. To foster the best learning environment, we must pay attention to our students' emotions and how they are feeling. Because learning cannot take place in the absence of emotion.

Learning can be influenced by a learner's emotional state. Negative emotions, such as fear and anger, can disrupt learning; positive emotions drive learning.

Takeaway: If emotions become too overwhelming, they can override a student's ability to process information and think, ultimately undermining the entire purpose of the lesson.

To be available to learn, engage, and thrive in the classroom, students must feel safe (emotionally, cognitively), connected, and supported.

How does Stress impact learning?

Sudden stressful incidents (extremely traumatic or dangerous situations) or long-term exposures to repeated stress can lead to toxic stress, which is highly destructive to learning.

In the classroom, we become experts at collecting and analyzing data. We are good teachers, but our students often still struggle both emotionally and academically. Why is this?

It is estimated that two-thirds (≈ 66 %) of children in the U.S. have experienced at least one potentially traumatic event by age 16.

Trauma is different for everyone. The definition of trauma varies widely, and experiencing a traumatic event does not mean a student has a trauma-related disorder; however, we can reasonably expect that many classrooms include multiple students who have experienced at least one traumatic event.

For educators, this underscores the importance of learning about the impacts of trauma, what trauma-informed practices are, and the importance of creating a whole-school environment where every child feels safe.

What is TRAUMA-

A traumatic event is a frightening, dangerous, or violent event that poses bodily harm or a threat to a student's life or a loved one. But as stated before, trauma is different for everyone, and students may or may not experience a situation as traumatic.

Trauma could be caused by a single event (assault), recurring events accumulated over a generation (poverty), and/or recurring events accumulated over generations (racism).

The daily experiences of students who are on the margins can also be traumatic. Because of experiencing further marginalization and ongoing microaggressions, what seems trivial and innocent slights and insults represent major stressors for marginalized groups. These microaggressions have been found to affect the biological, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral well-being of our students, with very real physiological impacts. Understanding trauma and using trauma-informed approaches will help reduce toxic stress, create safety, advance racial equity, and promote healing.

If we are unaware of how this may impact a student's learning, stress, and trauma can disrupt a student's behavior, emotional well-being, academic success, and health.

In summary-

As educators, we need to start seeing behaviors as survival strategies, not willful disobedience. Trauma-informed education, while it may be a current buzzword, is not merely a passing trend. It is about wanting to disrupt educational systems that too often prioritize knowing over caring, competition over collaboration, intervention over prevention, and individuals over community. It is about restoration and healing past injustices at the individual and community levels. It is about revealing our humanity to our students, showing them that we are on their side, that we have their backs, that we see them, and that they matter.