

STUDENTS EDITION

Trauma-Responsive Encounters for Young People

You Are More Than What Happened to You

01 “Nobody Notices When I’m Here”

A student with inconsistent attendance was finally asked, “We’ve missed you. What’s been going on?”

He responded, “Why does it matter? Nobody notices when I’m here anyway.”

Instead of discussing attendance immediately, the adult said, “I noticed.”

Two words. But the student looked up.

What Presence Looked Like That Day

The adult began with belonging instead of beginning with the attendance policy.

What I Was Paying Attention To

They heard the need underneath his statement, not just the complaint on the surface.

What It Taught Me

It taught me that before some young people believe education matters, they need to believe they matter.

Lessons I’m Still Learning

- “I noticed” can be a complete sentence, and a complete answer.
- I try to begin with belonging before I begin with policy.
- The need underneath a complaint is often the real conversation.

Take a Moment to Reflect *Who needs to hear, “I noticed you weren’t here”?*

02 “Everybody Thinks I’m the Bad Kid”

After another disciplinary referral, a student said, “Everybody already thinks I’m the bad kid.”

The mentor responded, “I don’t think you’re a bad kid.”

“Then why do I keep getting in trouble?”

“I think sometimes you’re making choices that create problems. But your choices aren’t your identity.”

The student grew quiet.

What Presence Looked Like That Day

The mentor separated the person from the behavior, without pretending the behavior didn’t have consequences.

What I Was Paying Attention To

They maintained accountability while making sure it didn’t turn into shame.

What It Taught Me

It taught me that young people need to understand mistakes have consequences without believing mistakes define who they are.

Lessons I’m Still Learning

- Choices and identity aren’t the same thing, and I try to keep them separate out loud.
- Accountability doesn’t require shame to be effective.
- Sometimes the most important sentence is, “your choices aren’t your identity.”

Take a Moment to Reflect *Are our words correcting behavior, or creating identity?*

03 “I Don’t Know What I Want to Be”

A teenager said, “Everybody keeps asking what I’m going to do with my life. I don’t know.”

The mentor smiled. “At your age, you don’t have to know your whole life.”

“Really?”

“Really. Let’s figure out the next good step.”

The pressure visibly decreased.

What Presence Looked Like That Day

The mentor reduced pressure that wasn’t actually necessary in that moment.

What I Was Paying Attention To

They met the student at the developmental stage he was actually in, instead of the one adults sometimes expect.

What It Taught Me

It taught me that hope doesn’t always require a ten year plan. Sometimes hope is simply discovering the next step.

Lessons I’m Still Learning

- Not every question needs a lifetime answer.
- “Let’s figure out the next good step” can relieve pressure a five year plan never could.
- I try to meet young people at the stage they’re actually in, not the one I expect.

Take a Moment to Reflect *Are we helping young people discover possibilities, or demanding certainty before they’re ready?*