

Rise, Teach, Learn - Season 1, Episode 3

Supporting Students and Faculty in Crisis

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We acknowledge and are mindful that CSU Chico stands on lands that were originally occupied by the first people of this area, the Mechoopda, and we recognize their distinctive spiritual relationship with this land and the waters that run through campus. We are humbled that our campus resides upon sacred lands that once sustained the Mechoopda people for centuries.

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Welcome to the Rise, Teach, Learn Podcast. I am Dr. Chiara Ferrari, Director of Faculty Development at Chico State, and we are happy to make this resource available to our campus community and beyond. The podcast is hosted by Dr. Jamie Linn Gunderson and she will engage in timely conversations with faculty, staff, and students and give you a taste of the Chico experience. Subscribe to our podcast and explore the many resources available on our website. Thank you for listening.

01:02

Hello, and welcome to Rise, Teach, Learn. I'm your host Jamie Gunderson, in our third episode entitled supporting students and faculty in crisis, we discuss the impacts of stress and trauma on learning and teaching and explore campus resources that are available to support our Wildcat students and colleagues in crisis.

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I'd like to welcome back Dr. Rebecca Justeson, the Director of the School of Education, whose expertise and experience with resilience extend quite nicely into our conversation on trauma today. Welcome back, Rebecca. Thank you for having me back. Now more than ever people both students and faculty are experiencing increasing and prolonged stress, and if you lived in Chico, or the world for that matter. in the past three years you've definitely experienced a bit of trauma. And we're starting to see a lot of timely research come out on anxiety, stress and trauma specific to higher education. We have some research on kind of students attitudes and beliefs in coping during the Covid 19 pandemic. And there's also been some work on the academic impact of natural disasters we've looked at things like earthquakes and kind of studied the impact on students at, you know, colleges, directly impacted by that natural disaster.

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And then finally, We're starting to look at just challenging life experiences, and how that impacts the professional development and the growth of graduate trainees so this is definitely a timely topic and a timely discussion, you know we talked in our previous episode about resilience, but now I want to take it a little bit deeper into stress toxic stress prolonged stress and even trauma, and I think we need to talk about what those things are in order to better understand what our students are feeling in those

moments so Rebecca Can you explain a little bit about trauma. Sure. You know I think when we talk about trauma, what we're really talking about is something we have a response to that is deeply distressing or disturbing, and it overwhelms our coping mechanisms it overwhelms our regular ability to cope. We find that we're floundering in terms of figuring out how to deal with it. Sometimes we talk about it shocking our system breaks US Open rocks as to the core overwhelms basically what we're saying is, wow, something just occurred that has proven to be larger than my ability to cope with it easily in this moment. And it you know it can be a lot of different things too we talk about natural disasters, and we talk about very serious things like assault. And, you know, other crimes, maybe being victims of crimes and things that, you know, surprise and overwhelm us. But there are also situations that that come up more frequently that can be traumatizing you know divorce, the trial.

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Loss of health, in some way, bereavement loss of a family member, loss of somebody close to us and we can find that that last traumatizing. So, there are many things that would fall in that category. But, but basically it is normal reaction to an abnormal circumstance, something that is, you know, challenging doesn't happen every day, but it's really significant and, and again challenging. We talked a little bit about what trauma is but what does trauma look like in our classroom so how would we know somebody who's in trauma, just, you know, by recognition.

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Yeah, that's a really good question because trauma responses are highly individual right and they depend on. I mean they vary a lot from person to person. They vary from circumstance that they that they have experience to circumstance right and what triggers an individual, but I will say, there are some indicators that we can look for when we're trying to identify students who might be suffering in that way. People tend to present with certain types of symptoms. So I would say if you have a student who's experiencing a lot of sadness, anger, denial, fear, shame withdraw those sort of things, those can be sort of emotional reactions to a lot of different things, but they're definitely a part of trauma. So if you have someone who sort of shut down in those ways. And then, if you have someone who is having physical symptoms. So, nausea, dizziness, big changes in their sleep patterns, changes in their appetite, headaches, certainly those could indicate a lot of different issues but they could certainly be a part of a traumatic response in students. And we tend to think about things like flashbacks, or reexperiencing a negative event that sometimes impacts sleep, sometimes it impacts individuals during the day, that sort of re-experiencing hyper vigilance maybe a hyper alert state or a real strong desire to disengage from the world so kind of both of those things might indicate that there had been some trauma. A lot of sort of disorganization in thinking and speech could indicate trauma.

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And then, certainly, we know that some of the symptoms can convert themselves into things like panic attacks and depression, anxiety, having suicidal thoughts, feeling isolated, just having trouble completing daily tasks, not sort of remembering everything they're supposed to do so like memory being impacted.

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In terms of what they're intending to do or things they just did if there's sort of a memory impact those things. None of them alone would, you know for sure be an indicator of trauma, but together in sort of a cluster and observing your students behavior can certainly be indicators of a traumatic response, being underway. So if you're in a class. When you know these symptoms arrive at a teacher might not know what to do but to recognize that those things are associated with trauma i think is one way that we can help figure out what supports to provide the student. I want to kind of talk a little bit about PTSD and how that is a little bit different than trauma PTSD or post-traumatic stress disorder is sort of this, this response to a traumatic event that we sort of used to define someone who develops, more of a full on reaction. So it's really important to bear in mind that not everybody is going to develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Not every traumatized person develops it sometimes they might exhibit symptoms that are more sort of a subclinical level and they have more of an, an acute stress response, and it passes over time, you know, but if they have a sort of a clustering of symptoms that lasts over a month, or that severely impact a person's functioning. They might be suffering from PTSD and individual might be. And you know, it's just a highly individual thing it might last months, it might last for the rest of their lives and they're triggered in some specific ways symptoms of PTSD can sort of escalate into panic attacks. They can turn into depression, suicidal thoughts drug abuse feeling isolated and being unable to sort of carry out daily tasks. So it really depends. And like I said it's, it's highly individual. It depends on the person it depends on the situation whether or not they develop symptoms that would sort of fall into a cluster that would be described as PTSD, but it is something that we see, when folks are triggered by the traumatic events that they experience, just to kind of give the perspective of what's happening to somebody when they're going through these episodes, you know I unfortunately was involved in the campfire and my evacuation of the fire was pretty traumatic. At the beginning I just felt like you know you're in survival mode and you're trying to just get your work done and you're trying to move forward you know if I if I don't keep running I'm gonna fall down kind of thing. And so I was going full bore and trying to do everything that I could do and then I was starting to have some physical symptoms that, you know, panic attacks, time for my body was shutting down and I was, I was start shaking and sweating and feeling like, for whatever reason, there was just like, Doom. And then I couldn't get past it and then I would also have these episodes where I would black out from the outside in, I couldn't, like, see I would get heightened I would feel it in my body first and then I would just start to kind of go black. A couple of other things I had were some pretty vivid nightmares that would actually, you know I just remember driving down that road, and my arm was so hot because the fire was just like all around me, and I would wake up in the middle of the night with these the same sensation of a hot arm, and it was bothering me I kept thinking like something's wrong with me I'm crazy. And once I was able to kind of figure out and get into some support. I learned that what was actually happening in my brain was a circuit problem that the pieces of my brain that were, you know, wired for survival that were totally there getting me out of that situation pushing me to like keep driving and just to, you know, move forward move forward move forward you got this were actually firing at inappropriate times where I was completely safe, and my body just wasn't aware that I was safe, but it when it was explained to me as being circuitry. It allowed me to kind of take a step back and understand that maybe I didn't have as much control over those thoughts, those emotions those episodes as I thought I might have. And so that was really helpful information. And so just to kind of give the perspective of what's happening to somebody when they're going through these episodes. The last thing you can do is think, I can't take in information I'm overwhelmed. If you give me a task, it just seems so unachievable things like getting the

mail were becoming tasks that were like on my mind that were piling up that just really weren't hard to do or hard to accomplish. But for whatever reason, I couldn't get out of that circuitry. In that limbic lizard brain, and I it prevented me from being able to really compute and function. It's important I think that we understand as educators that in those moments our students are not with us, they're not present, they may be in front of us, but they are not there, cognitively right because, you know, as you've described so well, their, their mental emotional resources have been overwhelmed by what they experienced and their physiology took over. In an effort to protect the old comment that we all make in psychology that if you're being chased by a Sabre toothed Tiger you want to be able to have your resources Marshal so that you can run right. And that is it is a bit of what happens your physiology takes over. You go into a protective mode, and then you're beyond the sort of acute situation that you were in, but your body doesn't quite know that you're still safe because it was so shocking because it was so overwhelming to your system, because you didn't see it coming right you felt safe, and then all of a sudden you weren't safe and your body had to jump into action and take over and do the things that did to protect you. It then needs sort of this process of soothing to take it back to baseline of, hey we're okay now, and it doesn't believe you. It believed it before. So, it will fight you a bit on that it'll wake you up at two in the morning and have your arm feel like it's still on fire, it will cause you to keep moving. Even though you don't really know what you're doing, like, I distinctly recall through the fire when you had relocated to friend's house or losing your house. You'd called me and said I I'm heading off to supervise in another town, and I thought, Oh my gosh, it's like that her legs are still moving, like, how does she How did she get there does she know what she's doing. Is she able to focus on the observation and I suspected that you weren't it's those sort of that sort of process of now taking your body and listening to your to what your physiology, your brain has to tell you about what it experienced when you were overwhelmed. And when you were no longer in control and getting, you know, it sort of back to baseline and takes time you got to hold some space for that process and work through it, because it doesn't just happen instantly it doesn't happen because you want it to. You don't just reel it to, you know, I'm back to baseline because clearly that's over and it's been 24 hours, it doesn't always work that way. Well we've talked about stress toxic stress prolonged stress trauma and then PTSD, which is more of a circuitry trauma, as somebody who is in recovery from PTSD I want to just make sure everybody knows that PTSD is not a state of being. In fact, one of the books we found together in our in our experience of what doesn't kill us by Stephen Joseph and in this book he talks about kintsugi and it has a lot of parallels for what we're calling post traumatic growth so this idea that somebody can take their trauma metabolize it over time. It's not like you said it's not easy it's definitely it's damn difficult I will tell you but there is hope, and there's light at the end of the tunnel and it is not a state of being and you can do something with it, do describe it so beautifully. Can you tell us a little bit about what kintsugi is and how it parallels to post traumatic growth.

15:59

Sure, sure. I think I'm going to take on post traumatic growth first and then I'll layer in some post traumatic growth is an idea that's talked about in the literature. Calhoun and Tedeschi talk about it. I believe they talked about it. Early, I don't want to say first but early in the literature, and it's the idea that when you experience something that is as difficult as a trauma is and it overwhelms your resources in the ways in which trauma does. It puts you in a position that you sort of have to reassemble yourself your interior, your inner resources your who you are in a way that is so complete that you are sort of forced to change who you are, or to transform who you are. And so, you incorporate the growth that

you've made through the process of sort of recovering from something very very difficult. And you come out on the other side, a different person. You come out on the other side is a person who would acknowledge that they've grown and changed. They might acknowledge a change in their philosophy of life. Certainly, realignment of your priorities, there's sort of a sense in post-traumatic growth that I know what is important to me now and I'm going to live for that. Sometimes there's a just an increased appreciation of certain aspects of their life family their work, or you know those priorities that they've shifted and more of a richer sense of appreciation for their life, and certainly there's an increased personal strength there sort of that idea that I am a strong person, I've faced the worst or I've faced something really awful and come out on the other side of it and I'm different. But I'm better, and I'm really proud of who I am now that I've worked my way through something extremely difficult. And so the all of those sort of ideas, probably fall under that umbrella of post traumatic growth and consuming is just it's just sort of a, it's a Japanese art form. It's a healing modality sometimes that is used in trauma recovery sort of work, it's not the only one there's certainly many but it's one of my favorite literally consumed the means golden joinery. And basically, what it is the Japanese repair broken things they valued. The idea that when things get old and they break. You don't just throw them away, you reassemble reconfigure them strengthen them and continue to use them because they have value. And so, it's the idea of taking you know either pottery, you know, plates, cups vases, whatever, and putting them back together once they're broken with, you know, a strong glue and lacquer, and it takes time actually to do this to carefully put them back together so that they are restored to their original condition, and then he goes through and they take the crap spots and they reinforce them with gold powder. And it's the idea that they're not hiding the cracks. They're highlighting the cracks. And they're making them more beautiful. And they're showcasing the fact that they are different, and they're stronger, and they are better and it's a, it's a, an art form sometimes dishes and vases and things have more value once they've been consumed in that particular culture, then less value they have actually, you know, would be more prized and certainly sometimes more expensive to purchase when they've been broken in the assemble. So that's sort of the idea that once we're broken open in those ways, and we put ourselves back together. We're, we're strong certainly and more valuable than we were before, to ourselves. Ernest Hemingway said the world breaks everyone and afterward, many are stronger at the broken places. And I think of that quote when I'm consuming things, as is the goal of this podcast I want to take it back to actionable practices so I think it's really important to have these conversations about, you know, if a student or a faculty member for that manner is getting in front of us in crisis, what do we do, what can we do I think that when we, when somebody is in traumatic sort of more acute phase of traumatic stress I think we have an obligation to say to them, you know, I see you, I recognize that you're actually suffering. Here are some resources, and just kind of be in that space with them, not trying to solve their problem, because, let's face it, you can't solve it many times, these are these are difficult emotions, these are difficult experiences, and it is their journey. So sometimes you being there's only thing you can do, but giving them hope things will get better, but it's your, you are on a difficult journey and being really honest with them about that. But I know you're going to share some resources; our campus has some incredible resources available. And if you can do what I just said I see you, I noticed you, I'm going to be here with you, and here's some steps you need to take, I think we've gotten, you know, at least on the right path. It's been a long time it's kind of weird to reflect on it but I remember a moment where I was having some trouble and for whatever reason I don't know what you saw, but you recognize it pulled me into that office and I think we had a conversation and and it facilitated a lot of support for me in the long run. So, It is important and I think sometimes, you know

that just that little expression of concern or care is really kind of the first and most important thing we can do for our, you know, to support other wild cats in crisis, so thank you for that, by the way. Yeah, no problem. And you know I have to say from the other side as a person, noticing a student or colleague, and reaching out. It's not going to feel like you're doing anything terribly substantive, you're going to wish you could do more, and you're going to wonder what you could do more and you're going to feel like, gosh, you know, is this all I've got. I need to do more for this person and it's just because remember what we're talking about something that overwhelms the, the coping mechanisms that we have it overwhelms it's a circumstance that is, is not something we encounter all the time it's it's out of proportion to everyday concerns, it's a big deal, so it's probably pretty natural for a person extending support to feel that way as well. There are a couple of other resources I want to highlight versus CSU red folder so if we're on campus and a student approaches us in crisis so you can click on that. And there are and I will also link this in our teaching guide, there are some kind of resources that will point you to the direction. So for example, if a student seems to be okay but they're reporting kind of a stress. You might be able to kind of facilitate them point them into the right direction to resources. If a student's in like pretty bad.

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You can tell that they're just not in a good state mentally, then you might want to maybe facilitate more of a connection to counselling, And then we also have the care team on campus and you can make a referral anytime. If you suspect anything that's distressing, and again these referrals will be investigated a team will follow up with the student that's not necessarily a faculty's job, but recognizing situations in distress and knowing what to do I think is the first line of defense in showing that, you know, care and concern for our fellow white Wildcat I think you touched on a really important point. And I just want to highlight this one more time.

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You know, recovering from an experienced trauma takes time but if you're in a really heightened state of agitation. That usually calls for something more immediate so I love what you're saying, you know, connecting to resources, relying on the care team. It's critical that you do that. So faculty are not immune to stress trauma, believe me I know, I don't know if people are aware but it's really important that I think we know about the resources that we have immediate access to his faculty. And so the first one I want to kind of talk about is life matters, they have a hotline a crisis hotline. And as much as I think there's a stigma of some embarrassment sometimes when we share our experience I hope that people understand that my intent and sharing my experience with calling the crisis hotline is not to invoke anything other than to, you know, just share that in those moments where I was the lowest of the low, somebody answered the phone and just had a conversation with me that calmed me and then facilitated immediate connection to resources. Yeah, I think, I think it's great for you to share that and I think it's an amazingly valuable resource for, you know, for all the people who call a line like that there are a lot of other people who are just trying to tough it out themselves and that doesn't always work, something like life matters, I think is crucial.

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And there you have it folks. Today we discussed the impacts of stress and trauma on learning and teaching, and we explored resources available to support Wildcats in crisis. For more information on

supporting Wildcats in crisis, including research practices and resources, check out our F dev teaching guide, entitled supporting students in crisis. If you or someone you know is struggling with stress or trauma, please access the resources via well cat health or consider making referrals to the cares team. And finally, don't forget about life matters.

26:17

I'd like to thank Dr. Rebecca Justeson and for contributing to this episode. And I also like to extend a special thank you to Quinn Winchell for our podcast music, and to the vocal stylings of Dr. Browning Neddeau for the land acknowledgement. Join us for our next episode where we will debrief the FDEV student engagement challenge. Until then, we got this Wildcat