



Transcript - Episode 77

Success Minutes: The Mind-Blowing Metric That Changes Everything

Kristie, this is it.

This is my favorite podcast episode. I know of it. I'm sure of it.

Okay. Everybody note that episode 77 is Julie's favorite. So she wasn't lying all the other times.

No, this is just it. This is going to change everything for you. And I'm serious.

It's called the Success Minutes Framework. It's episode 77. And we're going to talk about the concept of success minutes.

And it is useful, perhaps, if you're out there in the world and you feel like, I don't know what else to try. I am struggling mightily with this student. I've tried everything.

I don't know what else to do. Julie, when you said, let's say you're out in the world and you think to yourself, I don't know what else to try. I immediately thought about any of my relationships, or my inability to get to the gym, or my attitude.

And I just got to thinking, since I know what success minutes are, I could use this. Okay, we're going to save your marriages. We're going to get you to the gym.

There you go. We're going to help you clean your house and help you do all the things. And it's all using this actual brain trick called success minutes.

Now, of course, if you're an educator, this will also be very useful for your students with challenging behaviors. Okay? Or if you're a leader and you have staff with challenging behavior. Oh, I'm certain that doesn't happen.

Okay. So, Kristie, have you ever just noticed when a team is struggling with a student, the conversation starts to be about kind of the same thing over and over and over again. And it's always about what went wrong.

Yeah, we talk about admiring the problem. Yeah. And so it's like, no, no, no.

This kid gets up. They strip naked. They run down the hallway.

They write. And it's just this constant, constant, constant list of frustrations about what went wrong. Now we hear you.

We know these things have gone wrong. We know you're pulling your hair out or you're not sleeping because you are trying to figure out how to better support this student. But what we're about to give you is a magic trick to reframe your thinking.

And we start to see really beautiful changes in students because of this thing called success minutes. Julie, I have another application. Okay.

I'm ready. All of you itinerants and coaches who are professionally, your job title is to change the behavior of other adults. And all you do is get yeah, but or we've tried that or it won't work.

Or you get like the passive, nice white lady, like me, where you're like, okay, thank you. And then as soon as you leave, I put your idea in the trash. This is worse or worse.

Kristie, as soon as you leave, you roll your eyes and you say, that was not helpful. Well, that's true. Because I'm going to do that too.

Or something else. Right. Right.

Okay. So yeah, Kristie. So when you're coaching other adults, when you're supporting students, we have a new way of framing things and it's called success minutes.

And when we say success minutes, what we actually mean is you change your focus from antecedent behavior consequence to short successful moments where a student is engaged, regulated, connected, participating. These are not success hours. These are not success days.

They're tiny moments in time where you go. Awesome. Take a look at that.

They're doing it. They're engaged. They're regulated.

They're right here with me. It can be 30 seconds. It can be two minutes.

It could be four minutes during a math warmup, but what we're going to ask you to do is shift. What we've been told to take data on our whole lives, which is the behavior, the challenging behavior. Well, actually I would even say when we say it, we're like, how long does the tantrum last? What caused the tantrum? What did they do after the kid had the tantrum? Like it's all focused on the tantrum.

That's right. We know humans are going to have tantrums, and all we're spending our precious ink doing is recording a student getting out of homeostasis or getting out of their prefrontal cortex or their lids are flipping or they're in fight, flight, freeze, or faint. And we have to know that that's a human behavior will relate to stressors.

And when we keep our attention on that bad behavior, the problematic behavior, the distracting behavior, the disruptive behavior, when we put all our ink and our energy into that data collection, we miss what we really want to study. Well, and Julie, I'll say, let's go out to like, you would call it the macro level of the systems level. And this is for all you assistant principals out there.

If you spend all day tracking office referrals and disruptions, and how many times you had to do room clears and incident reports. If you spend all your day on that, we're also focusing on the wrong thing. All we know, or what we should gain from that is we've got a bunch of students who need help with co-regulation and there's a lot of stressors.

So how do we help reduce stressors and how do we co-regulate? But that's not really what we're asking ourselves. That's right, Kristie. That's what it tells us.

We can put all that bad behavior, take all those data charts and sheets and things like that and, and just put them in a pile and then put a sticky note on it and put on the sticky note. This means the student needs more co-regulation and support. And so great.

We're going to do more co-regulation and support, but the key is when are they successful? It could be engaged for four minutes during science. This kid helped pass out materials and stayed regulated. It could be sat next to other student and put hand on their back.

Like lovely little connection moments where you're like, yes, this is it. So why it's powerful to, to track how long success lasts is because that is where we start the growth. Meaning what we pay attention to grows.

What we pay attention to is what's going to increase. And so we've got to focus on what's working instead of what's not. And I don't think that says you can't ever collect incidents reports or you can't ever complain to your co-teacher, but there's gotta be some space and time and policies and practices for these other things.

Yeah. And what we have to do is think about when does the student actually succeed? And there's brain science behind why this works. And so Kristie, do you want to talk about the brain science here around why does focusing on success minutes actually help humans to be more successful? I think Julie, for me, when we think about the brain, you know, it's so related to all of our work in behavior 360 and around the four S's framework about safe, seen, soothed and secure.

But the bottom line is really understanding key words like regulation and co-regulation and homeostasis and reactive versus responsive or ready. So it's like people need to do some up-to-date work around understanding nervous systems and understanding behavior in a modern way. I would also say, as we think about our brains in general, do we have a high negativity bias? So all of us as humans are on alert for threats to our safety, whether that's emotional or physical safety, whether that's known to us or below the threshold of our awareness.

And then some of us have a heightened sense of that, either because of trauma with a capital T or a lowercase T or just our own temperament. I'll add a third T to that. I just tend to run more negative than Julie does.

Maybe it's my epigenetics. Maybe it's stressors in my life. Maybe it's just how I'm wired.

Like you're never really going to know why. Julie and I talk often about promoting the positive emotional attractor, getting the brain to see what's possible versus all the problems. And I'll just kind of like, end that little blurb here about like what we know about the brain is that like, think about change, think about any change, changing a job.

Oh, let's say there was a detour on your way to work today and you had to change and go a different direction, or you were going to do one thing and the weather changed or your partner's schedule changed or your pants didn't fit. So you had to change your pants. I don't care what it was.

We often think that change is going to be worse. It's like, these are my very favorite pants. Then come to find out today's a skirt day.

But we always, I think generally speaking, this is a broad generalization, but other than Julie, most of us think that whatever the changes is going to be worse. We just think it, we never think, oh, this might be even more stupendous than I could have ever imagined. Right.

Right. So for me, Julie, when you ask that question about what's going on in the brain or what's happening in the brain or why, why are we reframing this to look at success minutes is because it's too easy for us to focus on what's not working. It's too easy for us to think of the student in those same terms.

Think about all the problems. Like we said, admiring the problem and we're really trying to change our mindset as well as actually get to change in the students. So it's like all of our brains at once.

Yeah. Trying to shift. Yeah.

Well, I'm really glad you brought in a couple of things, like the teacher brain that's itself to say, we look for the good. We're going to start to see the good. When we look for engagement, we're going to start like people will say to us all the time.

No, this kid is never engaged, has never been engaged. Never. And then we'll, we'll do a different place with others.

Never participates. Never ready. Never.

Yeah. Never not screaming. Never.

Right. It doesn't matter. But when we go, oh, look, look, look, look, that's engagement.

That's regulation. That's connection. That's participation.

And we start to switch what we're looking for. Then we start to notice those moments more. And they were already happening.

And now we're just seeing them. And so it's just this like pretty magical thing that happens that starts to switch what we're looking for. Now it is magical in lots of ways.

And I'm going to tell you a quick story about a student named Mainee. When I was teaching in Wisconsin, he was a fourth grader. And I'll just tell you that he, um, everyone in the building was frankly scared of this kid named Mainee.

The teachers talked about him. And the substitutes wouldn't cover class. If Mainee was in the class, adults brace themselves, every time he walked in the room, um, his family had many, many concerns outside of school.

And the data looked just like you'd guess there were pages and pages and pages and pages of data collected about Mainee incident reports, referrals, behavior notes. Right. And besides wasting a lot of trees, what that told me is Mainee was needing support.

And if you ask the team, which I did show me a minute where Mainee is successful. No, there aren't any, it's not possible. It really doesn't happen.

Julie, I kid you not. This kid walks in and it's a tornado and dah, dah, dah, dah, and then there's just nothing. And then in his wake and dah, dah, dah, dah.

I was like, okay, let's slow it down today. Let's see if we can find a single success minute. And we started to do some different kind of observation and we started to see that at breakfast, when he got in there, he pulled this kid's backpack up that had slid down off of a, of a stool just out of the kindness of his heart.

And I said, Whoa, look at that Mainee notice that backpack fell Mainee supported that other student Mainee didn't even make a big deal out of it. Okay. And then we started to see that there are all kinds of ways all day long that Mainee is doing just fine.

It's just those big, big, big, big, big moments are huge. And when we started to see that more and more and more of his time were successful, we could study those minutes and go, we want to replicate that. We want more.

I'm going to pause you there for a minute because I think you hit on something that it's the, the intensity or how it feels to our nervous system that is skewing the actual passage of time or amount. Oh, it feels big. It's always versus, you know? Yeah.

Yeah. It is big. And it feels always because it skews our brain to think it's, it's horrible, terrible.

And this kid has to go. I mean, essentially they were explaining to me in a thousand ways why this kid needed to go somewhere else. Right? Right.

And so we started to look to see that when Mainee had a job or was helping others. So we use the backpack example to go, Hmm, he's really empathetic. He noticed that fell, he was able to provide support.

We started to ask for times and spaces where he could do more jobs. He regulated better among certain peers than others. He loved movement.

We started to know that calm adult proximity helps. So what we noticed was certain adults, he was more calm around. And at first we thought, okay, good.

It's just that adult. It's fine. It's just that adult, that adult should stay closer to me and to keep things calm.

But then we realized closer that adult does something called self-regulation. That adult approaches in calm ways. That adult uses co-regulation.

Yeah. What did I say? Self-regulation, but that's okay. Yeah.

Yeah. Co-regulation. And so we started to see that this adult, it was their strategies.

That was the magic here. And then. I'll link to because co-regulation may mean something different to everyone.

I'll put our down our handout for that, but I also wanted to go back to your point about calm. And I know I've kind of been on the soapbox lately, but I really find that we're doing a disservice to teachers. If our definition of calm is not articulated because calm to my nervous system is different than Julie's nervous system.

So just today, literally, Julie, I didn't tell you this, but right before we got on to do our podcasting, I thought to myself, Oh, it's been such a quiet morning and I got to ease into it. And I got, and I thought Julie and I are going to just like have so much energy for this batching session. And then I thought, wait, remember Julie, Kristie, what Julie's life often looks like.

Because I always think your life looks like mine. And it's like, Oh my God, Julie probably worked out, talked to her kids eight times, navigated something with Ellen, took the dog to the vet, cleaned out her refrigerator, made dinner, wrote to her mom. And grocery shop and grocery shop.

That's about it. Oh, I just woke up and walked downstairs. So like my calm and your calm are really different.

So I don't want people to think when we say that Mainee was calm or that you're collecting data, when they're calm means quiet or, or whatever we would define as calm. It means ready to learn in a regulated state, which may still look very agitated or very subdued. That's right.

Okay. Yeah. It's just this like what we're looking for is success in a way that you can measure it.

That looks like engagement, connection, cooperation, support. And we start to look for those things and we start to find them. And with Mainee, I'll just kind of end this story by explaining that Mainee's big behaviors didn't go away, but what we were able to do and keep track of and see is that we could create intentionally more moments that look like success.

So we quickly realized more leadership roles, more movement, more connection, anything that there was something novel or new that he could try or do. And we didn't get perfection. Please know Mainee is a challenging kid and will reMainee challenging, but, Oh, that team realized they were being so, so successful because they could see it growing and changing over time.

And more and more and more and more success minutes. Was it a straight trajectory straight up? No, but it over time grew and grew and grew. And when you saw the humanity in that incredibly beautiful kid, then you could see more and more and more of it when you just looked for it.

All right. So Julie, let's say people are like, you know, halfway through this podcast episode and they're like nodding their heads and starting to see, especially through your story of Mainee, where this could benefit them in their own relationships, in their work with staff and certainly in their work with students. So what action steps or what should we describe the download for this episode next? Or.

Yeah, let's do that. Kristie, what would you explain what the download is for this episode? Walk through it. Okay.

So first of all, where to get it, you can go to [inclusiveschooling.com](https://www.inclusiveschooling.com) forward slash download 77. And this is called the success minutes, quick tracker. Now with all forms don't get caught up in the form friends.

Like you can do this without a form though. My brain just doesn't work very well, but you can use this with your timer on your phone. Or if you have a timer in the classroom, or if you just have a sense, like Julie has a sense about time, you could just do it that way.

Okay. But we're going to kind of give you a tracker system that'll help you actually do some things that are familiar, but not in the same way of like, what was the trigger? How long was the bad behavior and how did we provide a punishment? Not that, not that the success minute quick tracker is just very quick. Who's the student.

And then it explains to capture small moments of success during the day. Success might mean engagement, regulation, connection, or participation and even 30 seconds counts. So what we have is a quick success log for you.

So you put in what happened, like what was happening during that success moment. And you might write quickly, something like 905 math, three minutes, started work teacher nearby. You're just making a quick guess about what's helping this kid start their math.

Okay. There's also an ultra fast support check where you have people circle, what you might have helped. Was it a peer? Was it movement? Was it choice? Was it responsibility? Was it music? Was it visual support or something else where you're just like, I'm going to guess it might be that.

And then at the end of the day, you do a pattern check and you ask yourself today's success happened most during morning, midday or afternoon. Was it group work independent time or hands-on transitions? Notice again, you're only keeping track of what was successful. And again, I would say adapt the form, because if you are only seeing the kid during one class period, or you're an early childhood team that sees the kids on Monday, Wednesdays and Fridays only in the morning session, that's fine.

It doesn't matter if you're with them for five minutes or five hours. We're just trying to break it down. You might even find that you want to get more detailed.

So like which peers, which adults were nearby, what type of music, but to start with, we're just trying to get you into this habit of collecting data in this way. And we want to keep it super simple, but of course, more details will always help you find the pattern. In fact, you might even ask the student, Hey, what did you see? When did you feel most successful or bring it up and say, Hey, it looks like music went really well today.

What was going on for you? Yeah. What did you like? What kept you there? Why did you stay like anything? You just start to ask questions to get more input. And then we just have this one question that just really drives the whole framework, which is, okay, we had 19 and a half success minutes today.

How do we create more moments like this tomorrow? And you come up with ideas and we put more of that in the schedule in the day tomorrow. And then we also have scripts for noticing student success. This is for private feedback only, but you can say things like, Ooh, that effort mattered, or you stayed with their group today, or I saw you stick with that for two whole minutes.

And you're just providing noticing out loud to the student, which oftentimes is rare and hard to find with students with very, very challenging behaviors. Yeah. So we hope that you'll download just this sort of one page protocol or a template or a starter place to think

about how might we grab success moments or success minutes so that we can then after tracking it, look for the patterns, look for ways to share that.

Even if that's just to share the success. So the team feels encouraged. Yes.

We don't have to make any other change. We can just be like, we're, we're making it, we're making a difference. And so you can get that at [inclusiveschooling.com](https://www.inclusiveschooling.com) forward slash download 77.

Let's leave folks with a challenge today, Kristie. And the challenge is if you're listening and you're thinking, I still don't honestly know, we're going to challenge you to say this for one week, track three success minutes per day, write down how long the success lasted, what the student was doing, and what support might've helped. And then ask yourself, how can we create more of this tomorrow? Yeah.

So like I'm thinking Julie, as co-teachers, you and I take this challenge on together, or if I have a paraprofessional that I teach with all day, or I'm close with an occupational therapist or even my building administrator, I could say, I'm going to take on this challenge. Will you help me? Because maybe I'm missing something or I'm over on this side of the classroom. So I don't see what's happening on that side of the classroom.

So help me find it. And we're going to put our little secrets, you know, in this file folder at our desk. Let's see how many stickies we can collect.

Yes. I love putting a partner or support in place so that you can do this, because we know that you're working with students who challenge you in big, big ways. And we know changing your mindset about them is not easy, but this will be magical in its effect with students in the world.

And it will also be magical in your own attitude and ability to do the work and keep going.

SHOW NOTES

In this episode, Julie and Kristie introduce Success Minutes, a simple shift in what teams notice and track when a student is struggling. Instead of spending nearly all of our attention documenting what went wrong, Success Minutes asks us to find the small moments when a student is engaged, regulated, connected, or participating—and then study what helped make those moments possible.

Key Takeaways

- Success does not have to last an hour—or even ten minutes. Thirty seconds of engagement, regulation, connection, or participation counts.
 - When teams only collect data on challenging behavior, they can miss the conditions that are already helping a student succeed.
 - Tracking Success Minutes helps teams identify patterns: particular peers, adults, movement, choice, responsibility, music, visual supports, times of day, or types of activities.
 - The goal is not to ignore difficult behavior. It is to use that information as a signal that more co-regulation and support may be needed, while also studying what is working.
 - Once a team can see successful moments, the next question becomes practical: How can we create more moments like this tomorrow?
-

Episode Download / Handout

The Success Minutes Quick Tracker

A simple one-page tool for capturing small moments of success and looking for the conditions that help them happen. Use it to record what was happening, how long the success lasted, what support may have helped, and the patterns you notice across the day.

The tracker can help you notice success connected to engagement, regulation, connection, or participation—even when it lasts only 30 seconds. It also includes a quick support check and an end-of-day pattern check so the team can decide what to intentionally create more of next.

👉 Get the handout at: [inclusiveschooling.com/download77](https://www.inclusiveschooling.com/download77)

The Success Minutes Challenge

Try it for one week: track three Success Minutes each day. Write down how long the success lasted, what the student was doing, and what support might have helped. Then ask: How can we create more of this tomorrow? You can do it alone, but it may be even more useful with a co-teacher, paraprofessional, related service provider, coach, or administrator helping you notice what you might otherwise miss.