Transcript- Episode 56

Inclusion and Safety Can Coexist

So we're working in a school district, and they're becoming much more inclusive.

And they used to have a lot of classrooms for kids with disabilities, and they used to have lots of classrooms for kids with challenging behavior based on disability, question mark. And what I want to say is, as they're becoming more inclusive, they're doing it because they believe it's the right work, they know it's time to make changes, all those kinds of things. The first question that came up for us, and it became up loud and clear, is educators are going to be worried about safety.

Parents are going to be worried about safety, and quite frankly, I am worried about safety. So, Kristie and I really took this on because we've really thought about the importance of this. We thought about, I had a lot of things to say that were less than helpful, and I realized this is an incredibly important discussion to have, and an incredibly important thing for people to get comfortable with this conversation.

Because if you're becoming more inclusive, right away, people's concerns might go to safety. Yeah, and I think, and just expect in this podcast, there's going to be a little bit of both, meaning this is a therapy session for Julie and me, so we might say things that aren't useful, and a little, well, I should speak for myself. I may say a few things that are a little bit snarky about ableist practices, but I will always come back and say, we have a download with practical strategies with this very important topic to get you started, and that's at inclusiveschooling.com/download56.

So it'll ebb and flow between sort of, I guess, mindset, like what do we value? What do we believe about students with disabilities? What do we believe about students that have behaviors that challenge us? I think that is warranted, Julie, that we kind of unpack that underneath that fear are some beliefs that are not presuming competence, and are grounded in sort of bad practices in terms of behavior management. You can't see me doing air quotes that have led to some problems. And I think it's like, are we talking about physical safety, or are we really understanding this is a broader topic around neurological safety? So it's like complicated, big, and yet some practical advice is how I would shape it.

Yes, I love that, Kristie. I think you really foregrounded this conversation in a really good way, because the beliefs about people are what fuels this concern. And our beliefs are problematic in so many ways.

And so I think we will get into that. And I think that's super important that you started there. Even our beliefs about how to deal with behavior, right? If you and I

were co-parenting, we would probably do an okay job, because we have very similar beliefs about how to deal with behavior.

But I can imagine with my real husband, if we had kids, we can't even agree on the dog when it comes to behavior. So I think there's a whole bunch about how we were parented, how society, what it looks like to be in control, all that, all that. Even my own nervous system wanting to feel safe will make me do weird things.

And I want to just let people know, because right now, I'm certain that many people are having different reactions to even the introduction to this podcast. And a lot of people are like, no, no, that's great. But we're talking about a kid who, and then there's a bunch of behaviors that have come to your mind, okay? And they're not pretty.

They're not... They're dangerous. They weren't safe. You were scared.

All those things are true. And so what Kristie and I want you to know and understand, kind of before we even dive into this, is we are talking about those big behaviors. And Kristie and I have worked in thousands of school districts, working with, quote unquote, the most challenging kid in this particular school.

So we are keeping everybody in mind, and we're making sure we're thinking about this huge range of behaviors that we see in school systems. So let's just start jumping in. And this concept is today about how do we make sure to help others understand that inclusion and safety can happen at the same time.

And Julie, that's a great distinction because we have a whole course called Behavior 360, where we're going to go into all these different layers. In a 15-minute podcast, all we can do is sort of take one layer or one quarter of a layer of an onion because there's like how we believe about behavior. Then there's like, what do we do to prevent behavior? And then how do we respond in the moment? And then there's the exceptions and the escalations, and then the kids that, right, there's like... And we have strategies for lots of layers, but today we just wanted to, I feel, situate on what you just said, which is believing, understanding that inclusion and safety coexist and how to disentangle the fear around safety from our inclusion efforts.

Yes. So inclusion and safety are not opposites. And so... Yeah, that's right there.

Yeah. So what we're going to ask you to do is no matter your beliefs, I'm imagining if you're listening to our podcast that you have a strong belief in inclusion and are likely to really want to create more inclusive school systems. And it is quite possible that someone is going to say to you, but wait, how are we make sure that this kid, these kids, I am safe? And so we've got this kind of step-by-step approach.

And the first big idea is that we have to name the fear and frame the vision, meaning we have to say and understand from the human that's talking, we hear you, we understand you, and safety is incredibly important. And then in that same idea, we want to make sure that everybody understands that this is a shared responsibility that we all are going to take very seriously. And often we have to keep reminding people that the reason we're including kids in the first place is they're going to have much better outcomes in general, the more they're

included and all of us without disability labels are going to have better outcomes because of the presence of the student that we're talking about.

Yeah. And Julie, good point. The behavior of students isn't always because of a disability.

And so sometimes that's where I get a little bit snarky because we think that, oh, we're in la-la land where there's these beautifully constructed, very safe learning ecologies, and now that we're going to introduce a student with a disability label, that's going to go to hell in a handbasket. And that's when my hackles get up and I'm like, why are we all of a sudden assuming that because I have a disability, I am now a threat to the national safety of the country, right? It's like, we got to say that any kid for any reason may need us to have this collaborative, thoughtful plan to deal with safety. So Kristie, in other words, you're saying it's not just kids with disabilities that struggle.

It's all human beings. If you have a brain, you're likely to struggle with your behavior. And essentially just reminding everybody that a disability label of challenging behavior or a behavioral disorder or oppositional defiance disorder doesn't necessarily increase the chance of, quote unquote, challenging behavior, violent behavior, any of the words that you want to use.

It may or may not. But what Kristie is saying is the more you say this is true for every human in our school. I love the name it to tame it idea, and I would love to name it and frame it outside of this is a greater fear because we're doing inclusion.

I don't like messing them up too much. It's like you said, they're not opposites, but they're also not synonyms, you know?

Yeah, right, right. And sort of to over-conflate or under-conflate, we've got to think about those kinds of ideas, right?

Yeah. So the first idea is that you really want to listen and provide support to the humans who are asking the question. The second big idea is that we want to provide proactive and ongoing training. Now Kristie already mentioned that we have a training called [Behavior 360](#) that's amazing and that's comprehensive and it's about all the aspects of this work.

But you don't want to just provide platitudes. You want to have something in humans' hands. Humans are the teachers in this case.

So that they know, for example, how do I de-escalate in this situation? How do I make sure that a student can come down from an aroused state to a brain-friendly state for learning? And so in this handout that we have for you, we've provided de-escalation techniques that we're not going to go into because we're going to do a whole other podcast on that.

But if you're interested, you can go ahead and pop right into there just to look at those because we care that you have strategies at the tip of your fingers that help people to de-escalate as opposed to old-fashioned thinking around removal, punishment, and all those kinds of things that are our typical go-tos in schools.

Yeah, and I would say, you know, you can pick up Instagram or any social media outlet that you prefer and you're going to see a hundred different ideas about room clears or sending them to the principal's office or what I should do or what I shouldn't do.

And what Julie and I would argue is that there are some core practices, like we said that we cover in Behavior 360 or like in these de-escalation techniques, that everyone should be kind of clear about. And we find that what gets to the real change is when you change your PD by the realities in different classrooms. So what works in pre-K at a core in terms of like relationships and, you know, reducing stressors and how to respond in the moment, sure, those will generalize to the fourth grade into 14-year-olds and 21-year-olds.

But then at some level, we have to get a little bit more tailored to the developmental level of the students and or the size of the students and or the situation that they're facing. So I would say, try to have some core practices, but then also differentiate your PD based upon the realities, like Julie was saying, that different classrooms might be facing. Not everybody's going to have a runner.

Not everyone's going to have a kid who shuts down da-da-da in the same way. Yeah, that's right. So it really has to be generalizable, practical, and individualizable, I like that.

And so, yeah, so you're going to want to be able to provide all sorts of supports. And Kristie, I just know that we mentioned Behavior 360, and I also know that people are going to be like, how do I get that? What's that? And so if you're interested, what we'll do is we'll put a link in the show notes about how to get that, okay? So if you're interested, that's a not free PD for your whole school district, but it's amazing and you probably are going to want to check it out. So we're going to give you a little support, like a link, so you can see what it is and how much it costs and where it is, okay? But this isn't about that.

We're trying to give you lots of supports for how do we help teachers understand that inclusion and safety fit together beautifully. And in fact, I'm going to go ahead and say it, inclusive classrooms are safer classrooms. So the thing that makes my hackles go up, Kristie, about this conversation is we pretend that by excluding children into separate places or segregated spaces, we're increasing the safety of people.

Now, I already struggle with whose safety are we prioritizing? And we well know it's those kids who don't have those labels. And what I want people to know is the most dangerous place in any school system is when you segregate kids with behavioral issues and put them together. So the way to make your schools more inclusive is to not segregate or separate kids with challenging behaviors.

I could explain this for about a million hours, but I'll just take this concept quickly to say that research suggests that when kids are included, they feel more connected. They have more supports with peers. They feel less stigmatized.

And they have a lot better peer models. I could go on and on. But the point is this, the more kids are included, the safer your schools are.

Oh, when you said on and on, I wanted you to go on and on. At that moment, I was just getting with you, like, ah, so it's so important that we have these conversations and just sort of understand why if, let's say, Julie, someone's had a different experience that they said, no, no, no, Julie, the self-contained classroom or the whole building for kids with disabilities actually reduced the number of self-injurious behaviors or harm to other students or, you know, things that happen to teachers. I can hear you and you would be asking us, well, what was the magic? It wasn't the separation that was magical that led to that decrease, right? You would invite us to figure out what did we do because we can probably do that anywhere.

Yeah. So two things. I'd like to see your data because I know for a fact that self-contained classrooms and self-contained schools are the most dangerous places for any kid to be.

So I'd like to see your research, but let's imagine it's true. And then I'd say, okay, let's imagine that you have these amazing relationships.

Good.

Those are portable services and let's get kids back to general education classrooms and let's start to follow least restrictive environment. So often it'll be a kid who throws a desk, injures a peer, pokes someone in the eye, does something really, really, really big one year, and they have a full time placement forever and ever in a self-contained classroom. And it's not the same like there's a judge and a jury.

There's not the same that we get to decide how long someone stays in these ways. But what happens is kids stay there and stay there and stay there and their behavior gets worse and worse and worse. And what we have to do is say, okay, let's imagine a temporary support was needed for this kid related to safety.

Great. How soon are we getting them back in general education and what supports are we putting in place?

Excellent. So I think friends, what you'll find at the download for this episode, which is at inclusiveschooling.com/download56, is you're going to find some of those variations from something on the fly with de-escalation to what Julie and I call student support plans to her mention of what does it mean to make supports portable? And then how do we still really think about safety, but that we don't do that as a go-to with segregation?

Yeah.

So Kristie, I want to do something a little different for those of you that are taking notes. If you're just like, okay. So I came on here to figure out how to assure educators that inclusion and safety can co-exist.

I'm just going to read the seven titles for the handout. So you know, number one is name the fear and frame the vision. So you name the fear for educators and say, the goal is safety and you support that.

The second is provide proactive ongoing training, not just platitudes. The third is model this, we're in this together mindset where we all collaborate and we all come together to support learners. The fourth is we clarify what support looks like.

And we get very clear on individualized supports for individualized kids. The fifth is we're really clear that safety boundaries, we draw clear safety boundaries without exclusion. So we say, hey, these are the goals for safety in this inclusive setting and exclusion isn't an option because we know about the deleterious effects of excluding kids.

The sixth is we shift focus from managing student behaviors to teaching them to self-regulate. So we support, we give a lot of supports for that. And the seventh one is celebrate wins and share stories.

And so just to give a quick strategy for that, Kristie and I often ask teams that are working with kids that have very challenging behavior to look for success minutes. And actually, you might notice that this kid today had three really successful minutes in a row. Then tomorrow, we're working on four really successful minutes in a row.

And we study the success of the student instead of the failure or the challenge that the kid has because too often we put all our energy on this concept of antecedent behavior consequence when in reality, we want to study the success and create more of it.

So it's so much that it's not just that we change our practices, but what Julie's really saying is that we're really thinking about our whole approach a little differently. And this notion of success minutes is definitely a reframe from all the things that they did bad or all the reasons why they should be removed to when did we have a moment? And Julie, I know I can hear so many of my pre-K teachers just telling me, we talk often about the red train.

They came in dysregulated and they left dysregulated and they took all of us with them. And so like some will say, no, there's no time in a day that there was an amount of regulation. And so we also understand that that could be very true that the clear majority of the day, but sometimes when you actually collect the data, you start to see a different picture than how it felt because it felt so hard.

It felt like all the time, but when you looked at the minutes, it was just intense for a while, which kind of gave you a sense that it was bigger than it was, or I would say longer than it was.

So yeah, when we just change our focus to those success minutes, we tend to get a more clear picture of what's working and what's working well. And that helps adults be able to even regulate their own nervous system to look for those things because they realize it's not maybe as big as they thought.

And if it is, it's may not be as long as we thought. Or you get actual keys, like when this student is sitting with this student, they're much more regulated.

Excellent. We're going to do more of that, right? So you're constantly examining those success minutes for what is the magic here and how do we replicate that

magic? Thank you for tuning in and don't forget to subscribe and catch up on past episodes where we share valuable insights, straight talk and practical steps to challenge outdated special education practices. You can find every episode with the show notes at inclusiveschooling.com/inclusion-podcast to build more inclusive schools together.

SHOW NOTES

Key Takeaways

- **Inclusion and safety are not opposites.** Inclusive classrooms can actually be safer than segregated ones because students feel more connected, supported, and less stigmatized.

- **Fear often comes from assumptions.** Concerns about safety are frequently rooted in ableist beliefs and outdated behavior management practices.

- **Name the fear, frame the vision.** Acknowledge concerns openly while reinforcing the shared responsibility to keep all students safe.

- **Safety without exclusion.** Schools can set clear safety boundaries without resorting to segregating or removing students.

- **Celebrate "success minutes."** Focusing on moments of regulation and success helps reframe thinking from crisis to growth.

Episode Download/Handout

The free companion guide — **Inclusion and Safety Can Coexist** — includes practical resources to support educators in creating safe, inclusive classrooms:

- **De-escalation techniques** to calm challenging situations.

- **Student support plan templates** to build individualized, proactive strategies.

- **Success minutes tracking tools** to shift focus toward progress.

👉 Download at **inclusiveschooling.com/download56**.

Highlights from the Handout

- **Julie's Favorite:** *Name the fear and frame the vision* — listen, acknowledge, and then reaffirm that safety and inclusion go hand in hand.

- **Kristie's Favorite:** *Shift from managing to teaching self-regulation* — equip students with tools to handle emotions instead of relying on exclusion.

Practical Tips

- **Provide proactive training:** Equip staff with clear, actionable de-escalation strategies instead of vague reassurance.

- **Model "we're in this together":** Build a collaborative team mindset so safety is a shared responsibility.

- **Track small wins:** Notice and celebrate even a few minutes of success to shift perspective and guide future planning.

- **[Episode 29] But Inclusion Isn't Fair to the Other Students: What to Say!**- Julie and Kristie tackle one of the most common and frustrating misconceptions about inclusive education: that it's somehow unfair to other students. With humor, compassion, and insight, they unpack the ableism hidden in this statement and offer practical language educators can use to shift the conversation toward equity and belonging. Listeners will learn how to respond thoughtfully, ask better follow-up questions, and engage both colleagues and families in creating inclusive environments where every student thrives.

- **[Episode 45] "But What Will They Get Out of This?": 20 Responses Every Educator Needs to Hear**- Julie and Kristie confront one of the most common arguments used against inclusion: the idea that students with disabilities must prove they'll "get something" out of a general education class. Through Stephanie's powerful story of thriving in an 11th-grade English class, they illustrate how access — not ability — is the true foundation of inclusion. This episode offers educators 20 ready-to-use responses to reframe exclusionary thinking, champion equity, and remind us that every student has a right to belong and learn alongside their peers.