

inSocialWork Podcast Series – Back to School This Fall: Addressing Trauma’s Impact

Speaker 1 [00:00:10] Everybody, and welcome back to inSocialWork, I'm Peter Sobota. It's looking very likely that K through 12 and higher education are going to give going back to school in person again this fall to go. The pandemic laid bare any illusions we had about how much progress we've made related to health and wealth equality, racial equity, violence in our society and our ability to cope with loss and death, our political

Speaker 1 [00:00:24] divisions, our

Speaker 1 [00:00:25] ambivalence related to immigration, and most of all, our need to address personal and collective trauma. As vaccines and treatments have evolved with many children, parents and educators and communities will no doubt be thrilled to get back to the routine of in-person school. The educational, health and well-being, economic and emotional related benefits of

Speaker 1 [00:00:57] routine in-person school is widely

Speaker 1 [00:01:00] anticipated with joy, but challenges no doubt remain. Our guest, Karen Gross, will talk with us about what schools should be concerned about as they

Speaker 1 [00:01:09] reopen, and especially

Speaker 1 [00:01:11] why trauma

Speaker 1 [00:01:11] matters most

Speaker 1 [00:01:12] practically. She will tell us about what can be done concretely to respond to our new

Speaker 1 [00:01:16] reality and, in fact,

Speaker 1 [00:01:18] how we might even improve the quality of education we offer in light of a global

Speaker 1 [00:01:22] pandemic that has turned our

Speaker 1 [00:01:24] lives upside down. Karen Gross is an educator and author of both adult and children's books.

Speaker 1 [00:01:29] She is a

Speaker 1 [00:01:20] former college president and former senior policy adviser to the US Department of Education in the Obama administration. She specializes in student success with emphasis on the impact of trauma on learning and psychosocial development. She is also a continuing education instructor at the Rutgers Graduate School of

Speaker 1 [00:01:48] Social Work, and her

Speaker 1 [00:01:49] latest book for adults is Trauma Doesn't Stop at the School Door. Karen Gross, welcome to inSocialWork.

Speaker 2 [00:01:56] Hello, nice to be with you.

Speaker 1 [00:01:58] Well, Karen, there's a lot to unpack here in preparing for our discussion today.

Speaker 1 [00:02:04] I was reminded

Speaker 1 [00:02:05] of some work I was exposed to years ago by a fellow named William

Speaker 1 [00:02:08] Bridges who wrote

Speaker 1 [00:02:10] books on transitions. In a nutshell, he talked about a process of

Speaker 1 [00:02:14] ending, a period of

Speaker 1 [00:02:16] time spent in what he called the neutral

Speaker 1 [00:02:18] zone, and

Speaker 1 [00:02:19] finally, the forging of a new beginning. Let's start with what you think we should be concerned about as we move toward our new beginning, as we prepare to open schools of all kinds. This fall,

Speaker 2 [00:02:22] the notion of transition is a very important one. And I just want to focus on that word for a moment where historically not very good at transitions. We're not good at transitions from pre-K into elementary school.

Speaker 2 [00:02:50] We're not

Speaker 2 [00:02:50] good at transitions from elementary school into middle school, middle school into high school or high school, into

Speaker 2 [00:02:58] college, college,

Speaker 2 [00:02:59] into the workplace or into graduate education. In all phases of education.

Speaker 2 [00:02:05] We struggle with

Speaker 2 [00:02:07] transitions.

Speaker 2 [00:02:08] And so

Speaker 2 [00:02:09] when you think about what happened to schools during the pandemic, that

Speaker 2 [00:02:12] they were shut down

Speaker 2 [00:02:14] in many cases like a light switch and then either reopened online or reopened in a hybrid

Speaker 2 [00:02:21] fashion and now

Speaker 2 [00:02:22] reopening largely in-person, it's not surprising that we will be encountering transitions

Speaker 2 [00:02:20] at

Speaker 2 [00:02:20] every turn,

Speaker 2 [00:02:22] particularly in light of

Speaker 2 [00:02:24] all that has happened over the last 18 months.

Speaker 1 [00:02:28] We're not that terrific at transition under normal circumstances, and we're not exactly living in normal circumstances.

Speaker 2 [00:02:45] That's correct. And while the pandemic is one large piece of

Speaker 2 [00:02:50] this, there are a

Speaker 2 [00:02:52] myriad of other things that have happened in our

Speaker 2 [00:02:54] world, as you noted

Speaker 2 [00:02:56] in your introduction, that have

Speaker 2 [00:02:57] affected educators,

Speaker 2 [00:02:59] parents and

Speaker 2 [00:04:01] students.

Speaker 2 [00:04:02] And lots of that has not been

Speaker 2 [00:04:04] processed and lots

Speaker 2 [00:04:06] of what has

Speaker 2 [00:04:07] happened. We have dealt

Speaker 2 [00:04:08] with in isolation in part because of masks and in part because of social distancing and in part because institutions and traditions that we normally have haven't happened. And so we're in this really unusual

Speaker 2 [00:04:22] space where we

Speaker 2 [00:04:25] think we can just reopen. But it's way, way, way more difficult than we're giving attention to. And so we would be wise to think better about reopenings.

Speaker 1 [00:04:41] Yeah, it'll be interesting to see

Speaker 1 [00:04:42] what we do in the grand

Speaker 1 [00:04:45] scheme of things. Now, obviously, that's a really nice overview of kind of where we're at.

Speaker 1 [00:04:49] But I know

Speaker 1 [00:04:50] you're really interested in trauma and I think anybody who knows a little bit about this will see the fit when I think of

Speaker 2 [00:04:58] trauma and.

Speaker 1 [00:05:00] Maybe not in the most sophisticated

Speaker 1 [00:05:01] way, but trauma

Speaker 1 [00:05:02] is something that's

Speaker 1 [00:05:04] unexpected that a person

Speaker 1 [00:05:05] wasn't prepared for. And in the worst cases, rocks them to their very foundation that they just are so unsettled. It's beyond kind of a normal. I'm upset about something. So given the picture that you just painted, why does trauma matter as we move forward here toward the full trauma matters?

Speaker 2 [00:05:26] Because trauma produces symptomology, both acute symptomology and deferred symptomology. And all of those symptoms impact learning and psychosocial development. When people have been traumatized, whatever the source of the

Speaker 2 [00:05:46] trauma or the sources, then

Speaker 2 [00:05:50] what happens is individuals exhibit different symptoms

Speaker 2 [00:05:54] of that that affect

Speaker 2 [00:05:56] memory, affect concentration,

Speaker 2 [00:05:59] affect

Speaker 2 [00:05:59] mood, affect feelings, affect psychosocial

Speaker 2 [00:06:04] balance.

Speaker 2 [00:06:05] And all of those things occur. Whether the trauma is acute, like what we've seen in Miami with the collapse of a

Speaker 2 [00:06:14] building or whether it's

Speaker 2 [00:06:16] chronic trauma akin to what the pandemic has been. And in a sense,

Speaker 2 [00:06:22] we're

Speaker 2 [00:06:22] way better equipped

Speaker 2 [00:06:24] to deal with acute trauma

Speaker 2 [00:06:27] than we are with chronic

Speaker 2 [00:06:29] trauma, which is what's

Speaker 2 [00:06:21] been

Speaker 2 [00:06:21] occurring for the last

Speaker 2 [00:06:22] 18 months.

Speaker 1 [00:06:24] You're right, we do have experiences. I'm not sure if we know exactly what we're doing yet, but we do have a lot of experience with acute

Speaker 1 [00:06:44] traumas, unfortunately, with

Speaker 1 [00:06:46] this kind of chronic, ongoing, slow moving 18 month period that's been kind of occupied by the pandemic. How do you see this as different from acute trauma? And obviously, we're not going to get away with the same old, same old. But I've got to think it's going to be different.

Speaker 2 [00:07:05] I think and I've actually written about this because it's been very troubling to me. When we have acute trauma, we know what to do. We send in disaster teams of all sorts.

Speaker 2 [00:07:19] We send in

Speaker 2 [00:07:20] high numbers of people to both deal with those who have been killed or injured and to deal with the survivors. And we have a protocol for that. We have teams that are ready and willing and able to do that.

Speaker 2 [00:07:28] Indeed, prior to the

Speaker 2 [00:07:29] pandemic, I served as a psychological first aid

Speaker 2 [00:07:42] provider. I would go to disaster sites. We, for the most

Speaker 2 [00:07:46] part, know how to

Speaker 2 [00:07:48] do that. That doesn't

Speaker 2 [00:07:49] mean there aren't deficiencies in communication

Speaker 2 [00:07:52] and that there

Speaker 2 [00:07:52] aren't deficiencies in how the teams coordinate. And it's not perfect because we don't have educators on most disaster relief teams. But notwithstanding that,

we're actually pretty good at disasters that are acute. The problem is that when you have a chronic trauma that has extended

Speaker 2 [00:08:12] over a long

Speaker 2 [00:08:14] period of

Speaker 2 [00:08:15] time, where there's

Speaker 2 [00:08:16] uncertainty at its end point, if we even know when that end point will

Speaker 2 [00:08:22] be and

Speaker 2 [00:08:24] we don't see it in the

Speaker 2 [00:08:26] same way that we

Speaker 2 [00:08:28] see an acute trauma like a building collapse or an earthquake or a

Speaker 2 [00:08:22] fire or

Speaker 2 [00:08:25] even a shooting, what you see with the pandemic is you may see individual examples of the trauma, but you don't get a

Speaker 2 [00:08:45] sense of

Speaker 2 [00:08:46] the over 600000 people who've died. And you don't get a sense of how all the

Speaker 2 [00:08:52] organizations, from

Speaker 2 [00:08:52] schools to hospitals to

Speaker 2 [00:08:55] communities to religious

Speaker 2 [00:08:57] environments, have been functioning. And so the systems we have in

Speaker 2 [00:09:02] place aren't

Speaker 2 [00:09:02] geared to chronic trauma. Nor, by the

Speaker 2 [00:09:06] way, is the media.

Speaker 1 [00:09:09] It's very much like the death by a thousand cuts phenomena that each one in and of itself is an injury of some kind.

Speaker 1 [00:09:16] But until

Speaker 1 [00:09:17] the cumulative results of

Speaker 1 [00:09:18] that hit, a lot of

Speaker 1 [00:09:20] us kind of dismiss it as significant as

Speaker 1 [00:09:22] it is. And the macro

Speaker 1 [00:09:24] version of what you just said. I really like a lot. So let me ask you, if I could, a question about schools that I've been thinking about. And again, this is kind of my opinion, so feel free to reshape the question. But schools for me are like really unique settings that are built for very specific goals. And depending on the district and and really what they're chasing,

Speaker 1 [00:09:44] it can be anything from

Speaker 1 [00:09:46] pure academics to a holistic

Speaker 2 [00:09:48] education and health

Speaker 1 [00:09:50] and mental health professionals who work in school

Speaker 1 [00:09:52] environments. I would say,

Speaker 1 [00:09:55] unfortunately, are often seen as

Speaker 2 [00:09:57] ancillary to the.

Speaker 1 [00:09:59] Focus of the school district, they kind of hang out on the periphery, almost so much of children's and young

Speaker 1 [00:10:07] person's time

Speaker 1 [00:10:08] and interactions are really directly with

Speaker 1 [00:10:12] teachers and

Speaker 1 [00:10:12] faculty who are on the front lines and who are the eyes and ears of that system. Yet teachers have many and conflicting demands on their time in the resources. How do you think people who are knowledgeable about trauma and even people like social workers and psychologists,

Speaker 1 [00:10:22] how do

Speaker 1 [00:10:22] you think we can prepare teachers for what's ahead and how do we forge working collaborations with these folks whose collaboration we really need to be successful in our work? I know that was a long winded question, but the questions are at the end.

Speaker 2 [00:10:50] Well, actually, it's a question with many layers.

Speaker 2 [00:10:52] And I think one

Speaker 2 [00:10:55] of the starter

Speaker 2 [00:10:56] pieces of it is how do

Speaker 2 [00:10:57] we deal with these issues

Speaker 2 [00:10:59] now and then?

Speaker 2 [00:11:01] Are there longer term strategies that we should be deploying

Speaker 2 [00:11:05] to deal with

Speaker 2 [00:11:06] these issues as and when they arise in the

Speaker 2 [00:11:09] future? So let me

Speaker 2 [00:11:11] first address, like, what do we do now? One of the things that we have to do now

Speaker 2 [00:11:16] is what I call the

Speaker 2 [00:11:18] three

Speaker 2 [00:11:18] P's. We have to

Speaker 2 [00:11:20] plan.

Speaker 2 [00:11:21] We have to prepare and we

Speaker 2 [00:11:22] have to

Speaker 2 [00:11:22] predict.

Speaker 2 [00:11:25] And this

Speaker 2 [00:11:26] involves a group that

Speaker 2 [00:11:28] cuts across the silos of an educational institution.

Speaker 2 [00:11:22] In other words, we silo

Speaker 2 [00:11:24] people, as you describe. We have educators here. We have what you're calling ancillary people. I probably would give them a different name, but social workers, school counselors,

Speaker 2 [00:11:44] coaches, those who

Speaker 2 [00:11:46] teach non classroom

Speaker 2 [00:11:48] based learning, art,

Speaker 2 [00:11:50] music and the like.

Speaker 2 [00:11:52] So you need

Speaker 2 [00:11:54] teams that involve administrators, that involve educators of all sorts, parents and depending on the age of the children, perhaps

Speaker 2 [00:12:02] students to think

Speaker 2 [00:12:04] in advance of reopening as to how to do it well and then to prepare for that and then to anticipate the kind of issues that will

Speaker 2 [00:12:15] arise once

Speaker 2 [00:12:16] reopening

Speaker 2 [00:12:17] occurs. And all

Speaker 2 [00:12:19] of this work has to be

Speaker 2 [00:12:20] done before

Speaker 2 [00:12:21] the school reopens

Speaker 2 [00:12:22] because it's not

Speaker 2 [00:12:25] like you'll be able to do these things. Once the school reopens, then you'll be

Speaker 2 [00:12:21] reactive as opposed

Speaker 2 [00:12:22] to proactive. So part of what I'm trying to encourage now

Speaker 2 [00:12:28] is the educational institution thinking

Speaker 2 [00:12:42] in advance before they reopen at the end of August or September about a host of issues about which they actually can

Speaker 2 [00:12:51] do something if they think about them and

Speaker 2 [00:12:54] if they include an interdisciplinary, non siloed team to work on these

Speaker 2 [00:12:00] issues. Now, longer term,

Speaker 2 [00:12:02] we would do well if our schools of education provided courses on how educators can deal with traumatized students. At the present moment, most schools of

Speaker 2 [00:12:12] education don't

Speaker 2 [00:12:14] have those

Speaker 2 [00:12:14] courses, or if they

Speaker 2 [00:12:16] do, they're just a

Speaker 2 [00:12:17] portion of a

Speaker 2 [00:12:18] larger course

Speaker 2 [00:12:20] on psychosocial

Speaker 2 [00:12:21] well-being. Given the plethora of trauma, the high family dysfunction, the high ACE

Speaker 2 [00:12:20] scores and our

Speaker 2 [00:12:22] knowledge of positive childhood

Speaker 2 [00:12:22] experiences, we would do

Speaker 2 [00:12:25] really well to have our educators

Speaker 2 [00:12:28] prepared for the

Speaker 2 [00:12:40] trauma that many of their students experience

Speaker 2 [00:12:44] and then

Speaker 2 [00:12:44] how it's symptomology displays itself and then strategies for dealing with it. But we're not there.

Speaker 2 [00:12:51] And so in the

Speaker 2 [00:12:52] absence of systemic change like that, we need to focus on what we can do now and we can do

Speaker 2 [00:14:02] things if we become

Speaker 2 [00:14:02] aware of them and then deal with them. So I use this

Speaker 2 [00:14:08] framework name,

Speaker 2 [00:14:09] team and frame. If you can name what's happening, namely trauma, then you contain it. If you don't name it, you can't tame it. And if you can tame it, then you can do two things with it. You can frame

Speaker 2 [00:14:24] it, as it put it, in a

Speaker 2 [00:14:25] picture frame and make it front and center so that it becomes something upon which you focus. And you can also create the structure, the frame

Speaker 2 [00:14:26] of a building to

Speaker 2 [00:14:27] hold all the things that you're going to need to

Speaker 2 [00:14:41] be doing on a go

Speaker 2 [00:14:42] forward basis within educational institutions.

Speaker 1 [00:14:46] Yeah. Could you give an example

Speaker 1 [00:14:49] or two about how

Speaker 1 [00:14:51] you anticipate

Speaker 1 [00:14:52] trauma manifesting in a school and also

Speaker 1 [00:14:55] while you're at it, how a trauma sensitive lens would. Change how that is perceived.

Speaker 2 [00:15:01] Sure. So I often say to people, we need to put on a trauma lens and view the world through that perspective. And there are actually a wonderful series of books called Promotion in which you put a piece of

Speaker 2 [00:15:14] plastic over an

Speaker 2 [00:15:16] image in a book. And when you do, the image changes. And I tell people this is what a trauma lens does, it changes your perspective

Speaker 2 [00:15:25] on what's happening. And by the way, even for

Speaker 2 [00:15:29] the limited number of people who aren't traumatized, trauma, responsive

Speaker 2 [00:15:22] pedagogy and a trauma,

Speaker 2 [00:15:25] responsive

Speaker 2 [00:15:26] culture helps all

Speaker 2 [00:15:27] students. It's like a rising tide lifts all boats. There's nothing wrong with introducing trauma,

Speaker 2 [00:15:42] responsiveness and trauma, responsive

Speaker 2 [00:15:45] pedagogy within an

Speaker 2 [00:15:47] institution. So you want an example. So trauma

Speaker 2 [00:15:50] symptomology manifests itself differently in different students of different

Speaker 2 [00:15:54] ages and at different stages.

Speaker 2 [00:15:56] But one way trauma manifests

Speaker 2 [00:15:59] itself is through

Speaker 2 [00:16:00] dysregulation. So students who act out, students who don't listen to the assignment, students who can't sit at their desks, students who hit another student, students who push their chair out.

Speaker 2 [00:16:12] And depending on your

Speaker 2 [00:16:14] age, you do that acting out differently. But that's a form of dysregulation. Other students actually

Speaker 2 [00:16:20] disassociate. They sit quietly

Speaker 2 [00:16:22] in the back. They look out the window. They stare down at their computer. They don't engage with their peers. And then there were a whole group of students who are overregulated. They do everything the teacher asks and then some, and they keep asking for more and

Speaker 2 [00:16:26] more things, as

Speaker 2 [00:16:28] if by doing everything

Speaker 2 [00:16:29] right, they can

Speaker 2 [00:16:41] push away the feelings that they're experiencing and whether students are dysregulated or disassociated or overregulated. We often mistake the accompanying behavior for being something that they're doing

Speaker 2 [00:16:57] wrong, some

Speaker 2 [00:16:58] intentional conduct that they somehow can control. But the thing about trauma symptomology is you didn't cause the trauma and most likely you can't control and

Speaker 2 [00:17:10] reregulate without some help.

Speaker 2 [00:17:12] And so we would be wise to recognize the kinds of behaviors we'll

Speaker 2 [00:17:18] be seeing in our schools of

Speaker 2 [00:17:21] students of all

Speaker 2 [00:17:22] ages, young

Speaker 2 [00:17:24] and older, and thinking about how we can respond to them. Now, let me give you another example. Most educational institutions will have experienced someone in that

Speaker 2 [00:17:27] institution who has passed

Speaker 2 [00:17:29] away because of covid.

Speaker 2 [00:17:41] It might be a teacher, it might be an

Speaker 2 [00:17:42] administrator,

Speaker 2 [00:17:44] it might

Speaker 2 [00:17:44] be a student's family member. It might be someone in the community who is near and dear to everyone. But it's highly

Speaker 2 [00:17:52] probable that most

Speaker 2 [00:17:52] schools will have had in some fashion a death that will have impacted their community. How are you going to respond to that when school reopens? Are you just going to say, well, well, I'm going to just pretend that didn't happen

Speaker 2 [00:18:08] or oh, gee,

Speaker 2 [00:18:09] well, I don't know, let other people deal with that, let the family deal with that. But in point of fact, those deaths will impact

Speaker 2 [00:18:19] the institution and we would do

Speaker 2 [00:18:21] way

Speaker 2 [00:18:21] better to

Speaker 2 [00:18:22] anticipate the word predict in my three

Speaker 2 [00:18:25] PS of plan,

Speaker 2 [00:18:26] prepare and predict how people will respond and what we will have to do to deal with some of the tragedies that have occurred or how will we memorialize those educators who passed away? Students will notice their absence. I mean, are we just going to assume, oh, well, they didn't come back for any number of reasons. And since we haven't had

Speaker 2 [00:18:49] memorials and since

Speaker 2 [00:18:51] we haven't had usual

Speaker 2 [00:18:52] traditions and communications

Speaker 2 [00:18:54] for dealing with these issues, they will all come upon

Speaker 2 [00:18:58] us when we reopen.

Speaker 1 [00:19:00] Yeah, can you give an example of how a school could anticipate this and build into something systemically to respond before the wheels come off?

Speaker 2 [00:19:11] Sure. In addition

Speaker 2 [00:19:12] to creating what I call

Speaker 2 [00:19:14] a trauma

Speaker 2 [00:19:15] response team that's in place now in preparation for starting, I also think that team has to be present during the first couple of weeks of school so that students and educators and families can access a team of people who thought about trauma. That's one set of strategies

Speaker 1 [00:19:27] before you go on. Do you have recommendations about

Speaker 1 [00:19:41] who should compromise

Speaker 1 [00:19:42] those teams?

Speaker 2 [00:19:44] Sure. I have lots of ideas as to who should be on those teams. But let me just go back to your other question first before I talk about team composition. We haven't done the best job

Speaker 2 [00:19:57] yet of

Speaker 2 [00:19:58] communicating between educational institutions and students to know what has happened to them in this gap period. Now, some teachers are very familiar with their students over the past 18 months. Others are not. Some administrators are familiar enough with their staff that they

Speaker 2 [00:20:16] know what has

Speaker 2 [00:20:17] happened to them. But understanding what has

Speaker 2 [00:20:21] happened, having the

Speaker 2 [00:20:22] facts is a really important piece of knowing how to

Speaker 2 [00:20:26] respond. Now, you don't

Speaker 2 [00:20:28] just go out and send a note to everybody when you haven't communicated before and say, oh, did anybody die? That's not what I'm talking about. I am talking

Speaker 2 [00:20:28] about thoughtful

Speaker 2 [00:20:40] information gathering from a wide variety of sources that enables institutions

Speaker 2 [00:20:45] to

Speaker 2 [00:20:46] know better who their students

Speaker 2 [00:20:49] and educators are.

Speaker 2 [00:20:51] And if you know who

Speaker 2 [00:20:52] they are, if you know

Speaker 2 [00:20:52] what they've experienced,

Speaker 2 [00:20:55] you're

Speaker 2 [00:20:55] way more likely to be able to come up with

Speaker 2 [00:20:58] solutions and approaches

Speaker 2 [00:21:00] that meet the needs of your community. And that will not be the same across all communities, across all

Speaker 2 [00:21:06] ethnicities, across everywhere,

Speaker 2 [00:21:08] geographically.

Speaker 2 [00:21:09] But if

Speaker 2 [00:21:10] you know your

Speaker 2 [00:21:11] school, one of the things

Speaker 2 [00:21:12] that you can do

Speaker 2 [00:21:12] now is be

Speaker 2 [00:21:15] gathering the kinds of information that will inform how you reopen. Yeah, who should be on this trauma team depends culturally, by the way, a little bit on who you're serving and how your institutions are

Speaker 2 [00:21:29] structured and how much

Speaker 2 [00:21:21] involvement there is at the regional and state level. But in any event, it should include the head of the school, whether that's a principal

Speaker 2 [00:21:29] or a head of

Speaker 2 [00:21:40] school or whatever nomenclature you have for that person. It should include

Speaker 2 [00:21:45] several existing

Speaker 2 [00:21:47] educators within that school. It should include the school nurse, the school social worker, the school counselor. And I'm assuming these are all different

Speaker 2 [00:22:00] people, not

Speaker 2 [00:22:01] amalgamated and ideally full time people. And it also should include ideally a parent and if the appropriate age, a student, the voices of the community are what you need to put together and you can provide them with training. I mean, you can enable them to understand trauma and symptomology and ways to ameliorate it. You can help them understand that trauma never goes away.

Speaker 2 [00:22:21] You can help them

Speaker 2 [00:22:22] understand that it can be

Speaker 2 [00:22:22] ameliorated. You can help

Speaker 2 [00:22:25] them understand that it can get re triggered and what serves as a trigger

Speaker 2 [00:22:29] point that sets

Speaker 2 [00:22:41] off people's tuning forks again. So if that group is trained, if that group is in place, let them

Speaker 2 [00:22:48] think collectively

Speaker 2 [00:22:50] and together

Speaker 2 [00:22:51] now so that

Speaker 2 [00:22:52] they're

Speaker 2 [00:22:52] ready to help the rest

Speaker 2 [00:22:55] of the institution

Speaker 2 [00:22:56] reopen

Speaker 2 [00:22:57] in ways that are thoughtful and trauma, responsive

Speaker 2 [00:22:01] and deeply

Speaker 2 [00:22:02] aware of the people who live in those

Speaker 2 [00:22:06] schools.

Speaker 1 [00:22:07] Yeah, it very much goes back to what you were just speaking about a little while ago about just how relationships and

Speaker 1 [00:22:12] connection are the container

Speaker 1 [00:22:15] for everything else that happens. And the other thing that struck me while you were

Speaker 1 [00:22:19] talking was the very fact of just creating,

Speaker 1 [00:22:22] if they didn't exist before, but

Speaker 1 [00:22:24] creating and then making

Speaker 1 [00:22:26] them visible.

Speaker 1 [00:22:27] These teams in and of itself

Speaker 1 [00:22:29] is

Speaker 1 [00:22:29] a statement that this matters and it's

Speaker 1 [00:22:21] important in addition to the

Speaker 1 [00:22:24] training, which can

Speaker 1 [00:22:26] help but assist in the work, the emphasis on dedicating resources to this could change the culture of the school and how it's perceived.

Speaker 2 [00:22:45] Absolutely. One of the observations I wanted to emphasize that you raised has to do with connections. So our brains are wired for connections.

Speaker 2 [00:22:57] And one of the

Speaker 2 [00:22:58] things that trauma does is it. Truncates connections, and so after a trauma, we need to rebuild connections, we have to actually create new neural

Speaker 2 [00:24:10] pathways to enable

Speaker 2 [00:24:12] people to connect. And so if we focus our

Speaker 2 [00:24:14] efforts on helping

Speaker 2 [00:24:16] students connect to their

Speaker 2 [00:24:17] peers, helping students

Speaker 2 [00:24:19] connect to educators, helping educators connect to each other and to

Speaker 2 [00:24:22] administrators will go a

Speaker 2 [00:24:25] long way to opening the neural pathways

Speaker 2 [00:24:28] that

Speaker 2 [00:24:29] trauma has truncated. And the important thing is we are wired

Speaker 2 [00:24:25] normally for

Speaker 2 [00:24:27] connections. So cutting off

Speaker 2 [00:24:29] connections has

Speaker 2 [00:24:40] real consequences in terms of how we engage. And so I just want to emphasize that any

Speaker 2 [00:24:47] strategy and all

Speaker 2 [00:24:49] strategies that collectively

Speaker 2 [00:24:51] work to create connectivity are important.

Speaker 2 [00:24:55] So I gave you my three PS

Speaker 2 [00:24:58] about prepare,

Speaker 2 [00:24:59] plan and predict, but I also have the three R's which go to this kind of issue. If people leave this podcast remembering the three PS prepare,

Speaker 2 [00:25:12] plan and

Speaker 2 [00:25:14] predict and then the three R's, that will help. So here are the three R's. The first is to remember that trauma gets re triggered. New things that happen, even if they seem disconnected,

Speaker 2 [00:25:20] will

Speaker 2 [00:25:21] trip

Speaker 2 [00:25:21] off the trauma

Speaker 2 [00:25:22] that existed from the past. For example, if school reopens and someone in someone's family within the school community gets sick from covid or even gets sick from something else that will re trigger all those feelings from before about the trauma of the pandemic. And so you have to be

Speaker 2 [00:25:57] aware of what will trip

Speaker 2 [00:25:59] things off. Another thing that trips people off is drills like fire drills or earthquake drills and the like. And suddenly those loud sounds trip off

Speaker 2 [00:26:12] other things that either

Speaker 2 [00:26:14] had loud sounds like a hospital

Speaker 2 [00:26:16] room or

Speaker 2 [00:26:18] some chaotic

Speaker 2 [00:26:19] event and the trauma

Speaker 2 [00:26:20] gets triggered. The second R is the word and it's not really a word.

Speaker 2 [00:26:26] It's Rugg less.

Speaker 2 [00:26:28] You can't push this all under a rug. It won't stay. There is no Rugg big enough to hide the trauma of what's happened. So we have to go Rugg lists without

Speaker 2 [00:26:45] rug's so that we

Speaker 2 [00:26:46] can see

Speaker 2 [00:26:47] what's happening, because if

Speaker 2 [00:26:49] you can see it, if you can name it, you can deal

Speaker 2 [00:26:52] with it. If you push it

Speaker 2 [00:26:52] under the rug, it will come out in some

Speaker 2 [00:26:55] form in some way.

Speaker 2 [00:26:57] And the third R is refresh for the educators and administrators dealing with all this. You have to remember that you can't pour from an empty cup. You need to be refreshed. Otherwise, your ability to deal with the trauma of your students and the trauma of

Speaker 2 [00:27:17] their families

Speaker 2 [00:27:18] will be

Speaker 2 [00:27:19] difficult, as

Speaker 2 [00:27:20] will it be difficult

Speaker 2 [00:27:21] to deal with the trauma

Speaker 2 [00:27:22] of one's own family. And so you need to give educators who are working with traumatized students a way to refresh themselves like a classroom within the

Speaker 2 [00:27:24] institution, like access

Speaker 2 [00:27:27] to professionals who understand trauma, like a virtual teacher's lounge where they can go and vent and share. If you don't do that, their cups will run empty and then they can't do their job well. Now, there's one more really critical point in all

Speaker 2 [00:27:56] of this, which is that

Speaker 2 [00:27:58] with both acute and chronic trauma of the sort that we've been talking about, the experiences of students and the experiences of educators are not vastly different. Usually we have a big divide between where students are at in their own lives and where educators are at in their own personal lives. But when there's a trauma, whether acute or chronic, of this sort, the experiences of both intersect and actually students have experienced what educators have experienced and

Speaker 2 [00:28:21] educators have

Speaker 2 [00:28:22] experienced what students have experienced. Now, our

Speaker 2 [00:28:25] instinct historically

Speaker 2 [00:28:27] is to create a huge dividing line between educators and students. But now that dividing line is

Speaker 2 [00:28:44] not so

Speaker 2 [00:28:45] firm. Another way of saying it is it's like Swiss cheese, right? It's got

Speaker 2 [00:28:50] holes. And we would

Speaker 2 [00:28:52] do well to allow students and

Speaker 2 [00:28:55] educators to share

Speaker 2 [00:28:58] what they have both experienced and.

Speaker 2 [00:29:00] Recognize that each of them has had similar experiences.

Speaker 2 [00:29:05] Now, how you do that differs on the age group and how you help educators realize that they're not crossing some horrible boundary line here. Right. By engaging with their students in a way that allows access to their personal lives, you will enhance what happens

Speaker 2 [00:29:24] inside and

Speaker 2 [00:29:25] outside the classroom. Yes, education happens in many places and spaces of which the classroom is but one.

Speaker 2 [00:29:22] And if you can

Speaker 2 [00:29:24] let there be somewhat more of a porous boundary right

Speaker 2 [00:29:28] now, you will do

Speaker 2 [00:29:40] way

Speaker 2 [00:29:40] better at killing

Speaker 2 [00:29:42] students and educators alike.

Speaker 1 [00:29:46] Yes, because really schools are highly regimented, at least the ones that I've in. And most teachers will see what you just

Speaker 1 [00:29:54] described as the

Speaker 1 [00:29:55] work of the school counselor or the school

Speaker 1 [00:29:58] social work. And again, that

Speaker 1 [00:29:59] goes back to those

Speaker 1 [00:20:00] boundaries that you

Speaker 1 [00:20:01] talked about. So even just giving educators

Speaker 1 [00:20:04] permission that this is

Speaker 1 [00:20:05] really OK and not only

Speaker 1 [00:20:07] OK, but

Speaker 1 [00:20:08] desirable and why I think would be incredibly liberating for everybody.

Speaker 2 [00:20:15] And I happen to still be teaching. So most of the

Speaker 2 [00:20:18] strategies that I'm suggesting

Speaker 2 [00:20:20] to you are ones that I have actually used. So they're not only supported by the science and the

Speaker 2 [00:20:28] research, they're supported

Speaker 2 [00:20:20] by in the trenches experiences. One of the things I've

Speaker 2 [00:20:24] done and there are several

Speaker 2 [00:20:26] things you can do to get it, this

Speaker 2 [00:20:28] porous boundary

Speaker 2 [00:20:29] is to have an educator say to

Speaker 2 [00:20:42] students, right

Speaker 2 [00:20:42] now, we're just going to stop. Nobody seems to be concentrating or we're all having a difficult time. Let's do an ask me anything moment. You can ask me anything. And as long as it's within the realm of decency. And you know what's amazing is initially people don't ask questions. They're scared. They're thinking, really, I can ask you anything.

Speaker 2 [00:21:02] And I go, yeah,

Speaker 2 [00:21:04] you can ask me anything. And what it does is it allows people to see some water going back and forth

Speaker 2 [00:21:12] between the student and

Speaker 2 [00:21:14] the educator. Not I'm not suggesting for a moment that we talk about

Speaker 2 [00:21:19] inappropriate conduct

Speaker 2 [00:21:21] or contact between educators and students. That's not what I'm talking

Speaker 2 [00:21:25] about at all. What I

Speaker 2 [00:21:26] am talking about is sharing experiences

Speaker 2 [00:21:29] that have happened

Speaker 2 [00:21:21] over the last 18 months or at least access to how the lives of the students and the lives of the

Speaker 2 [00:21:28] educators have not

Speaker 2 [00:21:40] been vastly different or not as different as they used to be. Now, another way to get it, that

Speaker 2 [00:21:48] is through

Speaker 2 [00:21:49] exploration of

Speaker 2 [00:21:50] feelings.

Speaker 2 [00:21:51] So I have at times of crises and institutions recommended that they create a bowl of feelings. There's a commercial

Speaker 2 [00:22:00] product called Kimochi,

Speaker 2 [00:22:02] which are little felt

Speaker 2 [00:22:02] toys that have

Speaker 2 [00:22:05] emotions on them, either images of emotions or actual words. Put them in a big bowl, tell people, you know

Speaker 2 [00:22:12] what, if you want to pull

Speaker 2 [00:22:14] one out as to how you're feeling right now, put it on a carabiner or wear it on your backpack. And if you're feeling

Speaker 2 [00:22:20] changes over the course

Speaker 2 [00:22:22] of the day or the week, come and exchange that feeling for another feeling. And the benefit is that it's messaging. It's OK to have feelings, but for every negative feeling, try to come up with one positive one and you'll see that over

Speaker 2 [00:22:28] time, one's feelings are

Speaker 2 [00:22:40] not static. One's feelings change.

Speaker 2 [00:22:42] But you're granting access to the feeling

Speaker 2 [00:22:45] part of what's known as the cognitive

Speaker 2 [00:22:47] triangle, which is that

Speaker 2 [00:22:49] feelings, thoughts and behaviors all influence each other. And you're making an entry point at the feeling piece. Yeah.

Speaker 1 [00:22:56] Again, listening to you

Speaker 1 [00:22:57] I was struck by,

Speaker 1 [00:22:59] you know, a lot of us have spent time searching for like, what good can come out of all this awful

Speaker 1 [00:22:04] mess. Right.

Speaker 1 [00:22:05] And as I listen to you, I think my first thought was we needed a pandemic to understand that this stuff would help everybody. And so I'm just I'm just

Speaker 1 [00:22:17] hoping that, like you said earlier, doing this

Speaker 1 [00:22:20] is not going to harm in any way the people who are not traumatized and who aren't experiencing symptomology. These are just great practices. These are things that enhance

Speaker 1 [00:22:21] learning and enhance

Speaker 1 [00:22:22] relationship. You know, my

Speaker 1 [00:22:22] fear, gosh,

Speaker 1 [00:22:24] I hope this doesn't happen is that schools are going to be obsessed with

Speaker 1 [00:22:28] safety and that's

Speaker 1 [00:22:29] what they're going to rally behind. And they're going to forget about trust, about collaboration,

Speaker 1 [00:22:45] connection

Speaker 1 [00:22:46] and all the intangibles

Speaker 1 [00:22:48] that in

Speaker 1 [00:22:49] the end are what gets good things done.

Speaker 2 [00:22:52] So sadly, I think

Speaker 2 [00:22:52] people are focused on physical well-being. It is in some ways the. Easiest and most obvious entry point, so where you place the desks, where you put handwashing things. What do you do about masks? What do you do about the vaccinated and the unvaccinated? What do you do when someone starts sneezing or gets sick? Those are things that institutions are rightly thinking about,

Speaker 2 [00:24:22] but they can't be

Speaker 2 [00:24:22] thought about as the only key topic mental wellness, mental wellbeing, psychosocial

Speaker 2 [00:24:22] development needs to

Speaker 2 [00:24:25] get attention

Speaker 2 [00:24:26] to.

Speaker 2 [00:24:26] And I would suggest that the learning loss over the last 18 months is less in the

Speaker 2 [00:24:42] area of cognition and

Speaker 2 [00:24:46] more in the area of psychosocial development. And so that's where we should be putting some

Speaker 2 [00:24:52] time when we

Speaker 2 [00:24:52] reopen on the issues that have fallen behind condition can you can catch up on cognition in lots of ways pretty fast.

Speaker 2 [00:25:05] And indeed, if you're teaching

Speaker 2 [00:25:07] well, what you're teaching is a way to think. And so some of the loss can come

Speaker 2 [00:25:12] back by

Speaker 2 [00:25:14] rebuilding some foundations. If you're struggling

Speaker 2 [00:25:18] socially

Speaker 2 [00:25:19] and

Speaker 2 [00:25:20] emotionally, it doesn't

Speaker 2 [00:25:21] matter how good the math teacher is, it's not going to help. Yeah, and presence in the school Litoral presence is

Speaker 2 [00:25:21] not synonymous

Speaker 2 [00:25:22] with ready, willing and able to learn its presence. OK, that's important, but not enough, right?

Speaker 1 [00:25:42] Yeah, well put. I know you've said what you've given us a lot of kind of concrete ideas. If I gave you a magic wand and you could create anything

Speaker 1 [00:25:52] you wanted in our school

Speaker 1 [00:25:52] settings, as we prepare for the fall, would you waive it and what would you do?

Speaker 2 [00:25:58] So I have a magic wand.

Speaker 1 You have one.

Speaker 2 [00:26:02] I have always had a magic wand as a leader and I have always

Speaker 2 [00:26:04] had it on my desk. And sometimes I've even said I wish it worked better than it does. But here's what I would do. I would tell people to improve communication. I would tell people to think hard about how to use space

Speaker 2 [00:26:20] and place what goes on

Speaker 2 [00:26:21] the walls, what goes into the classrooms, and we create problems for educators and

Speaker 2 [00:26:28] students. Then I would

Speaker 2 [00:26:20] tell people I

Speaker 2 [00:26:21] care, not

Speaker 2 [00:26:22] necessarily in this order. You thought about teams and you thought about space and place and thought about communications. I would tell people to rethink discipline because how we discipline students historically has presumed that students intent their bad behavior. Well, in the case of trauma, they didn't intend it.

Speaker 2 [00:26:55] And so when we want

Speaker 2 [00:26:57] connections kicking them out of a classroom or kicking them out of school is completely counterintuitive. We ought to process in place. And the last suggestion I have with my magic

Speaker 2 [00:27:10] wand would be to

Speaker 2 [00:27:11] allow people to express feelings so they understand their thoughts and behaviors, help people learn to reregulate by understanding better what's happening to them. So my magic wand would focus on those five areas.

Speaker 2 [00:27:29] And even if my

Speaker 2 [00:27:20] magic one only touched two or

Speaker 2 [00:27:22] three of them, it would be better

Speaker 2 [00:27:24] than touching none of

Speaker 1 [00:27:25] them. Yeah, absolutely. Well, Karen, thanks very much for not only the conceptualization, but then the kind of what to

Speaker 1 [00:27:42] do inside of the

Speaker 1 [00:27:44] conceptualization. It was it was really a pleasure to talk with you today. Thanks.

Speaker 2 [00:27:48] My pleasure. And I hope your listeners find it beneficial to helping them and their students.

Speaker 1 [00:27:55] And you've been listening to Karen Gross discuss the trauma responsive approach to returning to in-person school this fall on in social work. The social work podcast team is Steve Sturman, general manager and the person who keeps the trains running and Cate Bearss, production associate and technical guru. Also, a fond farewell to Michelle Melton, who was a production assistant for the previous two years. She's graduated on new adventures. Michelle, thanks for your significant contributions and we're going to miss you a lot. I'm Peter Sobota, and we'll see you next time on inSocialWork.