

Given that young people are _____

the best way to get them to behave is to _____



EMOTIONALLY SAFE SETTINGS

Young people are different...what do we do about it?

Email me!

GARETH@LETUSNAVIGATE.COM



Three parts, then you take it away

01

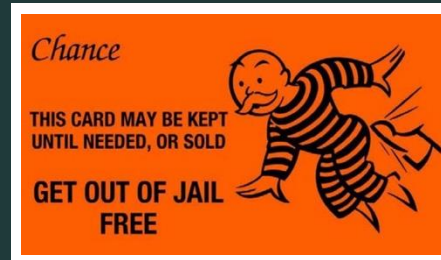
Intro

02

Why we need to be
different?

03

How to be different?



1

A get-out-of-jail card, a public health warning, and one big idea.



Why?

The reason we do any of this.



Intro to some key chemicals

Challenging behaviour often reflects a brain out of balance, where the survival system is dominating and the thinking system is less active.



Six chemicals: **which one is in charge today?**



What has changed? **Reminder of the mismatch...**

- Blue light and screens
- Poverty and stress
- Nature and outdoors
- Risk - physical versus emotional
- Artificial intelligence
- Parenting and work/life
- Shame and social media
- Play and social interaction
- Constant evaluation and feedback
- Ideas about masculinity

None of this is an excuse. All of it is the environment they arrived from.



THE MOTIVATION & REWARD CHEMICAL

Dopamine (the motivation chemical)



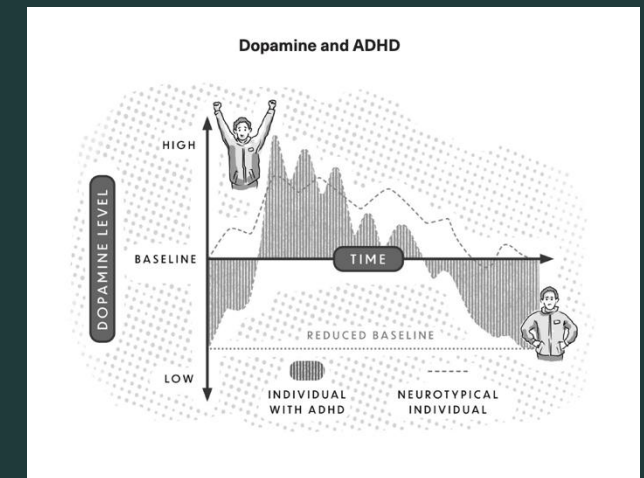
QUICK VS SLOW DOPAMINE

QUICK

Sugary foods
Social media
Gambling
Online shopping
Alcohol / drugs / vaping

SLOW

Exercise / physically active
Music / musical instrument
Creative
Reading
Coding / problem solving



Dopamine and ADHD - reduced baseline, bigger spikes.

WHAT WE SEE

Low tolerance for frustration, task avoidance, difficulty sustaining effort, increased impulsivity



Oxytocin (the connection chemical)



PRINCIPLES

- Requires in-person connection - phones often get in the way
- Positive, grateful, internal self-talk
- Hard in a comparison-based society

WHAT WE SEE

Attachment insecurity - clinginess or avoidance, reduced empathy, increased peer dependency



THE MOOD AND STABILITY CHEMICAL

Serotonin (the mood / energy chemical)



LOW SEROTONIN?

- Poor diet (90–95% created in your gut) – ADHD Study
- Poor sleep
- Lack of time in nature
- Lack of time in sunlight

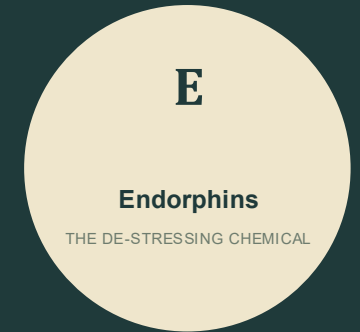
WHAT WE SEE

Irritability, withdrawal or social anxiety, shame sensitivity, fragile self-esteem, increased mood swings, tired



THE DE-STRESSING CHEMICAL

Endorphins (the de-stressing chemical)



CAUSES OF LOW ENDORPHINS

- Lack of physical exercise
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Lack of laughter
- Stress / unpredictability

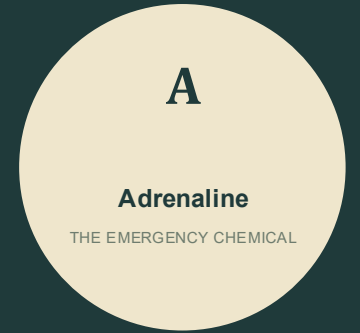
WHAT WE SEE

Lower tolerance for physical and emotional discomfort, meltdowns under minor stress, avoidance of challenge, reduced 'grit'



THE EMERGENCY CHEMICAL

Adrenaline (the emergency chemical)



MODERN CHANGES

- Digital simulation of threat / excitement
- Social media 'drama'
- Reduced real-world adventure, play and risk-taking

WHAT WE SEE

Thrill seeking, emotional volatility, overreactions, risk-taking in unsafe domains



THE STRESS CHEMICAL

Cortisol (the stress chemical)



MODERN CHANGES

- Financial pressures in families
- Constant digital comparison - even when trying to do good
- Academic pressures

WHAT WE SEE

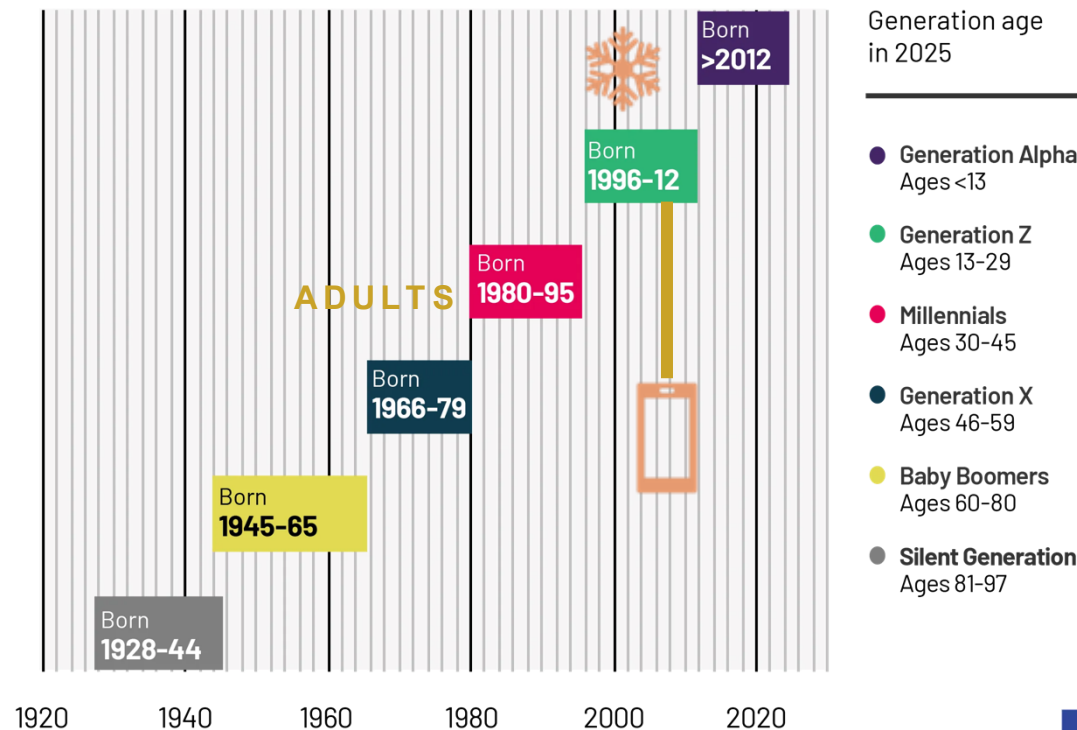
Anxiety, irritability, sleep disturbance, shut down, high drama (for seemingly very little)



WHO HAVE WE BEEN DEALING WITH?

We've been dealing with the **snowflakes** (Gen Z)

Defining the generations



TIMELINE

- **2004-06**
Facebook, Twitter
- **2010**
Front-facing camera (iPhone)
- **2010+**
Insta, Snap



Major Depressive Episodes in the Last Year (U.S. Teens)

Percent of 12-17-Year-Olds

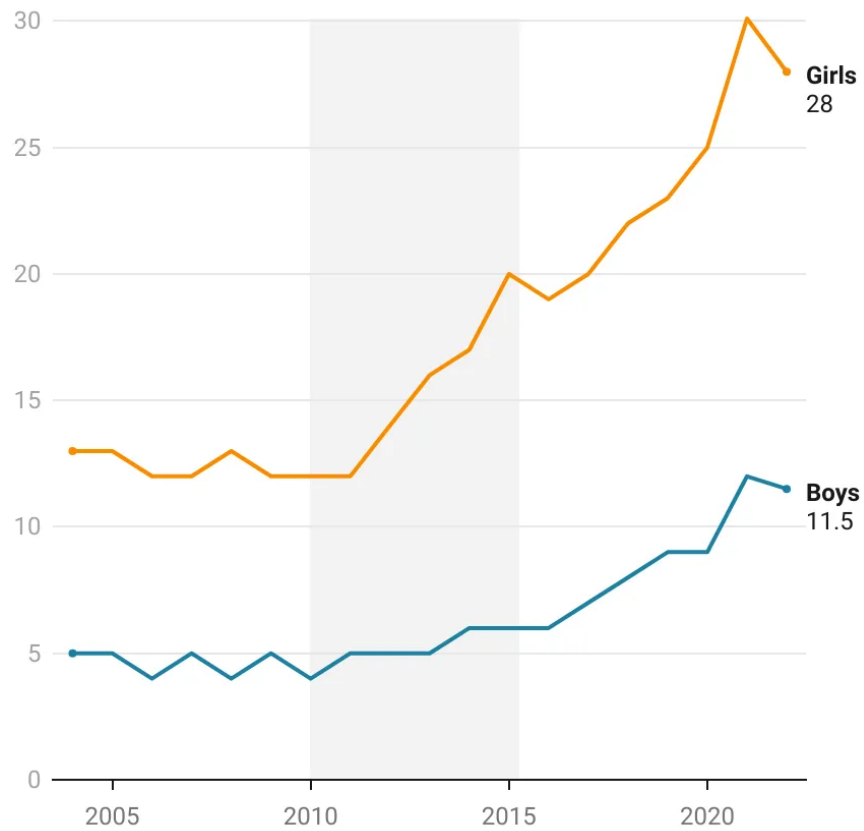
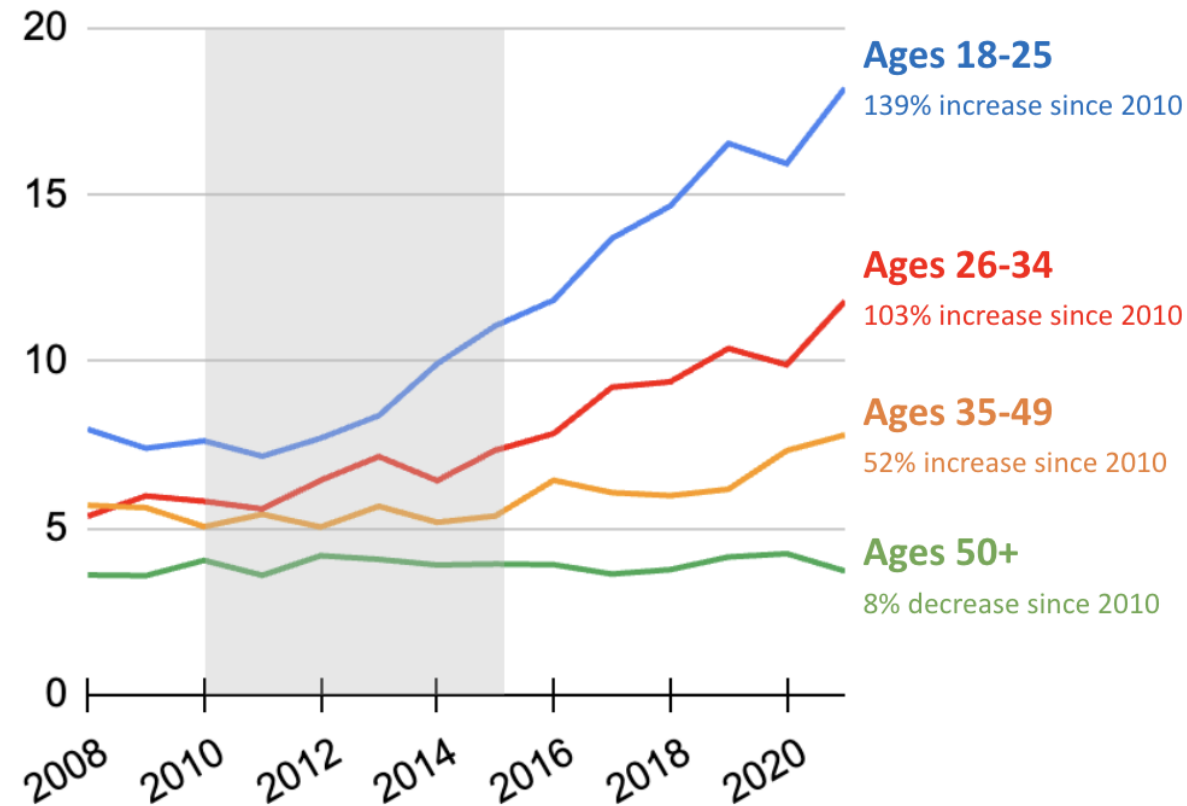


Chart: Zach Rausch • Source: National Survey on Drug Use and Health • Created with Datawrapper



Percent U.S. Anxiety Prevalence

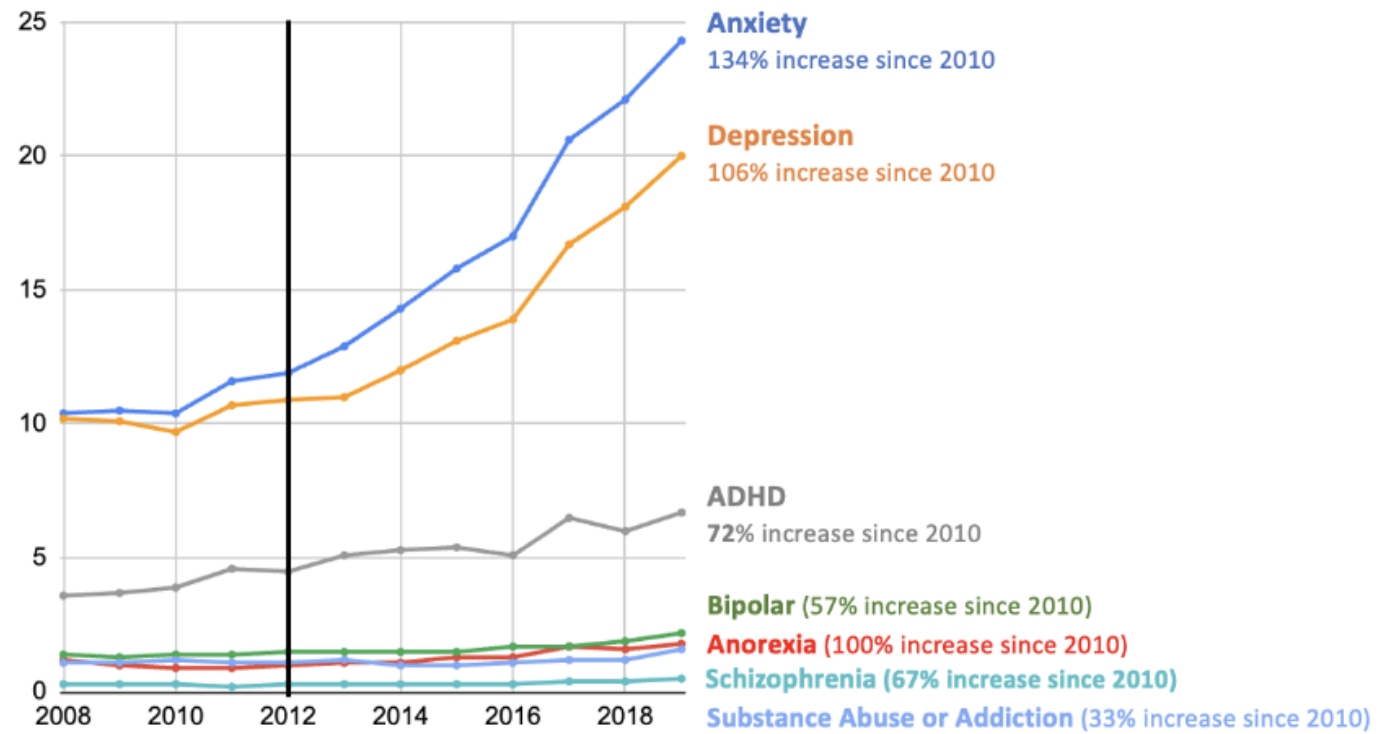


SOURCE: U.S. National Survey on Drug Use and Health



THE EVIDENCE

% of U.S. Undergraduates Diagnosed with a Mental Illness

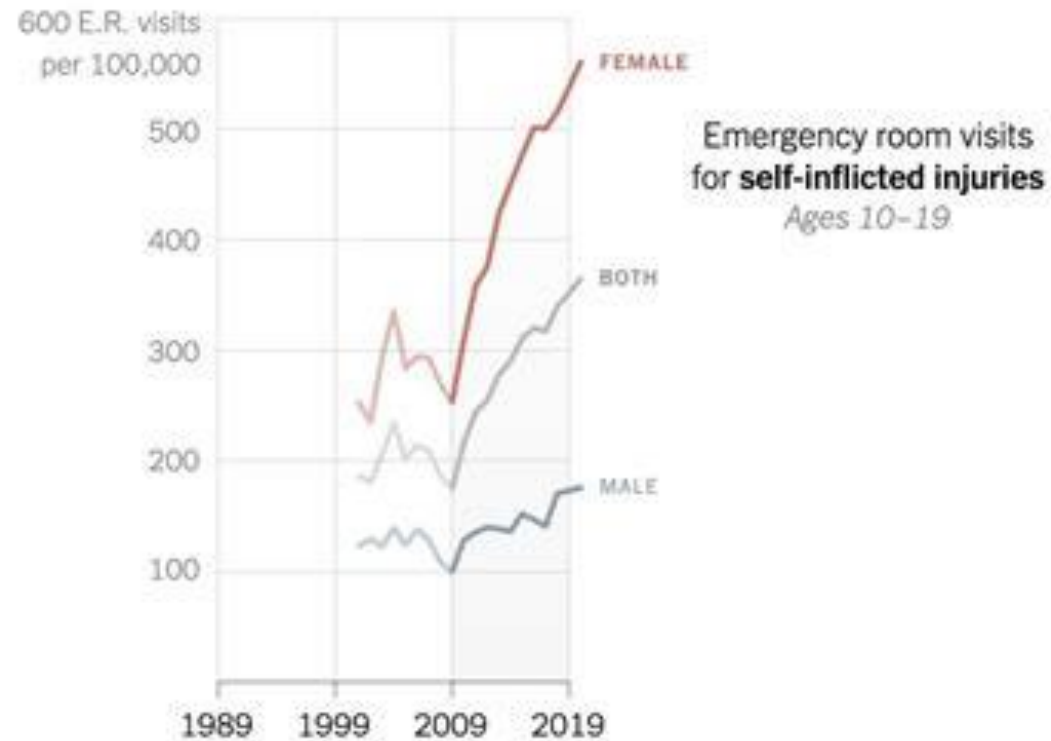


SOURCE: American College Health Association
(ACHA-NCHA II)



THE EVIDENCE

Emergency room visits for self-harm by children and adolescents rose sharply over the last decade, particularly among young women.



By The New York Times | Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

NAVIGATE TOWARDS...



Emotional safety

Knowing where you
stand



Safe spaces

Language and
environments



Opportunity

Chances to change
behaviour



Self belief

Picking up the rope



Hope

High expectations and
high support

Brains develop in response to environment. If we want different behaviour, we must change the culture and build **different environments**.



3 to win...

—

...3 to bin



WHAT IS YOUR WHY?

Is this really about **behaviour**?

- Emotionally safe setting
- Shame-free setting
- Nurturing setting

Intervention or culture?



○ THE HARDEST TO REACH (WHILST REACHING EVERYONE)



THE DISTINCTION THAT MATTERS

What is Relational

RELATIONSHIP

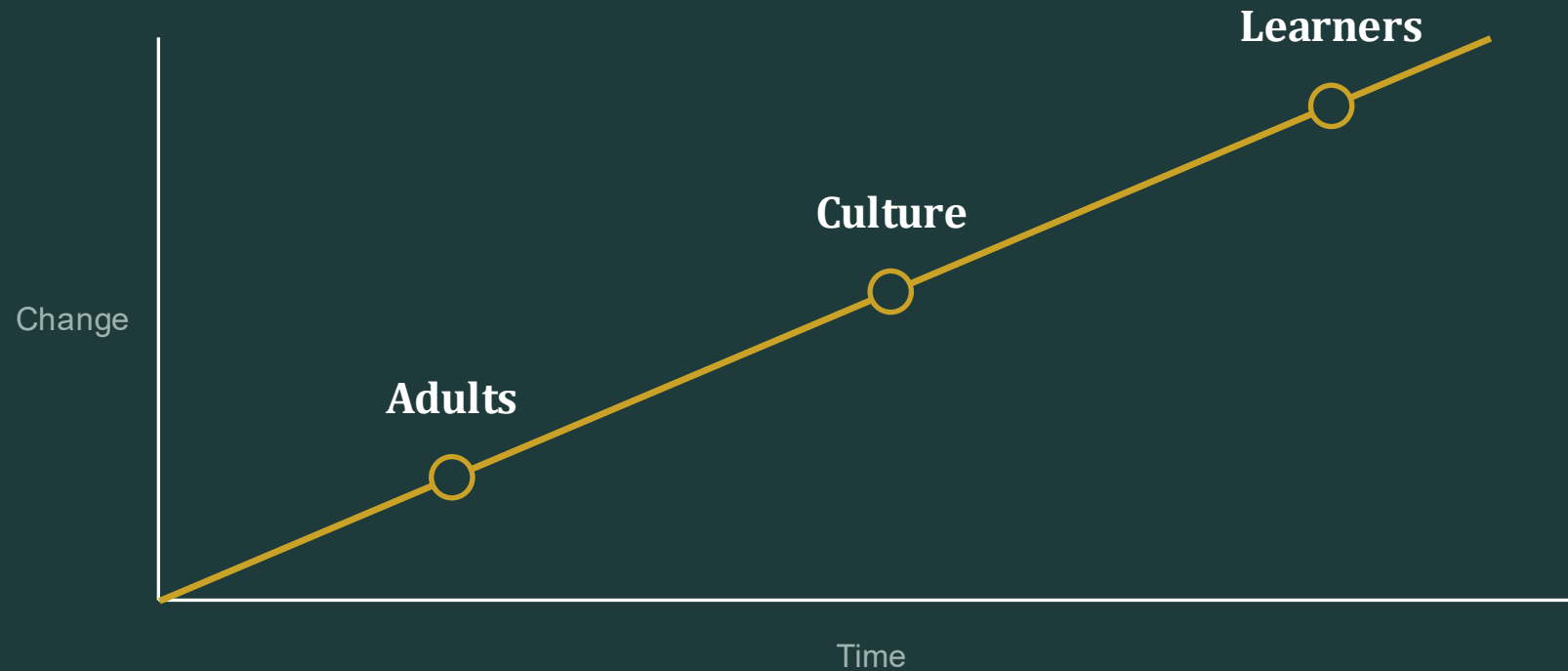
- Emotional
- Sentimental
- Variable
- Intuitive

Relationships vary by adult. Emotional safety cannot.



WHEN WILL IT WORK?

Adults first. Then culture. **Then learners.**



Learners change last. If nothing is shifting, look back down the timeline for the issues, not up.



01 / 05

EMOTIONAL SAFETY



PILLAR ONE

Emotional Safety

Emotional Safety is the organisational and relational condition in which every young person can predict what will be expected of them, how adults will respond to them, and what language will be used - regardless of which adult they are with, which room they are in, or what part of the day it is. It is not the absence of challenge; it is the presence of consistency.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

- Scripts and behaviour language
- Pulling emotion from interactions
- **Rules & rule language**
- **Predictable routines**
- **Rules across context**
- Adult fluency

What is the **language** of your setting?



WHY MOST SCHOOL RULES FAIL

Learners are expected to conduct themselves at all times in a manner consistent with the values of the College and to demonstrate appropriate regard for the health, safety and wellbeing of themselves and others. Learners must comply with all reasonable instructions given by a member of staff. Learners are required to attend all timetabled sessions punctually and to remain for the duration of the session unless permission has been granted. Mobile telephones and other personal electronic devices must not be used in a manner which disrupts teaching and learning. Learners must wear appropriate personal protective equipment in all practical areas. Learners must not consume food or drink in designated areas. Learners are expected to treat College property, equipment and facilities with due care. Learners must not engage in behaviour which could reasonably be construed as bullying, harassment or discrimination. Learners are required to carry identification at all times whilst on College premises. Learners must adhere to the Acceptable Use Policy in respect of all College IT systems and networks. Learners are expected to engage positively with tutorial and enrichment provision. Learners must report any accident, incident or near miss to a member of staff without delay. Learners are expected to submit all assessed work by the published deadline. Learners are expected to conduct themselves at all times in a manner consistent with the values of the College and to demonstrate appropriate regard for the health, safety and wellbeing of themselves and others. Learners must comply with all reasonable instructions given by a member of staff. Learners are required to attend all timetabled sessions punctually and to remain for the duration of the session unless permission has been granted. Mobile telephones and other personal electronic devices must not be used in a manner which disrupts teaching and learning. Learners must wear appropriate personal protective equipment in all practical areas. Learners must not consume food or drink in designated areas. Learners are expected to treat College property, equipment and facilities with due care. Learners must not engage in behaviour which could reasonably be construed as bullying, harassment or discrimination. Learners are required to carry identification at all times whilst on College premises. Learners must adhere to the Acceptable Use Policy in respect of all College IT systems and networks. Learners are expected to engage positively with tutorial and enrichment provision. Learners must report any accident, incident or near miss to a member of staff without delay. Learners are expected to submit all assessed work by the published deadline.

Can anyone here recite theirs?



Four tests for a rule worth having

01

Short

Sayable in one breath, from memory, under pressure.

02

Observable

You could film it. You can see it. You can hear it.

03

Positive

More + than -. Names what to do, not the forty things not to do.

04

Enforceable by **everyone**

Including reception, the caretaker and the café staff.

“Everyone” is the word that does the work here.



Why the whole conduct policy collapses into three

BEFORE

Attend every session
Arrive on time
Bring your kit
Wear correct uniform
Phones away in class / no phones
No food outside canteen
Meet your deadlines
Speak respectfully
Walk on left
Follow staff instructions
Report incidents
Care for equipment
...and eighteen more



AFTER

Safe.

Yourself, each other, the space, equipment.

Ready.

Here, on time, kit and ready to learn.

Respectful.

To people, to property, to the work.

You already have the three on the right. This slide is about why they hold - every line on the left lives inside one of them.



Teaching a rule, not reading one out

1

Explain

Why this rule exists, in one sentence.

2

Model

Show what it looks like when it is done.

3

Practise

Let them do it while you are watching.

4

Notice

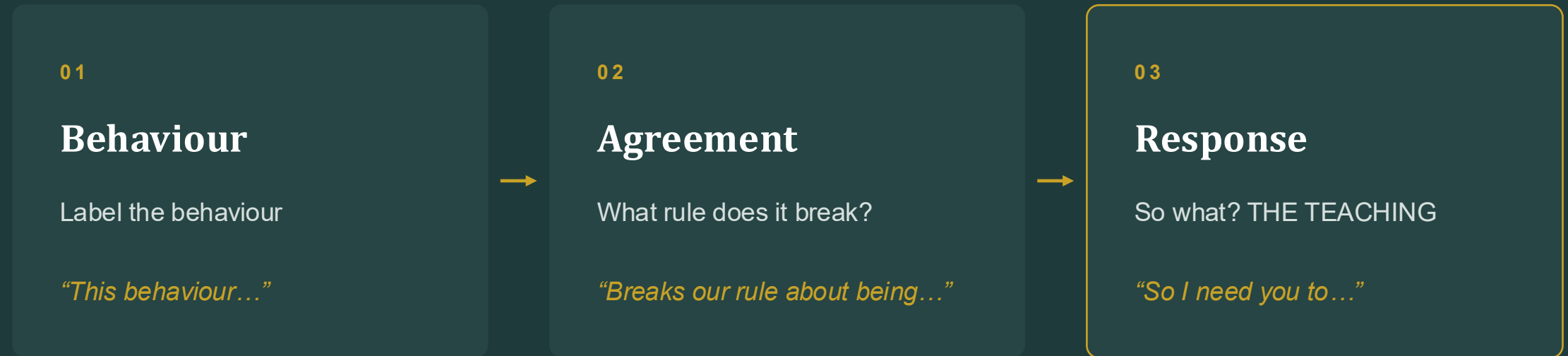
Name it out loud when it happens.

It might be common sense to you, but let's not take the risk?

Reading the rules at learners in week one is not teaching them.



Behaviour → Agreement → Response



OUTCOMES

Reduced defensiveness, less aggression, improved sponge space, increased co-operation



Routines and pedagogy

ROUTINES FOR...

- Transitions (between tasks)
- To silence
- For group work
- Create safety
- Gather responses
- Equipment
- Meet
- End

Super-power this with a commitment to routines **across subjects, year groups and parts of the school.**



RULE

What we expect.

Every rule asks somebody to decide to follow it, every time.

ROUTINE

The sequence that makes it happen.

A routine can help removes the decision / thinking around applying the rules.



Predictability lowers threat.

Less to be anxious about. More attention available for learning.



INSTALL THESE THREE IN WEEK ONE

Threshold. First 5 minutes. Exit.

01

The threshold

How learners are met at the door / on entry - every session, by name. Stand there. Say the name. Notice something.

○ *After a chaotic morning, this may be the first predictable, warm thing all day.*

02

The first 5 minutes

The same sequence every time, whatever the topic. Settle, retrieve, purpose, start.

03

The exit

How the session ends, what is confirmed, and how the next one is set up before they leave the room.

Explicit future expectations?



Five steps, then three weeks of holding it



Then hold it for three weeks before you assume it has landed.

Most routines are abandoned in week two, which is roughly the point at which they were starting to work.

How do we make it hold for our poorest attenders?



02 / 05

SELF BELIEF



PILLAR TWO

Self Belief - how do you pick up that rope?



Self-belief, in the context of our work, is the internal experience of being capable, worthy, and noticed - built through the sustained, deliberate actions of the adults around young people. It is not confidence in the conventional sense.

Primary / secondary differences

IT IS THE DEEPLY HELD SENSE THAT

- I make good choices
- The people around me see me
- I am capable of reaching milestones
- I deserve the positive outcomes that come from effort



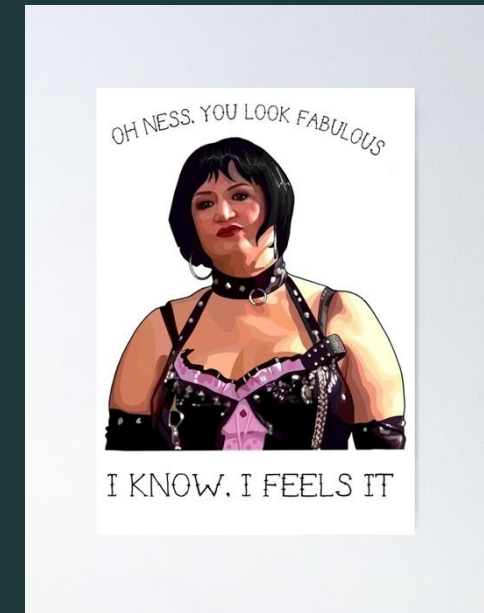
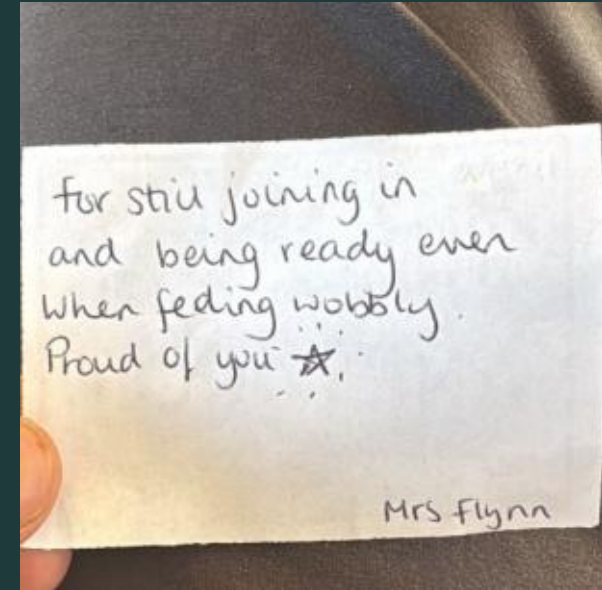
SELF BELIEF · MODEL

Good noticing

- Nudge / reinforcement (not a bribe)
- Effort, not outcome
- Intrinsic and specific - blank stickers, post-it notes, notices and phone calls home

SELF BELIEF ISN'T TRANSACTIONAL!

It holds no value to anyone else.



03 / 05

SAFE SPACES



Safe Spaces

Safe spaces is the deliberate, organisation-wide practice of creating environments - physical and relational -- in which every young person feels emotionally safe enough to be honest about their needs, regulated enough to access learning, and confident that every adult they encounter will respond to them in a consistent and dignified way.

- Are your adults **predictable**?
- **Structure** and **scripting** are your friends
- Sometimes you must **trick your brain!**
- Considering **sensory needs** - and doing something about it



Behaviour → Agreement → Response

“I’ve noticed that...”

“Remember our rule about being...”

“You might be right. Give me 5 minutes and I’ll come and see you...”

“That may be true, and yet...”

TAKE UP TIME

Protects social status



Being prepared...

Prepared language is not insincere. It is what protects both people at the exact moment neither of you is thinking clearly.



Proactively **maintaining** regulation

WHAT DYSREGULATES

Stuff — sensory overwhelm from clutter, busy displays, too much equipment

Noise — volume, and the layering of multiple sounds at once

Too much choice — overwhelming during unstructured time

Unstructured time — lack of clarity, no visible boundaries

Shame — in language, body language, or tone

Urgency — raised volume, fast pace, or pressure

Temperature — heat from clothing, environment, activity

Hunger — how often do you offer food on a tricky day?

Fear or confusion — unclear expectations, no access to the curriculum

WHAT REGULATES

Sensory flooding — ice, strong smell, or sour taste

Chewing — cereal bars, dried fruit, string cheese

Weight — wall pushes or carrying something heavy

Fidget tools — particularly a hard Nee Doh ball

Deliberate noticing — from a trusted adult

Grounding — taking shoes off

Structured movement — stretching, or a pre-agreed lap

Rhythm — rhythmic activity and breathing

Oxygen — natural light and fresh air



04 / 05

OPPORTUNITY



PILLAR FOUR

Opportunity — how do we change future behaviour?

‘Consequences’ are OK! They must be **forward facing**...

TYPES OF RESTORE

- Follow up
- Restore / repair and my issue with **sorry**
- Help and **equity** – some young people will just need a bit more from you.
- Anchor and **Drift**

Certainty over severity, every time.

This is your collective responsibility...



Restore is **everything we have covered**, in one moment

LET'S THINK ABOUT WHAT WE'VE COVERED UNTIL NOW...

- **Emotional safety** - rules understood? good routines for this process? anchor and drift
- **Self belief** - notice the good? align to rules and values
- **Safe space** - "I've noticed that...", "what can I do to help?", the physical environment
- **Opportunity** - follow up and help

WHEN WE FORMALISE RESTORE, IT CAN FEEL INTIMIDATING

Alternatives:

- Walk and talk
- Jobs
- Side-to-side
- Do it outside?
- Can we do the same with parents?

*A mix of everything we have covered, in a shorter, more intense moment. It **cannot** feel different to the culture you are creating everywhere. Is it forward facing?*



WHO DEALS WITH IT?

Navigation over delegation

DELEGATION REINFORCES TWO THINGS

- 1 You don't have the ability to deal with tricky behaviour
- 2 You only matter to me when things are going well

How does this look / feel currently?

How do we create an environment that **empowers every member of staff** to take responsibility?



05 / 05

HOPE



PILLAR FIVE

Hope

Hope is not wishful thinking. It is not ambition, confidence, or opportunity — though it acts as the foundational gateway to all of these. Hope is the belief, held and felt by a young person, that a better future is possible and that they are worthy of it.

High standards + high support (it's not a compromise)

An internal resource — the skills, belief, wellbeing and connection that make change possible when it matters most.

- Can your learners imagine their way to a better future?
- How good are we at noticing the small things?



Relationship **ping pong** vs the shield

- The importance of one key adult
- How do you notice early signs of hope building?
- Can you build in data to capture progress for your **most vulnerable** learners?

HOPE AND SAFEGUARDING

At its most serious, the absence of hope is the greatest risk factor in suicide. Adults must understand that the decision to end one's life can temporarily provide a false sense of hope - control, clarity, and purpose. This is why many people experience an uplift in mood, an apparent calm, or improved relationships just before suicide.



NAVIGATE TOWARDS...



Emotional safety

Knowing where you
stand



Safe spaces

Language and
environments



Opportunity

Chances to change
behaviour



Self belief

Picking up the rope



Hope

High expectations and
high support

Brains develop in response to environment. If we want different behaviour, we must change the culture and build **different environments**.



FINAL THING FOR SEPTEMBER

BELONGING AND ATTENDANCE

Making attendance everyone's job rather than the attendance team's job.



It is rarely one decision. It is a drift.

It starts with one missed session that nobody noticed.



You already know **who to support first**

01

Before term starts

Pull the learners whose school flagged them, or whose prior attendance you already hold. That list exists. Someone has it.

02

Week one

Give each of them a named adult and a reason to be somewhere on day one. Not a warning letter — a person expecting them. Notice!

03

First absence

Same-day contact, warm, no threat. The point is that they learn quickly that somebody noticed.

Waiting for the horse to bolt and then writing a strong letter about the stable door is not an attendance strategy.



The **welcome back** helps decide future attendance.

Most systems invest everything in the chase and nothing in the return.

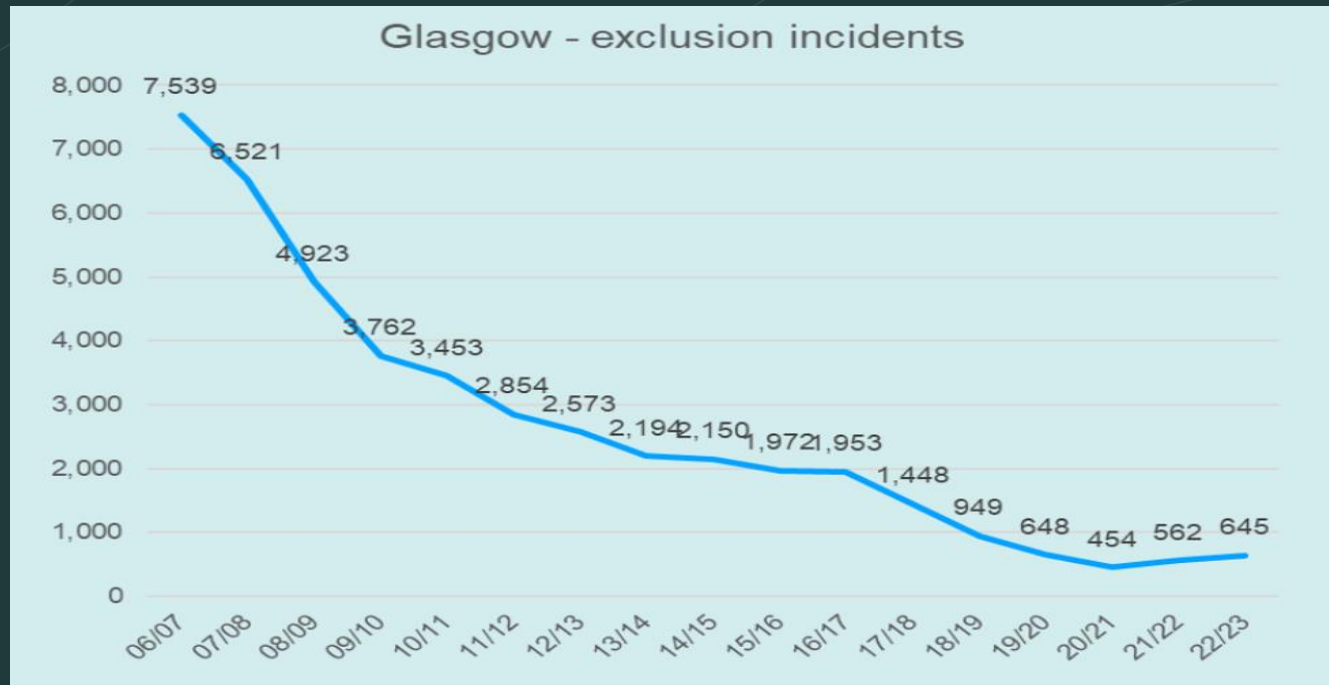


Break

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Over 90% reduction in exclusions since 2007.



140 permanent exclusions, to almost none.

It wasn't all about **behaviour...**

“People from social care, working in social care”

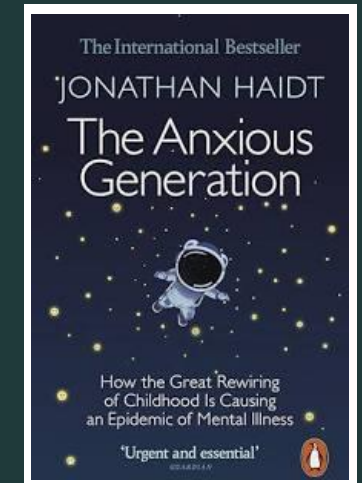
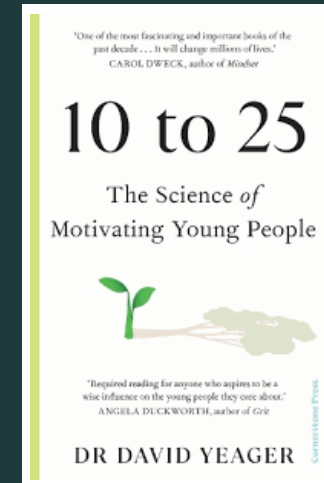
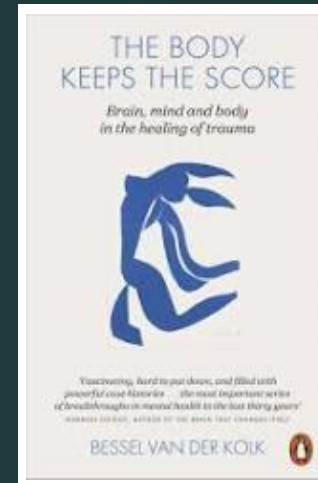
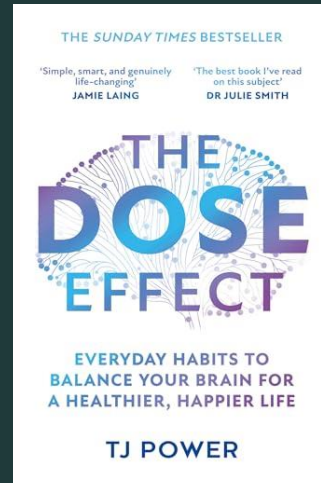
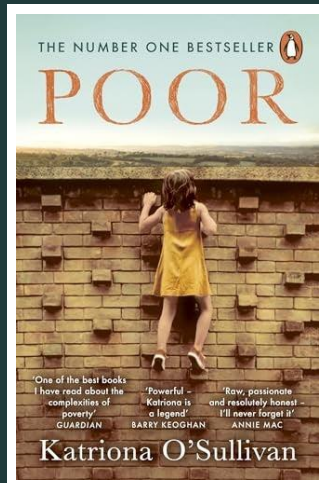
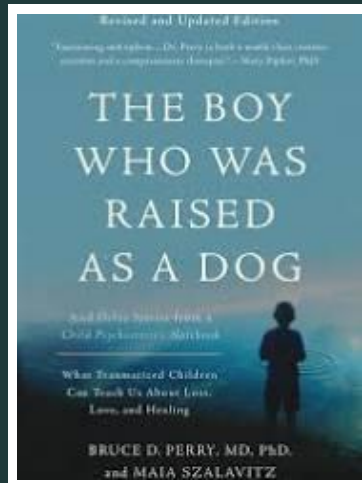
“People from the estates working as health professionals in the estates”

1 + LEVEL 6	2007	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
NATIONAL	39%	61.6%	64.3%	66%	63.8%	63.8%
GLASGOW	28%	56.6%	60.3%	60.8%	58.9%	61.9%
5 + LEVEL 6	2007	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
NATIONAL	10%	22.1%	24.1%	24.7%	24.2%	25%
GLASGOW	5%	16.1%	18.8%	17.9%	18.3%	20.6%

“Build from within...”

WHERE THIS COMES FROM

How do we build **emotionally safe schools** in modern society?



None of this is new. It is just rarely turned into what an adult does at a doorway on a Monday morning.



CALL TO ACTION...

What new understanding have I gained?

What one thing can I do differently tomorrow?



What do I need help with moving forward?

What still feels uncertain or requires more clarity?



GARETH@LETUSNAVIGATE.COM

CHARLOTTE@LETUSNAVIGATE.COM



www.letusnavigate.com

Navigate Education



Gareth Lewis

Co-Founder @ Navigate Education | School
Culture, Inclusive Education





EMOTIONALLY SAFE SCHOOLS

Young people are different... what do we do about it?

Email me!

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