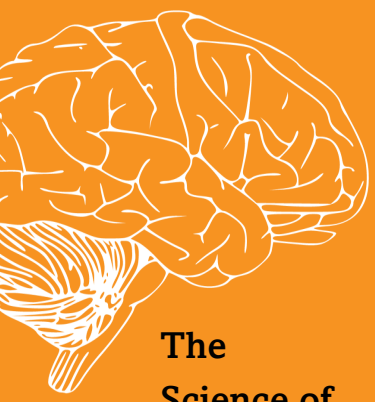

The Science of Stress and Safety

SEEN, HEARD, AND VALUED:
Psychological Safety

When you hear the word, “safety,” do you immediately think of physical safety? **Safety is the absence of threat or harm, but not all threats are physical.**

Consider other types of safety that humans experience: emotional, relational, financial, spiritual, and psychological. While physical safety is important to immediate survival, other types of safety impact long-term survival.

Prolonged stress and worry about financial stability, secure housing, and relationships can cause or exacerbate physical and mental illness. The ACEs study considered 10 categories of stressful experiences in childhood and the results showed a relationship between stress exposure and long-term health outcomes. The Philadelphia ACEs study expanded the understanding of stress to include community stresses such as food insecurity, neighborhood violence, discrimination, bullying, and foster services involvement.

Psychological safety is particularly significant in schools. **Teaching or working in an environment that allows us to share ideas without the fear of negative judgement, to admit errors, to ask for help, and to take creative risks allows psychological safety.** We in turn, can extend that safety to our colleagues and our students.

To raise self-awareness of safety ask yourself, do I feel seen, heard, and valued in a way that allows me to be open and connected to others? And, **as you work with students, are you creating and sustaining an environment where they feel seen, heard, and valued?**

To support psychological safety with others, acknowledge them and honor their ideas, value diverse points of view, be a trustworthy professional, and address issues with a curiosity that allows multiple solutions to be heard and considered before any choice or compromise is made.

Jeanne Elberfeld, MD, LSW
NeuroLogic® Coach

About the CDC-Kaiser ACE Study | Violence Prevention | Injury Center | CDC

Philadelphia ACE Survey | ACES Philadelphia

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