

# Relationships, Connection and Well Being



Jean M Clinton BMus MD FRCP(C) McMaster University  
@drjeanforkids clintonj@mcmaster.ca

How we often feel  
after attending a conference...



How we sometimes feel when we  
return to our school...



# The Wisdom of the Elders

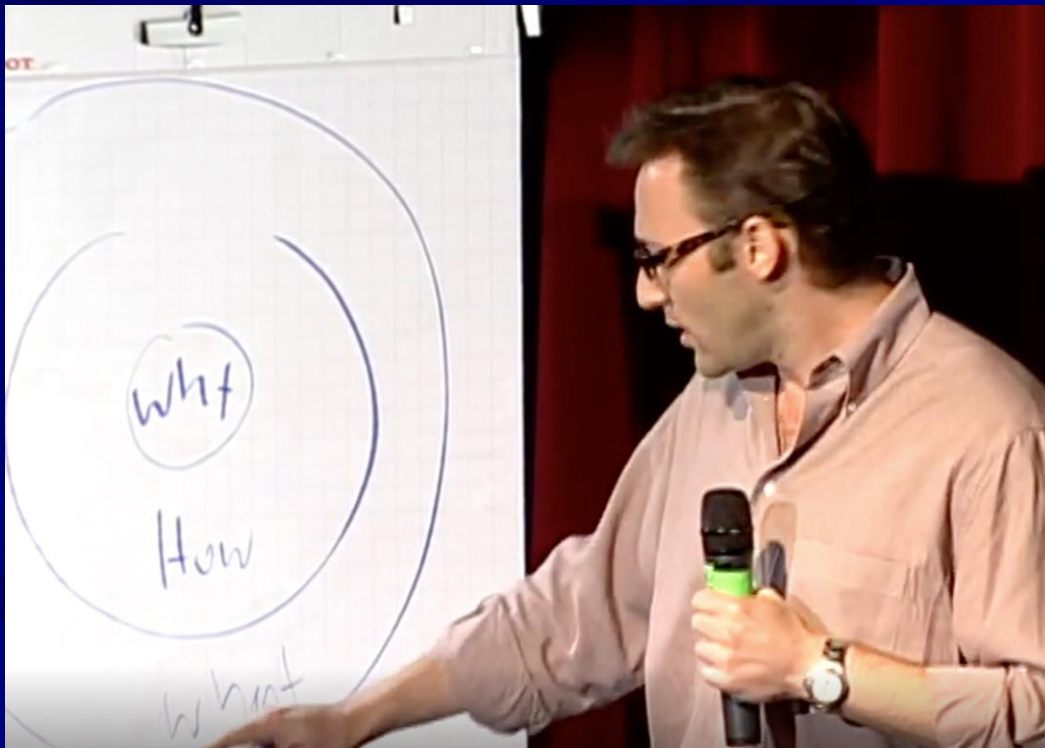
- Consider the interest of the next 7 generations when decisions are being made





# A Compelling Why

We need the **COMPELLING WHY** of the work we do.



Simon Sinek 2009

# THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

*Education 2030*



THE  
FUTURE  
WE WANT



To navigate through uncertainty, students will need to develop curiosity, imagination, resilience and selfregulation;

-they will need to respect and appreciate the ideas, perspectives and values of others;  
- and they will need to cope with failure and rejection, and to move forward in the face of adversity.-

-Their motivation will be more than getting a good job and a high income; they will also need to care about the well-being of their friends and families, their communities and the planet

What we believe about children informs our view...and our language.

## WHAT IS OUR IMAGE OF THE CHILD?



- Do we see the child/learner

As an empty vessel? Needing to be 'filled up' with what we 'know is best'?

Or

- Do we see the child

AS a Powerful ,resourceful, creative co-learner and creator ?

- Develop normally or function to the best of ability?
- Fix the problem.....or promote activity and what can be?





# Leading Mentally Healthy Schools



*Setting the Stage for Best Practices in School Mental Health*



# Where did well-being come from?

We've been leading up to this for a long time!

- Concerns about drink machines and food in school cafeterias
- Safe schools and antibullying – 2001
- Daily physical activities – DPAs - 2005
- Focus on school climate - 2008
- Trustees responsible for education and **well-being** - 2009
- Open Minds Healthy Minds – the mental health initiative - 2011
- Safe and Accepting Schools legislation -2012
- Achieving Excellence - 2014





# Achieving Excellence, Well-Being Goal

“Through the renewed vision, Ontario is setting its sights...

it will be a system that recognizes well-being as an instrumental factor in students’ academic success, and promotes greater equity that all students can be their best.”



- **Achieving Excellence**
- **Ensuring Equity**
- **Promoting Well-Being**
- **Enhancing Public Confidence**

<http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/excellent.html>

# What is Mental Well-Being?

A state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.

World Health Organization, 2014



**More than the absence of  
illness!  
It is about FLOURISHING!**



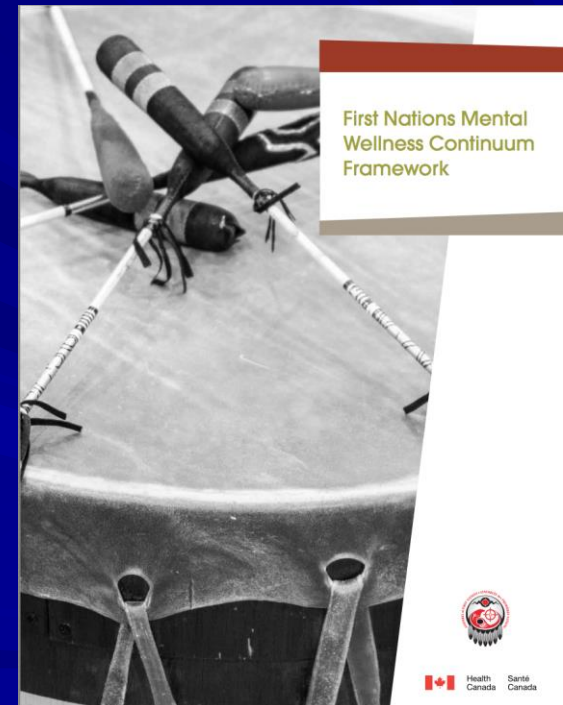
- **Well-being** is that positive sense of self, spirit and belonging that we feel when our cognitive, emotional, social and physical needs are being met. As our Indigenous partners have long known, healthy development of the mind, body and spirit is contingent on balance and interconnectedness.



## Development of the Whole Learner

# First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework

- Mental well-being is about having
- a sense of purpose,
- hope,
- belonging,
- and meaning in our daily
- lives.



■ [nnapf.com/first-nations-mental-wellness-continuum-framework/](http://nnapf.com/first-nations-mental-wellness-continuum-framework/)





Sense of self and spirit



Meaningful learning experiences



Physical and emotional safety



Supportive relationships



Sense of Belonging



Healthy minds and bodies

# Whole Child View-Know the Learner

Development of the body, influenced by physical activity, sleep patterns, healthy eating, and healthy life choices.

Involves learning about experiencing emotions, and understanding how to recognize, manage, and cope with them. Includes emotional self-regulation, empathy, motivation, risk taking.

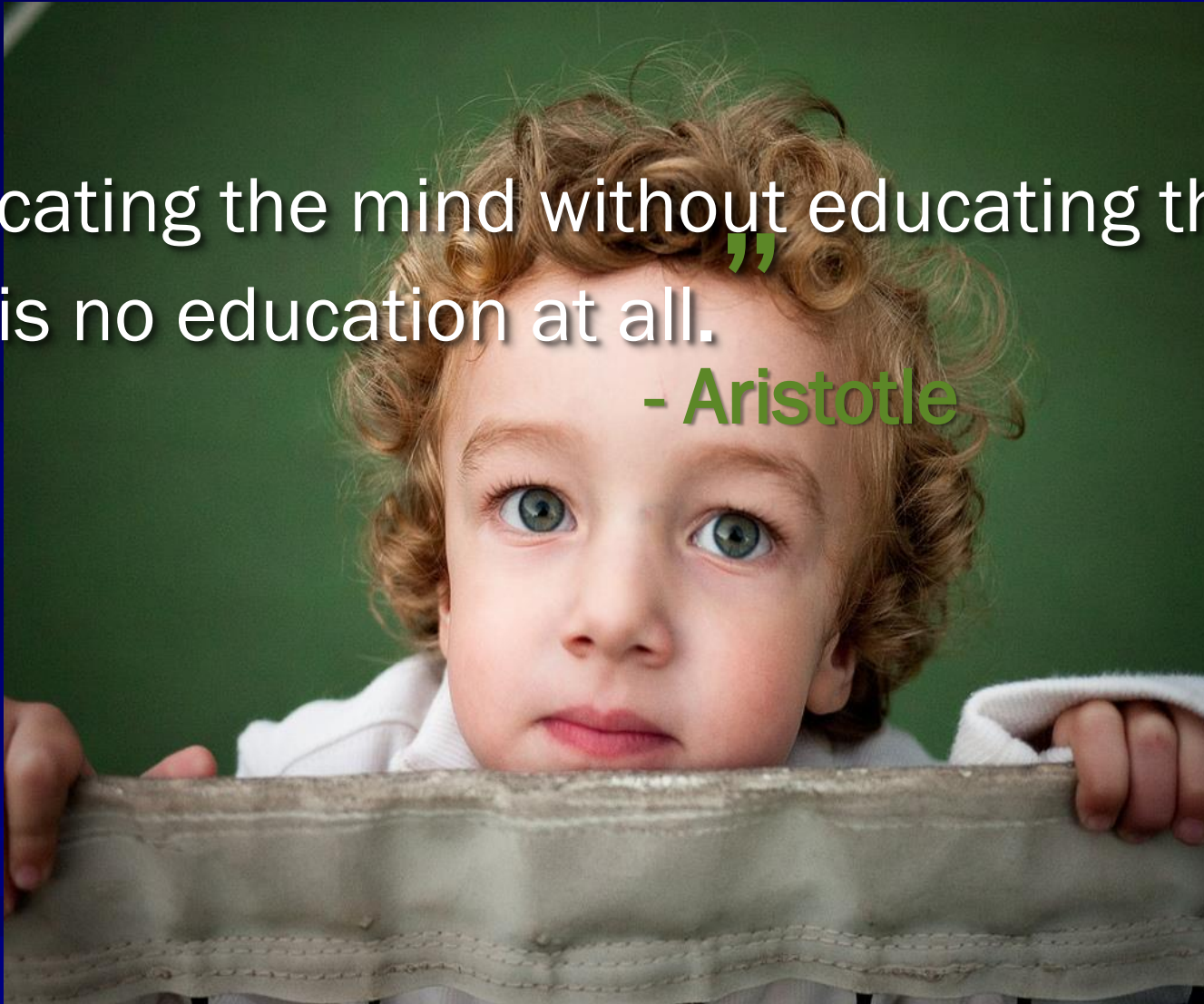


Development of abilities and skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, and the ability to be flexible and innovative.

Development of self-awareness, a sense of belonging, relationships with others, and collaboration and communication skills. Includes the development of identity (individual, social group, spiritual/religious), self-concept, and self-esteem.

“ Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.

- Aristotle



# Why do we care about brain?



Time Magazine Dr J Stieben

**You are your brain.**



Dr R Gibb UofLethbridge

**BUT**

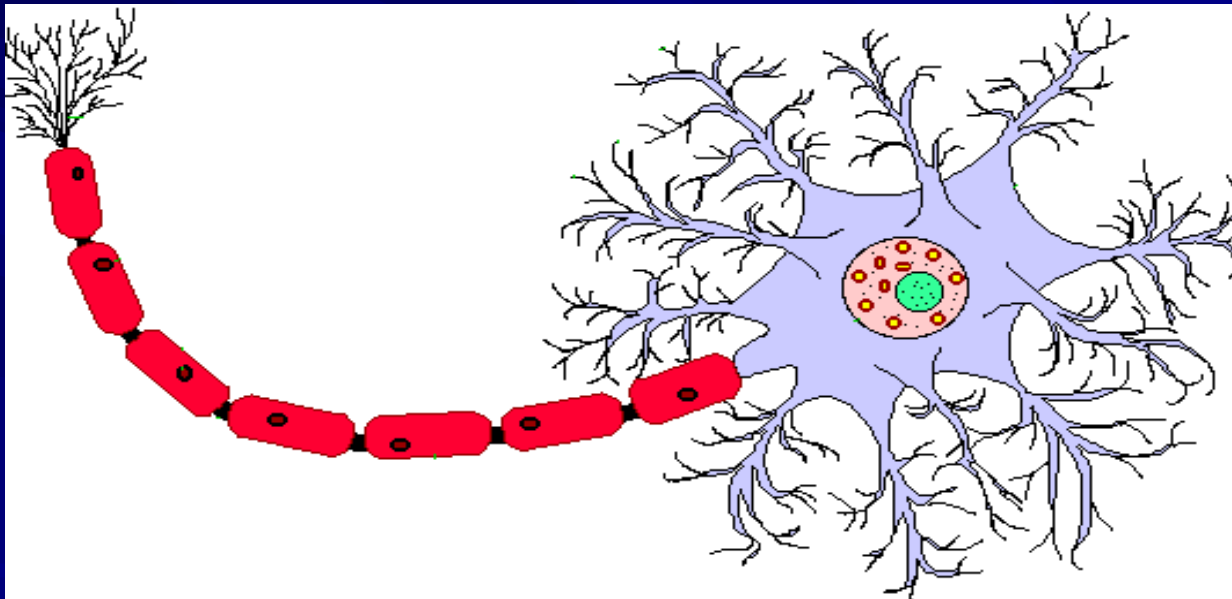
**Your brain is not just  
produced by your genes**

**Your brain is sculpted by  
a lifetime of  
experiences .**



All of the areas of the brain  
...like sound, communication, problem-solving...  
are made of cells called

## **NEURONS**



They transmit information all around the brain.



# Brain is social Organ

- The Brain is a social organ- wired to connect– the modern human brains primary environment is our matrix of social relationships
- Create positive social experiences in the classroom

# Serve and Return

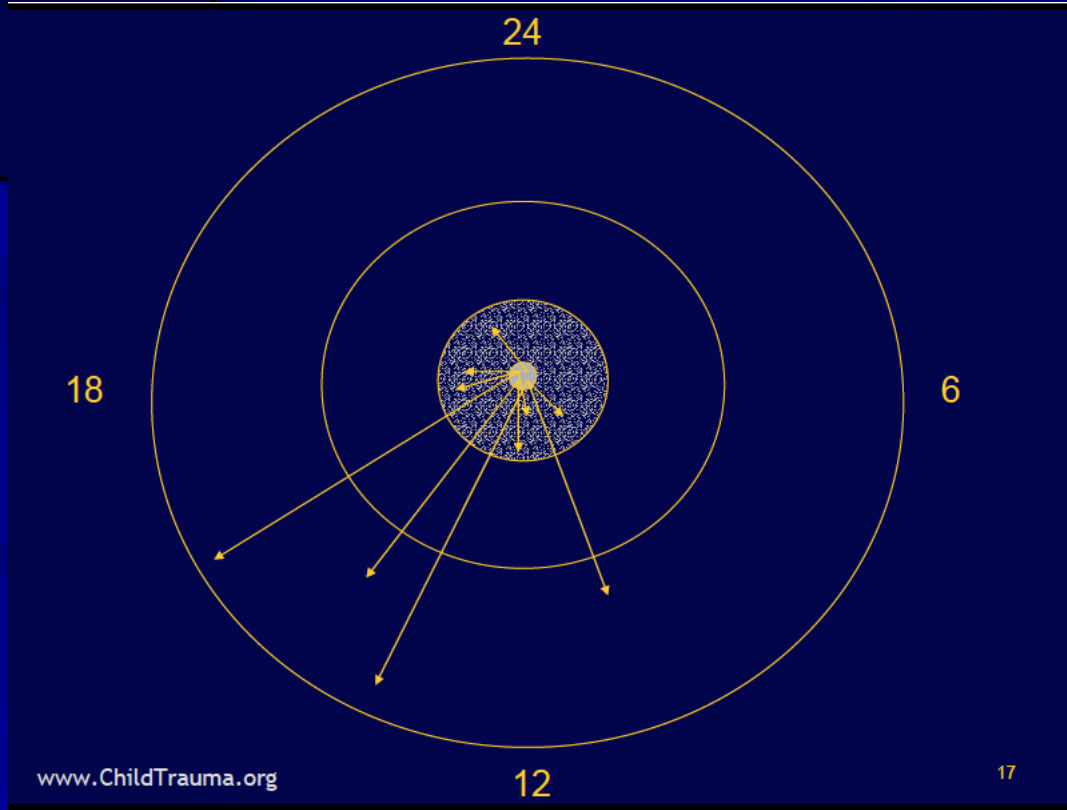
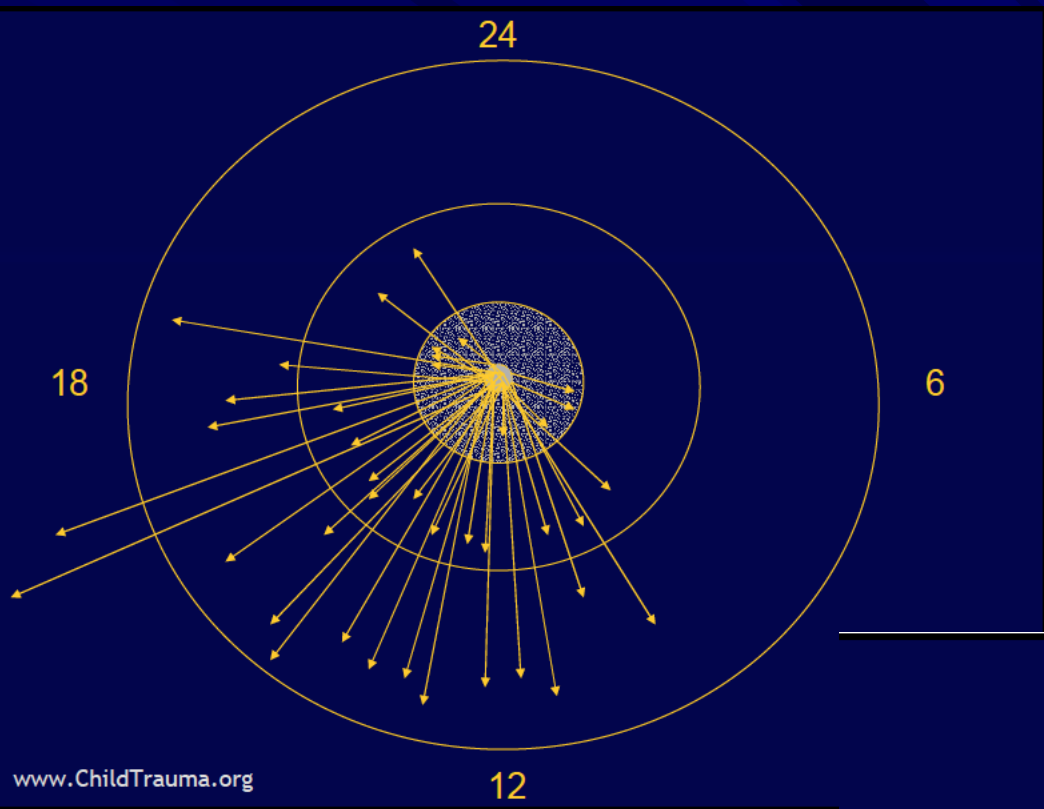
# Drive to Help Others



© Warneken & Tomasello

The Relational Landscape is  
changing.

Children have fewer emotional  
,social and cognitive  
interactions with fewer people



# POVERTY OF RELATIONSHIPS

The compartmentalizing of our culture  
has resulted in material wealth yet  
poverty of social and emotional  
opportunity.

Modernity's Paradox



# SIGNIFICANT CHANGES


	2013		2015
Moderate to serious psychological distress	24%	↑	34%
Serious psychological distress	11%	↑	14%
	2007		2015
Rate mental health as fair or poor	11%	↑	17%
	1999		2015
Visited mental health care professional in previous year	12%	↑	21%
	2001		2015
Were prescribed medication for anxiety, depression or both in previous year	3%	↑	6%
	2007		2015
Used a prescribed opioid pain reliever (e.g., Tylenol 3, Percocet) in previous year	41%	↓	21%
	2003		2015
Performed any gambling activity in previous year	57%	↓	32%





# Almost half of Ontario youth miss school because of anxiety, study suggests

A survey commissioned by Children's Mental Health Ontario suggests that children and parents miss school and work to cope with mental illness.

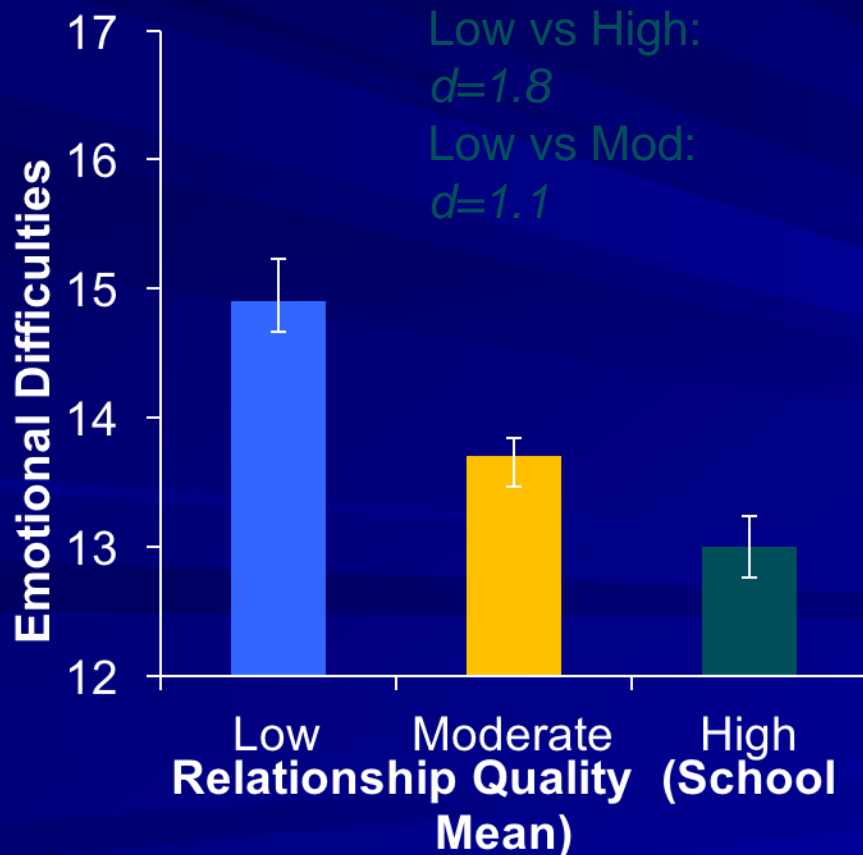


kidsmentalhealthcantwait.ca

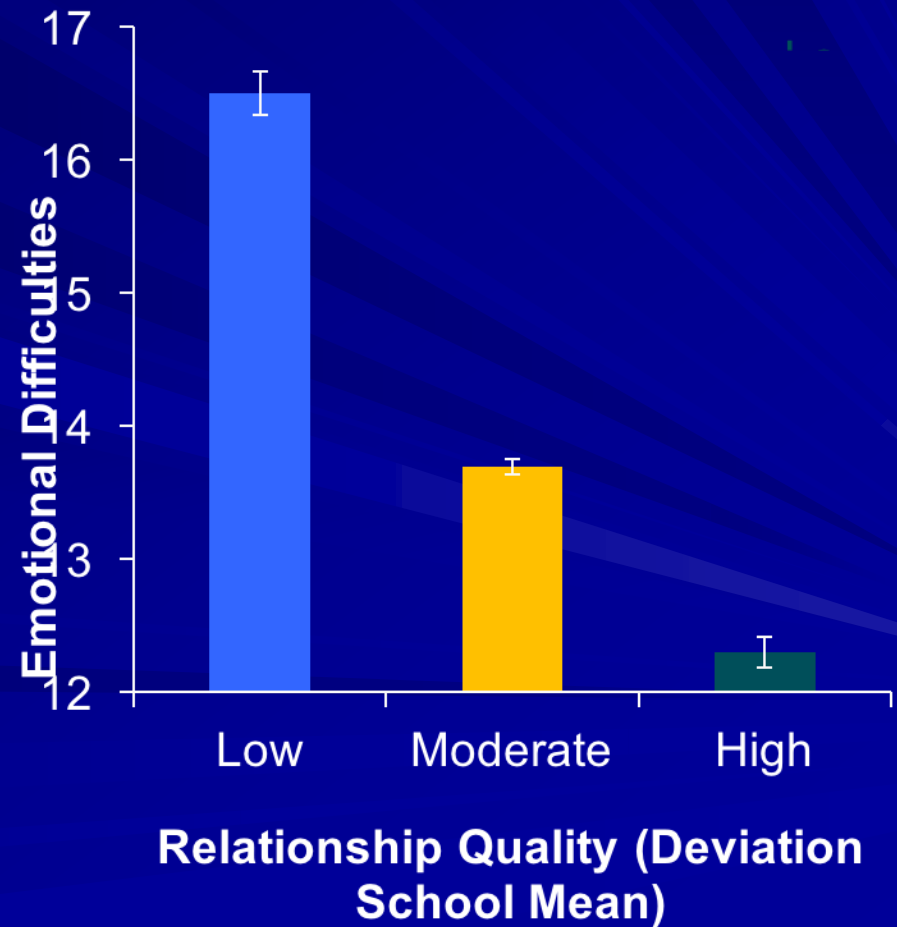


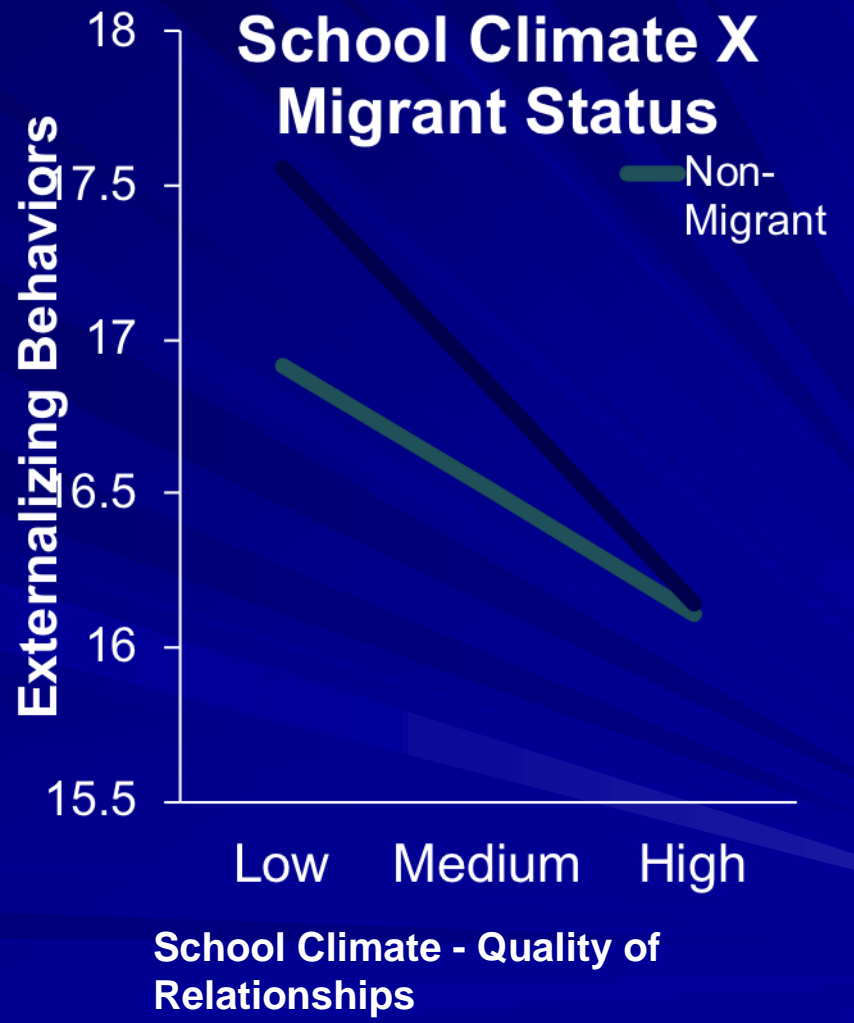
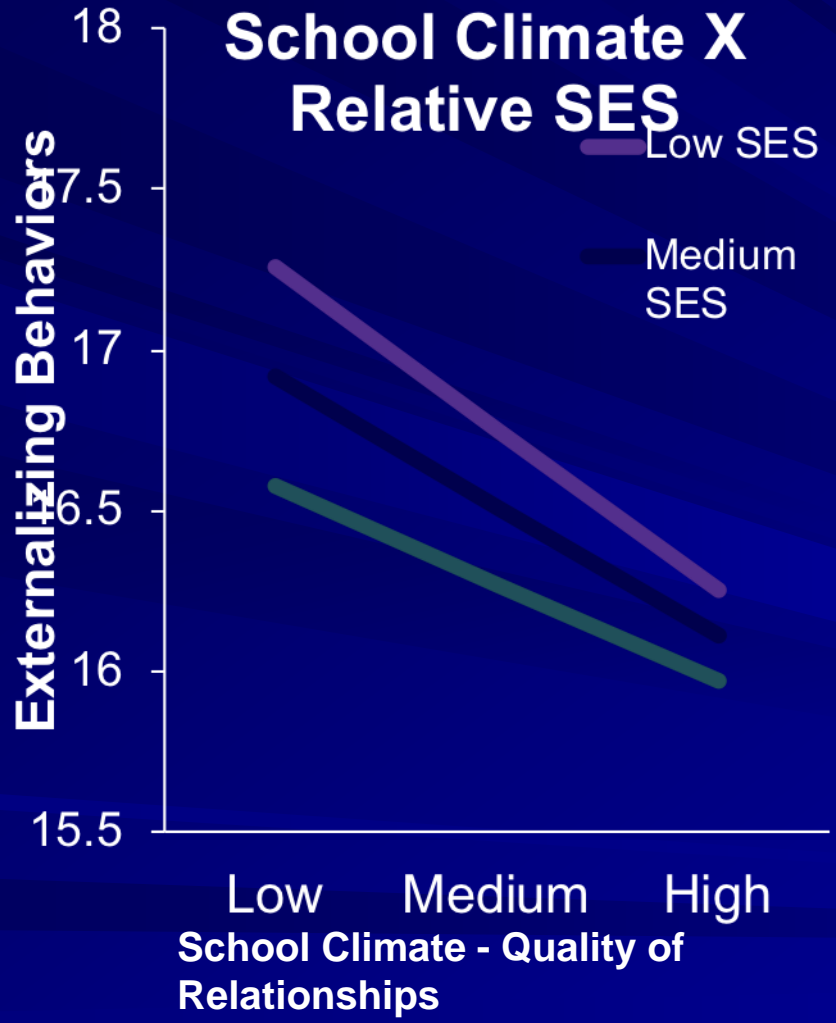
# School Relationships & Emotional Difficulties

## School Level Differences



## Differences







Looking for  
the positive

A focus on looking  
for strengths

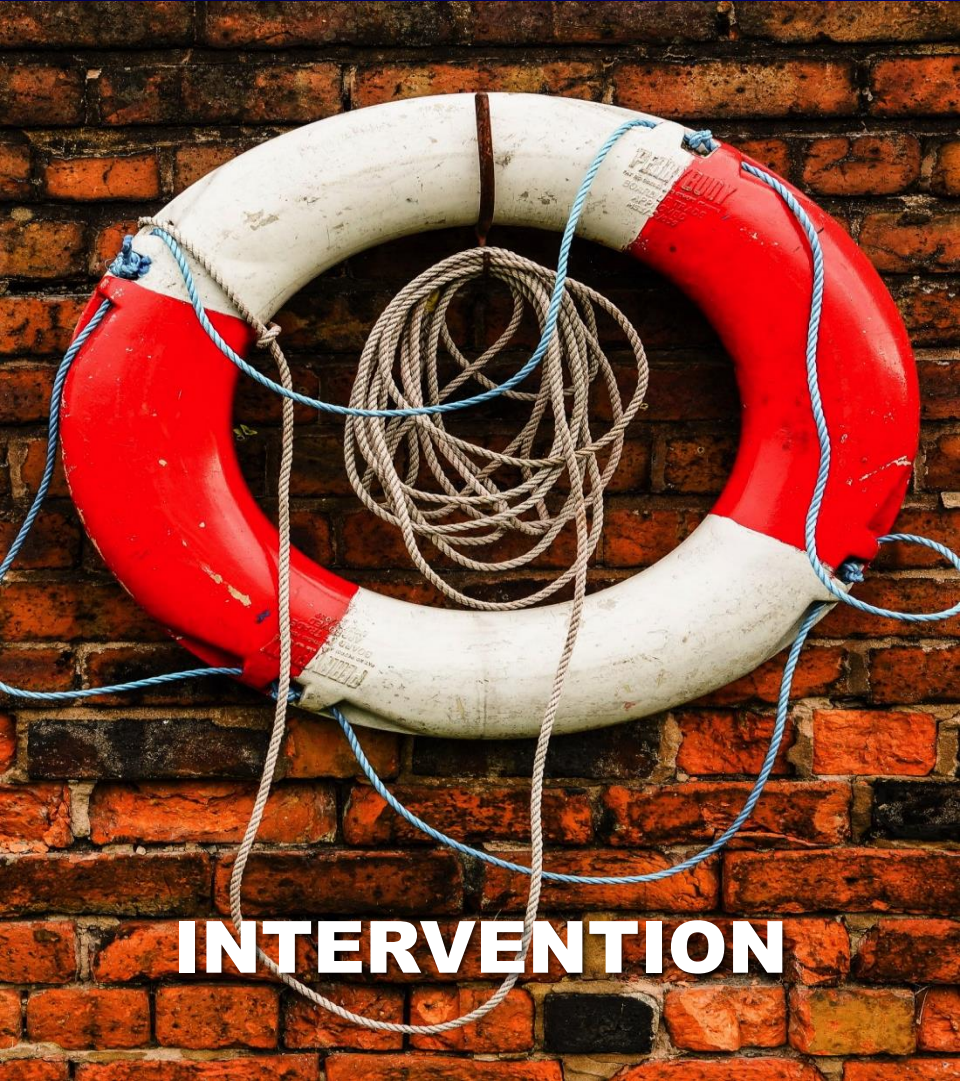
The importance of BOTH  
Child AND adult  
Well-being



# ILL-being to WELL-being







**INTERVENTION**



**PREVENTION**

# Key MESSAGES

1. Create caring environments and relationships with students so that they feel loved, supported, and nurtured.
2. Provide students with opportunities and specific skills that will foster their social and emotional competence, happiness, and well-being.
3. Promoting the adults' social and emotional competence and well-being is critical for this.



*“The well-being of children  
is inseparable from the  
well-being of all the  
critical adults in their lives.”  
- Dr. Stuart Shanker*



**The MERRIT Centre**



THE LEARNING CONTEXT



SEL OF STUDENTS

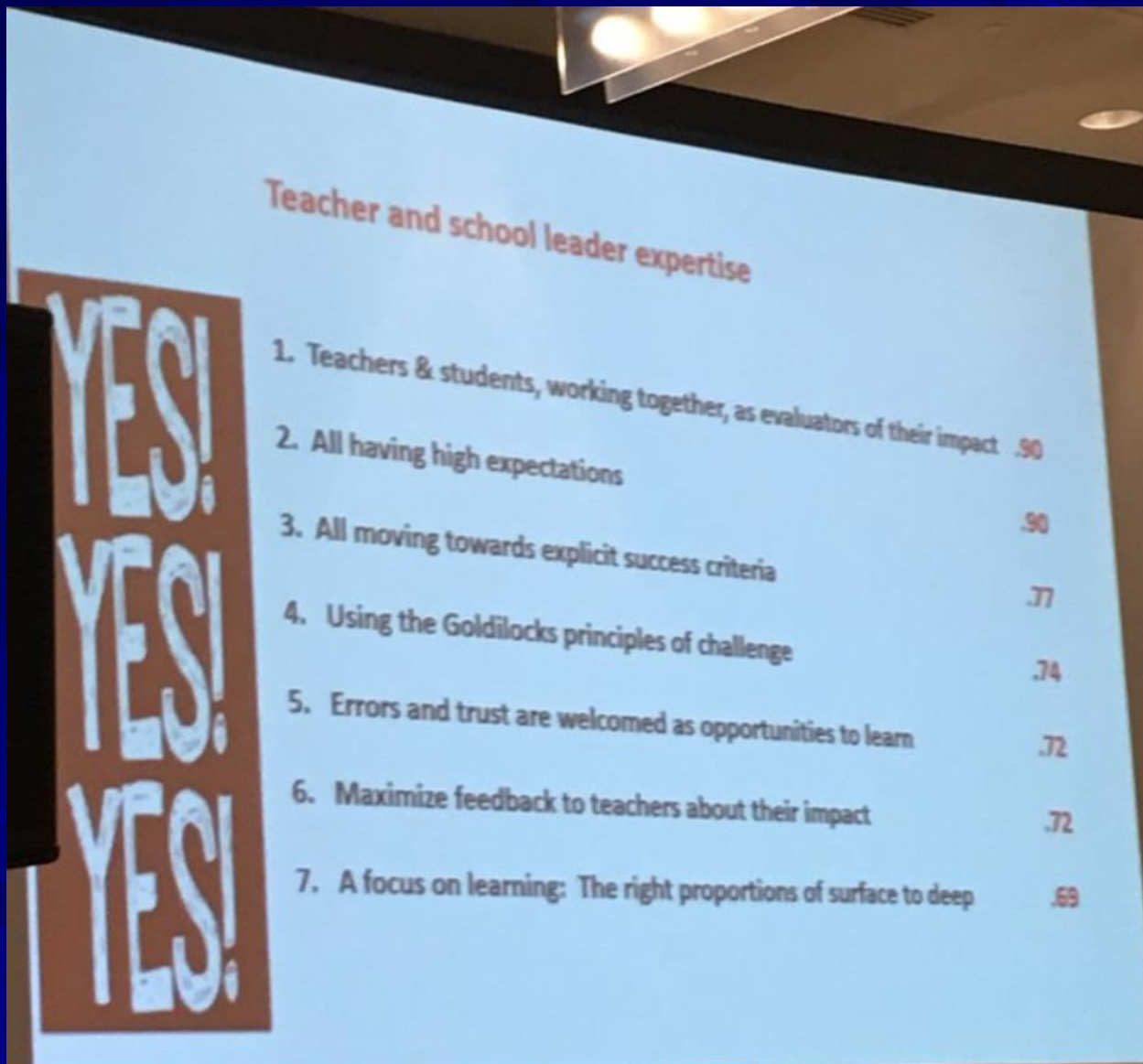


SEL OF EDUCATORS

# Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

- SEL involves the processes by which people acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to
  - understand and manage their emotions,
  - to feel and show empathy for others,
  - to establish and achieve positive goals,
  - to develop and maintain positive relationships,
  - and to make responsible decisions.

# The 7 things we do in school that have the most impact



Teacher and school leader expertise	
1. Teachers & students, working together, as evaluators of their impact	.90
2. All having high expectations	.90
3. All moving towards explicit success criteria	.77
4. Using the Goldilocks principles of challenge	.74
5. Errors and trust are welcomed as opportunities to learn	.72
6. Maximize feedback to teachers about their impact	.72
7. A focus on learning: The right proportions of surface to deep	.69

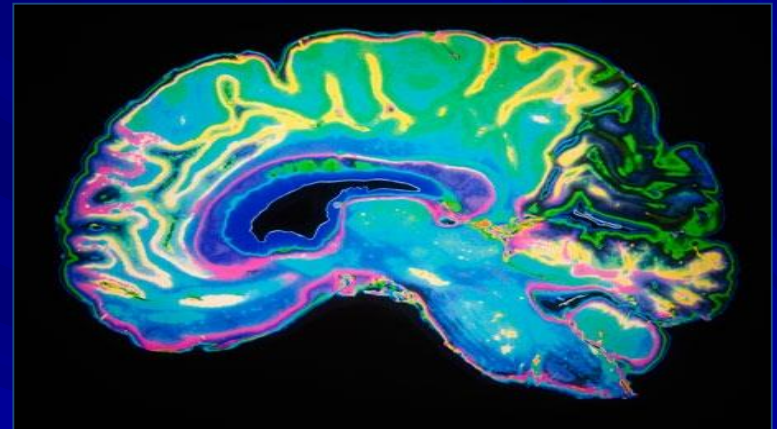




# Toxic Stress

# Stress and Learning

- Early stress may impair the development of self-regulation
- Interferes with learning
- Over time may cause learning and behavior problems
- Especially for children at-risk
- Adult support may be protective



(Blair & Raver, 2012)

# Three Levels of Stress

## Positive

Brief increases in heart rate,  
mild elevations in stress hormone levels.

## Tolerable

Serious, temporary stress responses,  
buffered by supportive relationships.

## Toxic

Prolonged activation of stress response systems  
in the absence of protective relationships.



# Stress .....don't go NUTS

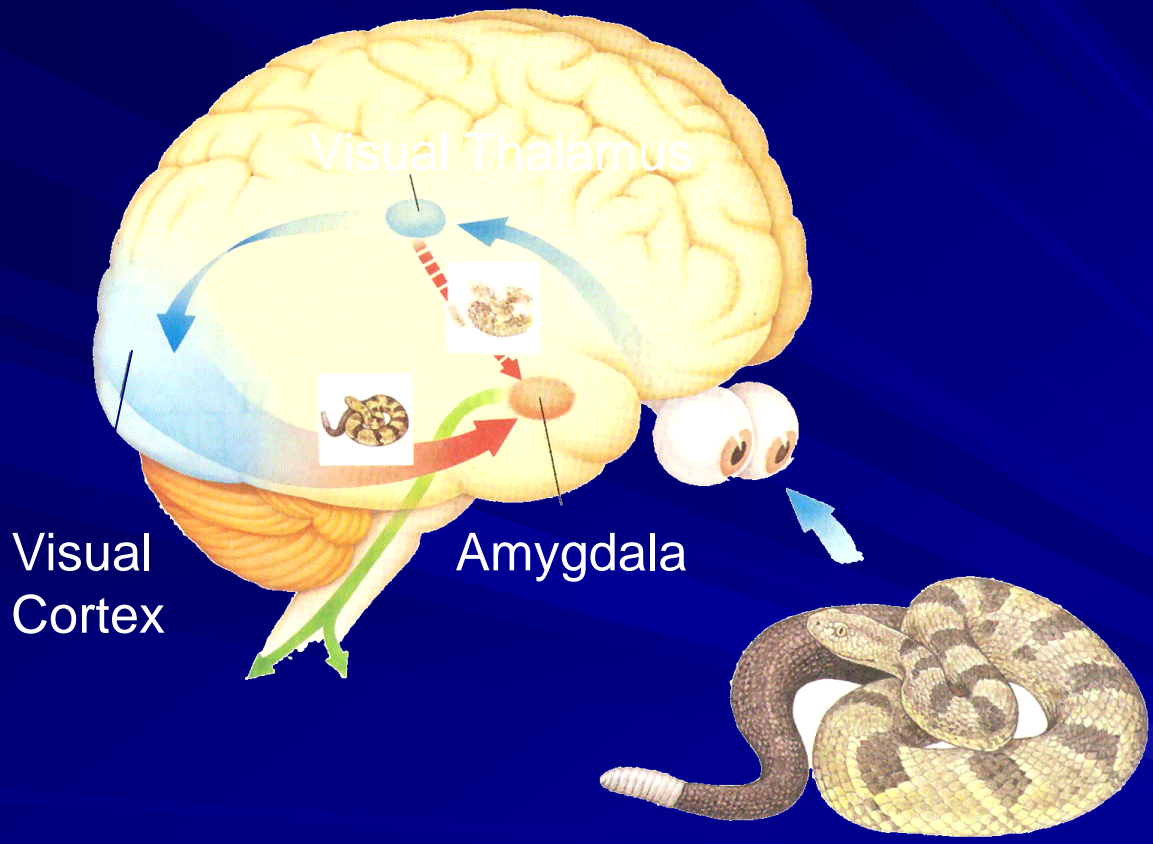
- Novelty,
- Unpredictability,
- Threat to the ego,
- Sense of loss of control



■ Dr Sonia Lupien Centre for Studies on Human Stress



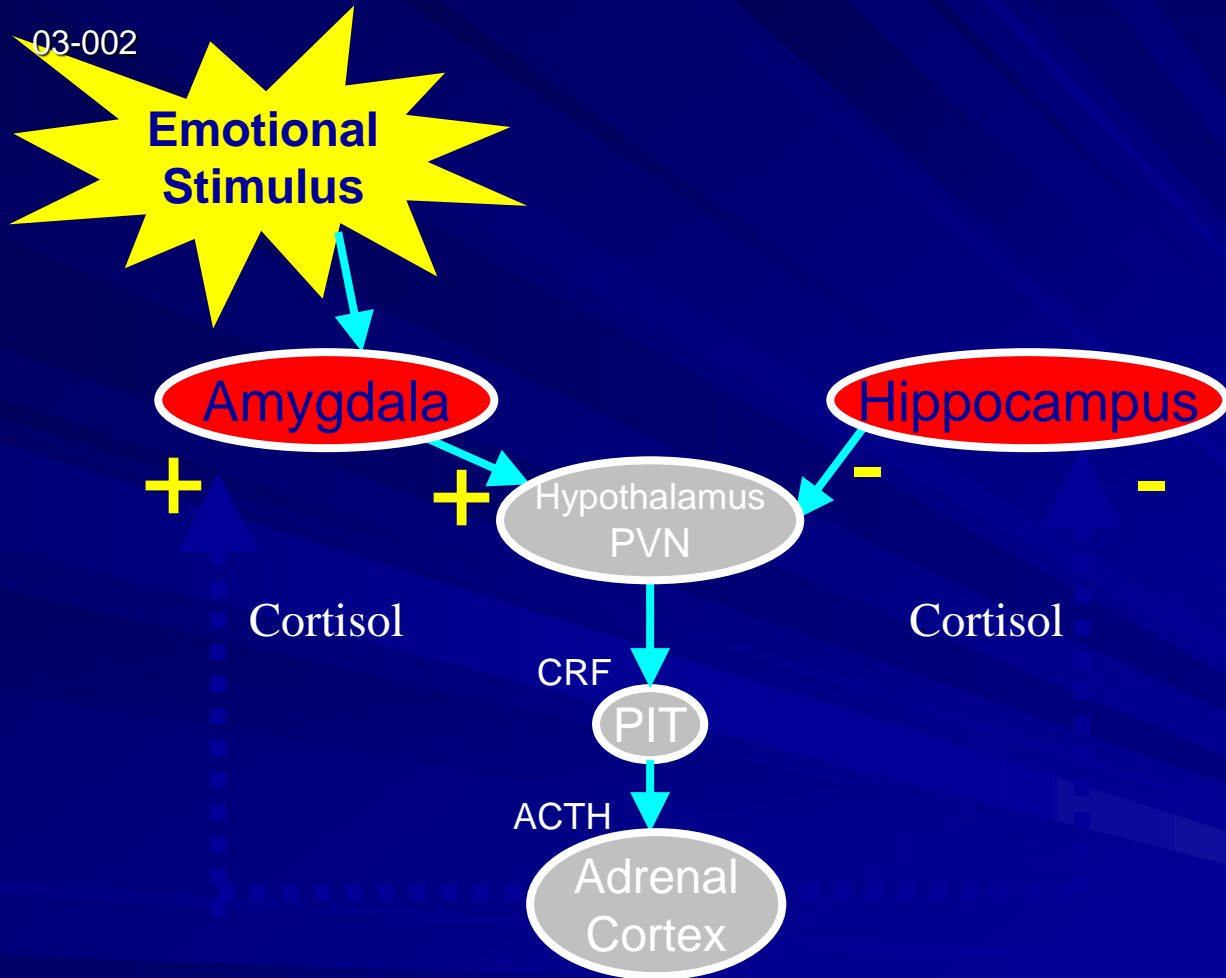
# The Fear Response: Fight or Flight and Stress



Scientific American  
The Hidden Mind, 2002, Volume 12, Number 1

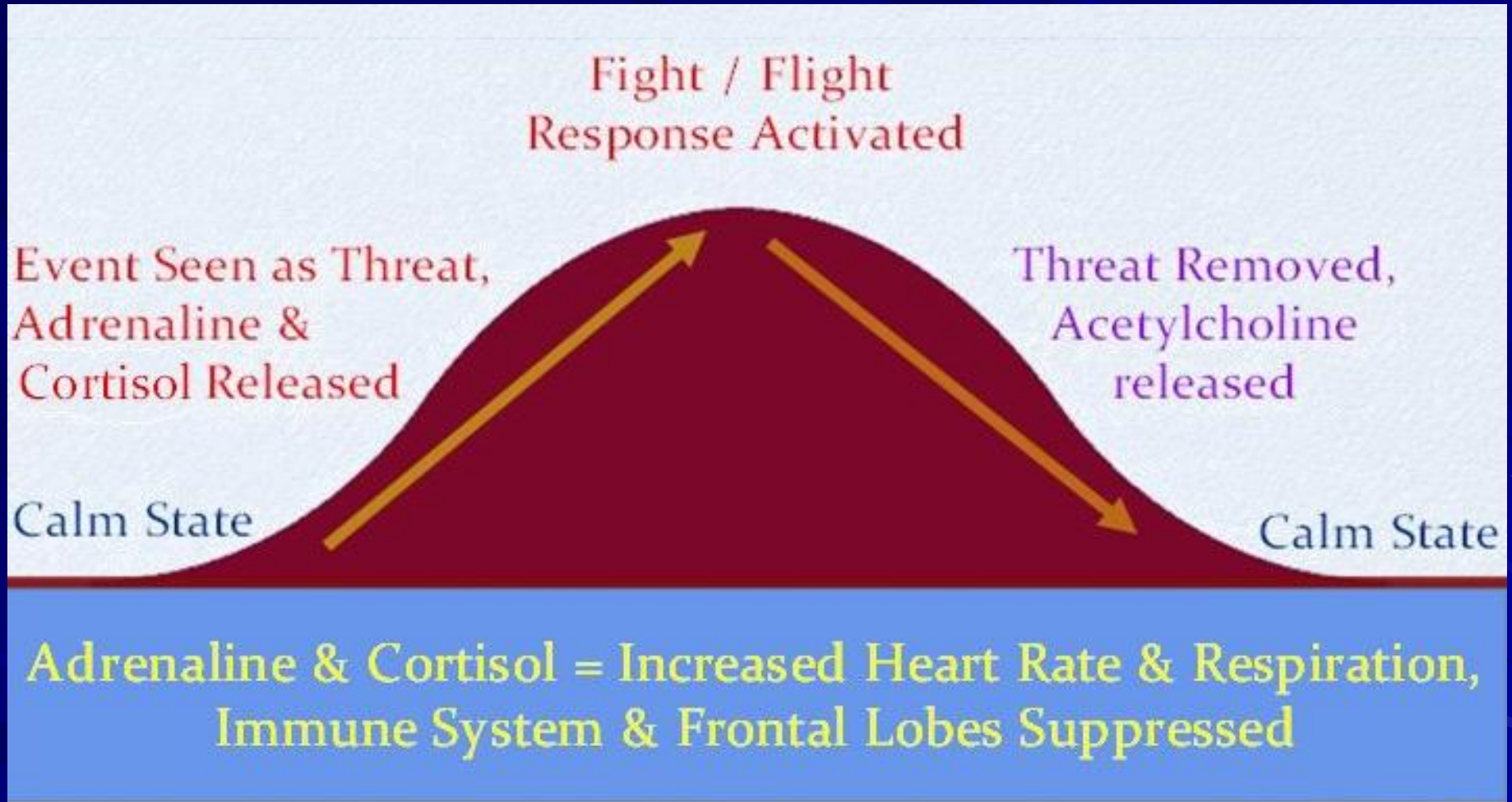
Imagine you are walking home and you see a bear...





LeDoux, Synaptic Self

# The Stress Response Cycle





# Cortisol & Brain Development

Cortisol affects the parts of the brain that

- regulate stress
- store memory
- Are involved in planning and executing complex functions
- Are involved in language

# What happens when the bear is always there...

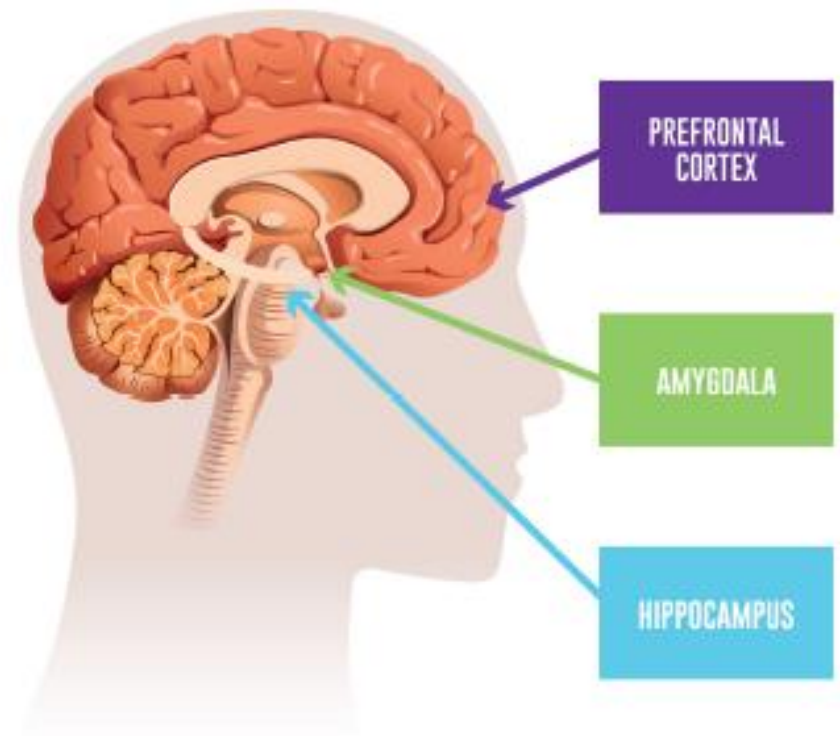
Irritability

Poor memory

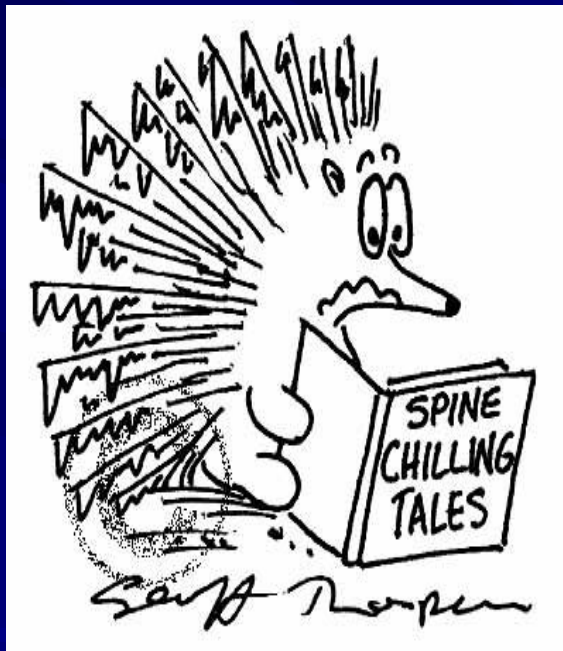
Difficulty focusing

Critical thinking difficulty

Increased anxiety and fear



# Amygdala and Hippocampus



# Cortisol can be bad for the brain

---

## Hippocampus

- ➔ high sterol levels cause loss of dendrites and cell death

## Frontal brain

- ➔ attention deficits



A close-up photograph of a man with a beard and a young girl with blonde hair, both looking towards each other in profile. The man is on the left, and the girl is on the right. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a net or a fence.

# STRESS CONTAGION

Milkie & Warner, 2011, Classroom learning environments and the mental health of first grade children *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*.

Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016, Stress contagion in the classroom? The link between classroom teachers' burnout and morning cortisol in elementary school students. *Social Science & Medicine*.

The teacher creates the weather in the classroom.





# Sources of Teacher Stress

- Managing student misbehavior,
- providing support to needy and/or unmotivated students,
- feeling that their workload is overwhelming,
- feeling a lack of control over decisions that affect them and their students
- having little time to relax due to the need to take a great deal of work home,
- feeling the constant pressure to be accountable for student outcomes (Richards, 2012)

# New Pedagogies for Deep Learning: Levelling the Playing Field for All Children



Jean M Clinton BMus MD FRCP(C) McMaster University  
@drjeanforkids clintonj@mcmaster.ca



# The Equity Hypothesis

- The 'old notion that students who have struggled with school must wait until they have mastered the foundations of literacy and numeracy are being replaced with effective programs that bolster foundational skills but simultaneously engross students in authentic tasks that engage them deeply while providing meaningful ways to learn critical learning skills.

# Clinton's take

- When students fully engage with the 6C's of Character, Citizenship, Collaboration, Communication, Creativity and Critical Thinking, those students who come from disadvantage have a more profound and deeper opportunity to engage in the learning through collaborative inquiry . They are able to bring their experience and life knowledge, rather than simply being labeled as not having what we 'need them to know'"

# In the words of an Ontario Educator....

- "This approach to teaching has allowed me to pay attention to my students in a truly meaningful way. Before, I was desperately trying to cover curriculum that I knew they wouldn't remember. Consequently, while I would love hearing all about my students ideas and adventures, there was no time to act on that knowledge. Now - it's a different story! I'm deeply interested in who my students are (interests, questions, skills, personality, connections, lives) because it is all the source of direction for their education".

# Connecting

- How do we spend our time with our children?







# Directing and Correcting



# Scenarios

- What we Think....
- Affects how we feel....
- Affects how we act...

# Collaborative Professionalism

- In Ontario, collaborative professionalism is defined as professionals – at all levels of the education system<sup>1</sup> – working together, sharing knowledge, skills and experience to improve student achievement and well-being of both students and staff





# Leading Mentally Healthy Schools



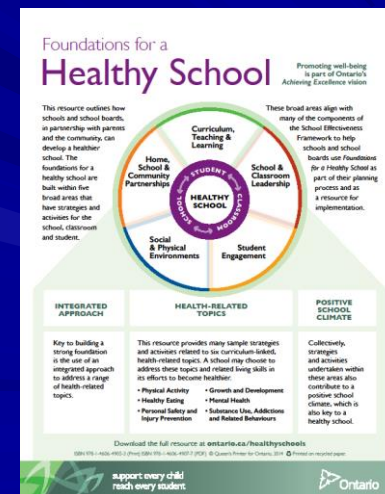
*Setting the Stage for Best Practices in School Mental Health*

# Supporting Mental Well-Being for ALL at School

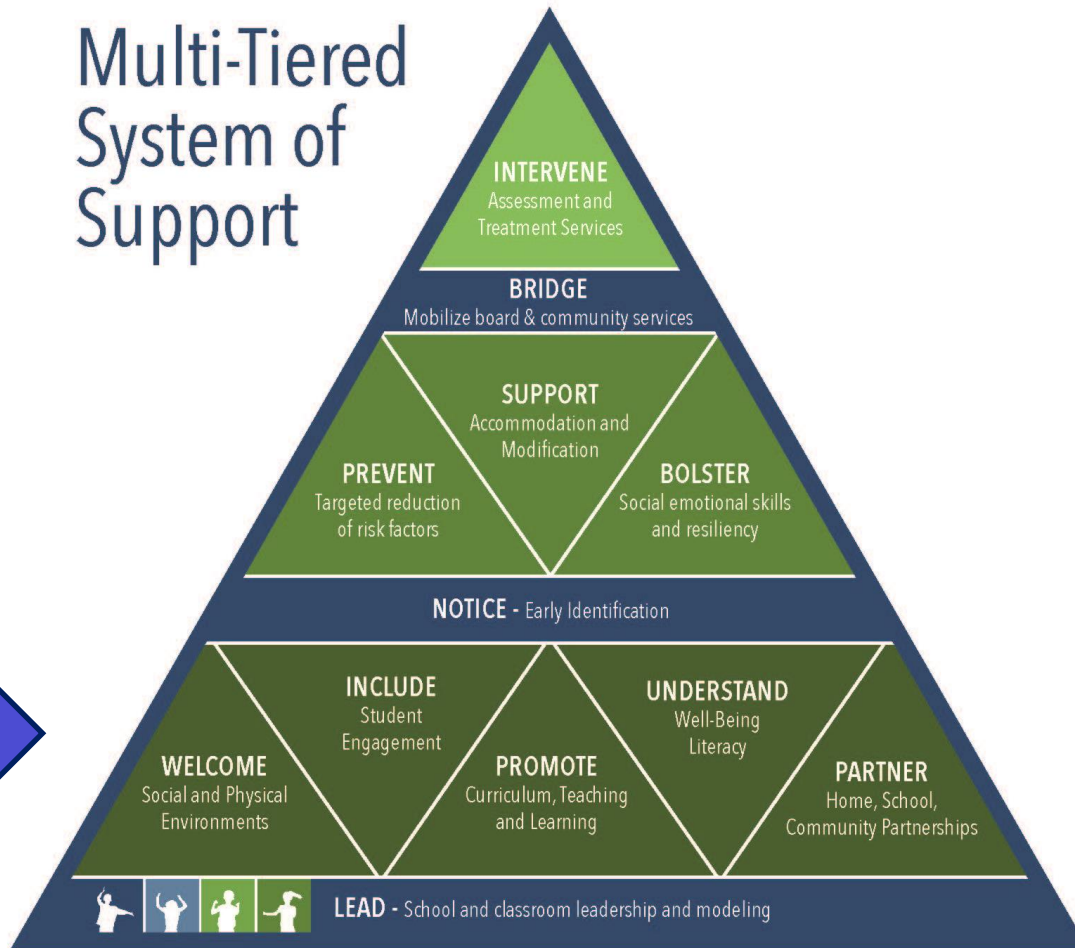


Educators are well-positioned to promote mental well-being for **ALL** students, daily in classrooms across Ontario

- **WELCOME** - Creating Supportive Classroom Environments
- **INCLUDE** – Student Engagement
- **PROMOTE** -Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning
- **KNOW**– Well-Being Literacy
- **PARTNER** - Home, School, Community Partnership



# Multi-Tiered System of Support



WELL-BEING  
PROMOTION  
FOR ALL



# Promoting Mental Health

## Setting the stage for a Mentally Healthy Classroom

### What does it look like?

- Meaningful relationships
- Knowing your students
- Genuine connection with students
- Systematic, explicit & intentional practice of the 5 key teacher behaviours:
  - Welcoming
  - Including
  - Understanding
  - Promoting
  - Partnering

### How do I get there?

- ✓ Knowing your students
- ✓ Establish baseline knowledge of students and their interest
- ✓ Connectedness
- ✓ Pervasive Caring
- ✓ Establishing real relationships
- ✓ Being systematic, intentional and explicit in daily practice







# Giving our kids a sense of well-being

....

**“RELATIONSHIPS, RELATIONSHIPS,  
RELATIONSHIPS”**

**“relationships” are the “active  
ingredients” of the environment’s  
influence on healthy child development”**

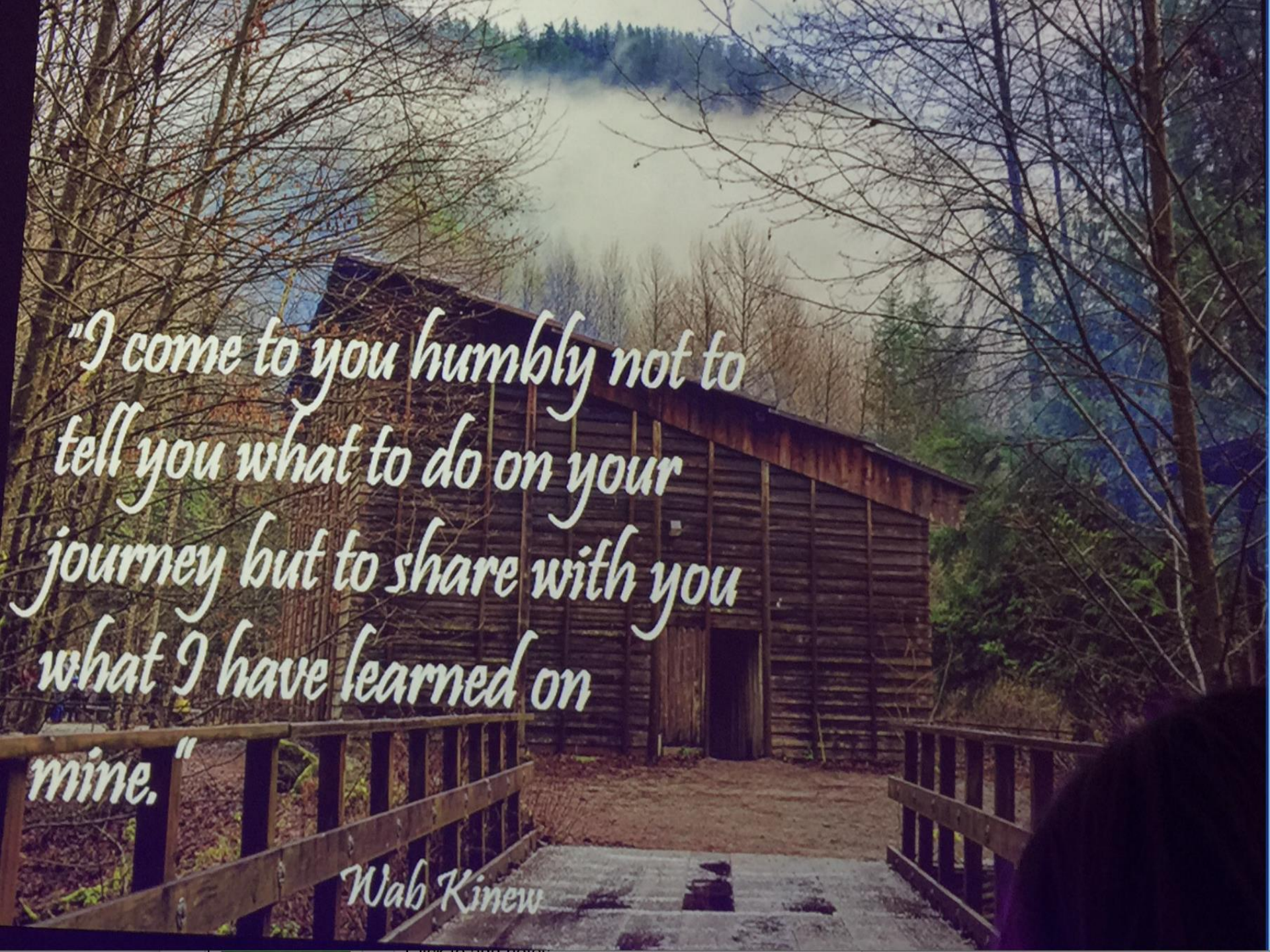
*National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004)*

# What do ALL students need at school?

- A warm welcome
  - A smile
  - A connection to a caring adult, every day
  - A chance to learn
  - A safe place to risk
  - Someone who notices when something is wrong
  - Someone who reaches out when they notice
  - Someone who listens, and tries to find help for them
  - Someone who believes in them, and instills hope
- (Dr. Kathy Short)





A rustic wooden barn with a dark roof and a central doorway, situated in a misty forest. The barn is surrounded by bare trees and a wooden fence in the foreground. The background shows a misty mountain range under a cloudy sky.

*"I come to you humbly not to  
tell you what to do on your  
journey but to share with you  
what I have learned on  
mine."*

*Wab Kinew*