



## National Institute for Resiliency and Wellness

### Zone of Optimal Performance

Athletes often talk about being in the “Zone.” Psychologists refer to the “ **Zone of Optimal Functioning**.” Professor Mihaly Csikszentmihayli, former chairman of the department of psychology at the University of Chicago calls it being in “flow.” He describes flow as reaching a state of concentration so intense it amounts to a complete absorption into a particular activity, whether its education, sports, family or life in general. Can you remember a moment in your childhood where you had a zone experience? Perhaps the first time you learned to ride a bike no handed, a special fishing trip with your grandpa, or nailing a test you were studying for.

That state of ultimate concentration in the activity or process precludes any doubt, fear, and anxiety, where all distractions are neutralized and optimal performance can ensue. The Zone is a state of body and mind balance characterized by hope, passion, energy, vitality, faith, drive, inspiration, creativity, self-trust, competency and joy. **Children and adolescents can excel in learning environments when they are in range of the Optimal Zone levels.**

**However, what is frustrating for many of today’s students and educators is that even if the Optimal Zone is experienced it can quickly disappear. This in turn makes it difficult for students to remain focused and accomplish learning goals on any consistent basis.**

Many of today’s students have experienced adverse childhood events and have been thrown out of the Zone and into states of overwhelm and stress. **Stress and overwhelm from adverse childhood experience undermines the ability of students to form relationships and regulate their emotions. This results in decreases in cognitive functioning. These students present a challenge in the classroom as they may appear withdrawn or with aggressive/acting out behavior. In addition they may demonstrate poor attendance, increased rates of suspension or expulsion and have a greater tendency to drop out of school.** Many of today’s students are “Zoned Out” or acting out in high levels of stress and aggression. Most school systems lack the training and programs to adequately understand, assess and address this overwhelming pattern in today’s schools. **The key to increasing student achievement is to create a learning system that promotes positive relationship and positive environmental experience leading to SELF-REGULATION, which allows the student to stay within the range of “Optimal Zone Performance.”**



## Mindfulness Education

### The Impact of Self- Regulation and School Performance

Since the 60's scientists have done a number of studies on trajectories. Thorough literacy and numeracy testing, they could make astonishing predictions on how well children would do in school, how far they would go in school, social relationships and vulnerability to negative behaviors. The frustration for these scientists was the fact that they *could do little* to improve trajectories in the past. In 2000, an extremely important book was published "From Neurons to Neighborhoods". Thirty four of the world's leading developmental scientists were ask the question, "Why can't we improve trajectories?" **The conclusion from this group of scientists was that it is not about IQ, it is about the inability of children to *self-regulate* once they enter the school environment.**

What is self regulation? Self regulation is not about doing what you are told, not about self control. Self regulation is a biological, primarily subconscious phenomenon. They way it works, is the better your are self regulated the better you learn self control. This is more of a story about children who cannot handle the stress in their lives and the disorganization and impact it has on the body and mind system. **One recent study indicates that 25% to 50 % of kids coming into grade one are having problems with self regulation.** We think that this is a general societal trend; it is not just a statistical anomaly. There is something going on in society impeding self regulation.

**The goal of the National Institute for Resiliency and Wellness is to increase the regulatory capacity of all children. Impacting children to improve school performance, have strong friendships, develop empathy and compassion, demonstrate pro-social values, thrive and become leaders and contributors to the community.** We combine the disciplines of trauma informed care, relationship based approaches, resiliency research and the science of neuro-physiology (body and mind) to create pathways to bring children back into a balance and increase regulatory capacity.

## **Indicators of Optimal Zone Performance**

- ✚ A state of calm arousal (regulation) and central nervous system balance
- ✚ A positive energy state, alertness.
- ✚ Absence of shut down and withdrawal.
- ✚ Absence of aggression and acting out
- ✚ Attention from an external to an internal focus has been dramatically reduced.
- ✚ No need to consciously control concentration, concentration becomes totally effortless or automatic.
- ✚ Thoughts and ideas just flow together in a way that makes problem solving and/or the organization of information effortless.
- ✚ The individual is in control without controlling others.
- ✚ Complete immersion in the subject with ease and comfort
- ✚ Extremely confident, poised and in rhythm
- ✚ A feeling of joy and fulfillment
- ✚ Absence or modulation of traumatic stress symptoms
- ✚ Neo-Cortex in full function
- ✚ *Academic Excellence!*

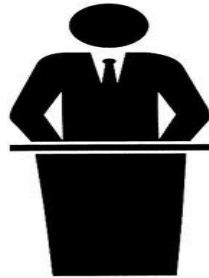
## **Zone Busters**

(Relational and environment factors that keep student's out of balance)

- ✚ Lack of training and understanding into the holistic needs of today's student.
- ✚ Lack of training in trauma informed care and resiliency approaches.
- ✚ No trauma informed practice in place.
- ✚ No working model in sequential protocols for developing self-regulation in students.
- ✚ Distant student and school staff relationships.
- ✚ No safe place/s or safe face/s in the school environment.
- ✚ Bullying and/or peer to peer aggression.
- ✚ Coercive discipline processes that disenfranchise students.
- ✚ Passive or permissive school personnel.
- ✚ Lack of sensory adaptable environments.
- ✚ No freedom of movement.
- ✚ Cold and institutional like physical environment.
- ✚ Lack of creative pedagogy. Discrimination against a child's learning style.
- ✚ Behavior focused approaches over a relationship focus approach with students.
- ✚ Lack of safety and security. Lack of prevention and early intervention.



## **INSERVICE OPTIONS**



- ✚ Module #1 *Trauma, Stress and Self Regulation***
- ✚ Module #2 *Relational Based Teaching***
- ✚ Module #3 *Resiliency Work***
- ✚ Module #4 *Creating a Sensory Adaptable Environment***
- ✚ Module #5 *Restorative Discipline***
- ✚ Module #6 *Counseling: Trauma Trained School Staff***

**Consulting Service: Internal and External Support**

## **TRAINING MODULE ONE: TRAUMA, STRESS AND SELF REGULATION**

Traumatic stress from adverse childhood experiences can undermine the ability of students to learn and can lead to a multitude of behavioral problems. This course will provide evidenced based research and information to school administrators and staff which illustrates the correlations between trauma, brain development, behavioral, and learning issues. By integrating trauma sensitivity into school policies and teaching strategies, school climates and academic achievement can greatly improve. By sharing information that permits schools to address the root causes of behavioral and learning dilemmas, educators will be empowered to reach the improved achievement expectations required by state and federal departments of education.

### **In Service Agenda**

- ✚ Traumatic stress in the new millennium
- ✚ Understanding the 8 components of the stress response
- ✚ Acute Stress vs. chronic Stress
- ✚ ACES (adverse childhood experience )
- ✚ What is SELF REGULATION: Implications for education
- ✚ The Triune Brain: new breakthroughs
- ✚ Understanding hypo and hyper aroused students
- ✚ Intervention protocols for self-regulation
- ✚ The Triune Brain
- ✚ Video case review: Improving regulatory capacity of students



## **TRAINING MODULE TWO: RELATIONAL TEACHING**

Attachment and bonding is a biological imperative. Isolation, fear and social disconnection is what's unnatural and deadly. Students often judge an activity as meaningful when it satisfies deep-rooted human emotional needs. Students are motivated when they believe that teachers treat them like people and care about them. When those needs are met in the classroom, students want to learn and to achieve to the highest standards. There is no part of the brain that isn't influenced by these interactions and how they affect the brain circuits or pathways that are being established. Relationship is the key to building the foundation for proper neural firing and getting students to the neo-cortex. We are not afraid to go back and build any relational foundations, even at its most basic level.

### **In Service Agenda**

- ✚ The neurophysiological feedback loop
- ✚ 10 keys to charismatic teaching
- ✚ Meeting the needs of the whole student.
- ✚ Increasing bonding opportunities
- ✚ Keys to influencing your students
- ✚ Having a “presence”
- ✚ Collaborative communication
- ✚ Physical Affection
- ✚ Building affect tolerance and understanding
- ✚ Self exploration and discovery
- ✚ Intervention Styles



## **TRAINING MODULE THREE: RESILIENCY WORK**

All children are born with a drive to understand their environment and become more competent. Sometimes that drive can be hidden and smothered by obstacles. But it never disappears, it simply waits for the opportunity to thrive. As schools are looking to improve student achievement and to help all students succeed, the topic of resiliency is becoming a framework that many schools are finding successful. The premise of a resiliency program is that when developmentally relevant, protective factors are established, students will achieve academically and will be less inclined to participate in negative and self-defeating behaviors.

### **In Service Agenda**

- ✚ Mindsets: staff exploration (risky vs. protective teachers)
- ✚ Self inventory: exploring our beliefs and biases.
- ✚ Understanding cultural and neural diversity
- ✚ 5 critical needs of all students
- ✚ Developing islands of competency
- ✚ Joy, fun and humor
- ✚ The inside child: sub-conscious experiencing
- ✚ Moving from victimization to victory
- ✚ Video Clip: Stress in Urban Schools
- ✚ Understanding Risk Factors/ Building Protective Strategies
- ✚ Wellness for teachers (mindfulness, self-care)



sample only



## **TRAINING MODULE FOUR: REGULATION AND RESTORATIVE DISCIPLINE**

How does your school deal with minor and serious wrongdoings? Are there more effective ways to deal with these incidents rather than simply isolating and punishing students through suspensions and expulsions? More and more schools across the country are finding that their traditional discipline system isn't effective enough in reclaiming students as positive members in the school environment. Our discipline protocol concentrates on the following components:

**School Safety.** Safety is best developed by building relationships and giving the school, community and families the opportunity to take responsibility for the well-being of its youth

**Self- Regulation Development.** It is important to increase the regulatory capacity of the disruptive student. Addressing the biological, social and emotional needs of the student is a main factor in our discipline process.

**Accountability.** Opportunities for offenders to be accountable to those they have harmed and an expectation to repair the harm they have caused to the extent possible.

### **In Service Agenda**

- ✚ Base Line Preparation/Early Intervention
- ✚ Restorative time in rooms
- ✚ Facilitator skill sets
- ✚ Restorative justice for victims
- ✚ Crisis intervention strategies
- ✚ Video review: Explosion in Urban school.
- ✚ Dynamic body-mind approaches
- ✚ The De-stress approach: co-regulation of disruptive students
- ✚ The C.A.R.E program (assessment of student and auto-regulation planning )
- ✚ The Engage model: Connecting and collaborative communication with students



## **TRAINING MODULE FIVE: SENSORY ADAPTABLE ENVIRONMENTS**

Students with neurological differences that result in lack of self-regulation (with resulting behavior, learning, and social/emotional difficulties) require individual needs assessments, leading to individualized therapeutic sensory diets, the use of sensory rooms, sensory boxes and sensory activities. Sensory integration programs can provide many children with the opportunity to be in control of themselves by providing the proper sensory input in the following sensory areas: visual, auditory, tactile, taste/smell, vestibular, proprioception and interoception.. This training will provide a knowledge base and skill sets for teachers to begin sensory integration strategies with their students. The goal again is to increase student self-regulation and academic performance.

### **In Service Agenda**

- ✚ Utilizing 5 external and 3 internal senses to maximize learning capacity
- ✚ Sensory rooms, sensory diets, sensory boxes
- ✚ Central nervous system organization
- ✚ Biological and emotional balancing
- ✚ Two critical experiences every student needs (the relaxation response and physical release)
- ✚ Understanding triggers and predictable pitfalls (sensory assaults/ healing through the 8 sensory pathways)
- ✚ Down regulation and up regulation strategies (giving stressed students what they need)
- ✚ Sensory Activities
- ✚ Creative pedagogy ( enhance your teaching approach)



## **TRAINING MODULE SIX: COUNSELING- TRAUMA TRAINED SCHOOL STAFF**

School systems need to be encouraged to provide trauma-specific assessment and counseling services to its students. This would be a huge advantage for any school to be able to provide this crucial component. Any student can become overwhelm with stress and could benefit from the support of school personal who can connect and be a witness to their troubles. Trained educational staff (social workers, counselors e.g.) can also work with the student to created specific plans for the student return to the zone of optimal performance. This training will provide the basic tools to do trauma assessments and provide a structured, step by step trauma specific counseling program.

### **Trauma specific counseling for Students**

#### **Intensity**

Individual or group sessions with a school staff (counselor, social worker e.g.) trained in trauma specific counseling

Student case management services and teacher consultation are added as needed.

Parent education and involvement

#### **Counseling Components**

Bonding and validation

Education on trauma related issues.

Narrative development, Students can tell their stories.

Trauma assessment

Learning skills in relaxation and modulation

Sensory work on themes of trauma (fear, sadness, worry)

Problem solving/cognitive mapping and re-structuring



## **INTERNAL SUPPORT**



- Supporting administrative roles
- Helping administrators evaluate programs and policies through the lens of trauma informed practice with the goal of maximizing student safety, empowerment and self-regulation
- Initial consultation services with implementation team.
- On-going consultation with NIRW
- Wellness programming for staff
- Periodical quality reviews
- Increase positive publicity, networking and funding opportunities
- Building bridges with community resources.

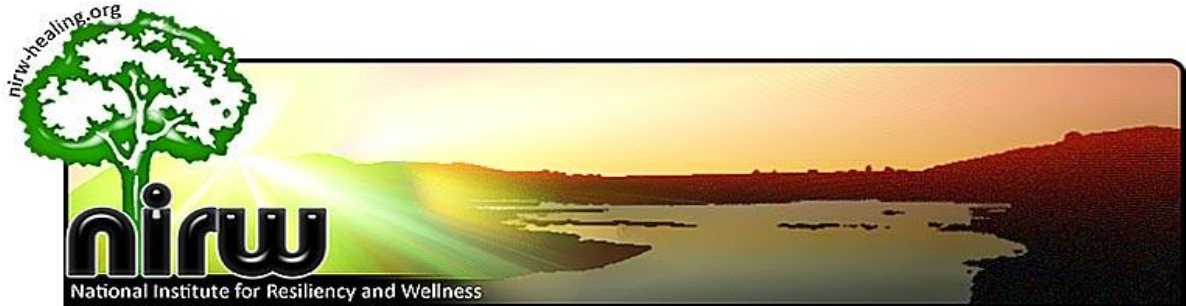


**COURSE DIRECTOR:  
JOHN MICSAK MA, LLPC, CTC**

**2009 Consultant of the Year**, The National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children  
Featured in Psychology Today for his brain base and resiliency programs for youth

Mr. Micsak has **over thirty years experience** working with vulnerable youth with traumatic and delinquent histories with positions varying from front line staff, manager, director and clinical supervisor. Mr. Micsak is a **trauma consultant with the National Institute for Trauma and Loss with Children**. John is a certified trainer in **Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (Cornell University)**. John is a qualified national trainer with **RAP (Response Ability Pathways)**, a cutting edge program developed in South Africa to assist at-risk youth populations. He is a registered clinician with **Robertson Research** which provides clients with a program to help balance brain chemistry with holistic approaches. John recently completed the **Child Trauma's Academy's** series on neuro-sequential therapeutics. John acts as a liaison and consultant to schools, families, mental health and legal professionals in promoting the healing of at-risk children and adolescents.

Visit **Healingtheinsidechild.com** for a complete review  
of Mr. Micsak's programs and expertise.



## **Choose the entire program to maximize your benefit!**

Training modules can also be selected on an individual basis.

**Utilizing this program in any capacity will give staff the necessary tools to work with difficult youth, increase student performance, and decrease disciplinary referrals.** We use the latest cutting edge research and evidence based intervention taught by one of the premier trainers in the country, and a trauma consultant and resiliency expert with over 35 years of field experience.

*For more information or to set up an appointment:*  
**info@healingtheinsidechild.com or call us at 989-928-3967**

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