**Episode 4**

**Interviewer, Respondent**

**[00:00:01]**

**Interviewer:** Hello, and welcome to Voices from the Village, a podcast from the Wyoming Early Childhood Professional Learning Collaborative. We know it takes a village to raise a child and Wyoming Early Childhood Educators, as an essential part of that village, this podcast is for you. I’m your host Nicky Baldwin and today we are doing something very special on Voices From The Village. I’ve invited students from the class I’m teaching at the University of Wyoming to respond to my most recent podcast interview with the nationally recognized expert on trauma and trauma responsive strategies, Julie Kurtz. One of the best parts of my job as a member of the College of Education Faculty at UW is to coordinate the early Childhood Special Education Endorsement Program. Students in this program have completed their bachelor’s degrees and are working in early education settings across Wyoming as early childhood special teachers and early interventionists. All while they complete their course work for their endorsement and on the weekends. That means each week I get to hang out with early childhood professionals that are in the trenches doing the challenging and exciting work of teaching young children with learning differences in our state. Our current class discussions at this point in the semester center on trauma and trauma responsive teaching, so, it’s a perfect fit to have this group of educators respond to the insights Julie shared in our interview. We just had the opportunity to listen as a class to Julie’s interview and now we’re going to have a little discussion with our group tonight. So, welcome to the podcast, everybody in class. I’m just going to toss some questions out. I’d love to hear your responses to what you just listened to in that interview with Julie about trauma responsive practice. So, first question to toss out to the group, how has your understanding of trauma changed based on any of the insights that Julie shared?

**Respondent:** I’m Pepper Stevens from Sheridan and I work for the Child Development Center in Region 2. I think the thing that struck me most was how she said, how Julie mentioned fear lives in the kid’s bodies and that fear can resurface at any time and the event itself can be a non-event that triggers a behavior.

**Interviewer:** Why does that stand out to you Pepper, what does that imply for your practice? Are there any implications about what you would do differently knowing that now?

**Respondent:** I think just recognizing when a child maybe has some behaviors that seem there’s no antecedent for instead of trying to immediately fix the problem, recognize that this child needs help to calm down and to feel safe before we can address the emotions.

**Interviewer:** Thanks Pepper. And class, I think let’s stick on this idea about, because Julie’s interview talks about children and then it talks about adults, so stick with the piece about children first. Other insights that any of you had about trauma and that experience and how it’s expressed in children.

**Respondent:** I’m Laurie Majors and I’m in {inaudible} Region 12 at Stride Learning Center. Kind of to go off of Pepper’s but what really got me was the say that I’m safe, that children are feeling when they do have those behaviors, knowing that they have the trauma in their past and that behavior is them telling us that they’re unsafe. Looking at that and making them feel like a more safe environment so possibly that behavior doesn’t keep going because they need to feel that safeness for themselves.

**Interviewer:** Thanks Laurie. Anybody else have thoughts?

**Respondent:** Hi, I’m Hoby Brown, I’m in Cheyenne at the Children’s {inaudible} and something that really struck me was how she incorporated sensations into that experience for children. So, instead of jumping right into the more abstract of red, orange, green zones, you talk about the sensations first of: oh, I get butterflies in my tummy and that’s how I know that I’m feeling nervous. I ball my fists up, that’s how I know I’m feeling angry and just incorporating that into it, since that’s something that I don’t that a lot of people think of initially because by the time you’re an adult you know what those feelings are. When they’re young and they’re processing trauma, those inside feelings are wild and unchartered for them.

**Interviewer:** Thanks, Hoby, and I think it is really powerful because then if you can recognize it, that’s when you can use agency and do something about it. It gives you power to respond to it. I’m glad you noticed that. Anybody else?

**Respondent:** I’m Lexie Bolkly from Children’s Developmental Services in {inaudible} and I just also thought that having a visual to go with, talking about those zones of self-awareness, I think it’s really powerful for kids to be able to point to and use that as a tool rather than trying to articulate all their feelings in the moment and things like that.

**Interviewer:** Tell me what children you’re thinking about that a visual que might be more helpful for and how could you see yourself using that with kids?

**Respondent:** I have a student in particular that started out, came from a trauma background, not a lot of language but we did use visuals with her and the more language that was used, the more she would escalate, so just being able to connect with her, to where she could feel safe, but then also be able to give her a way to communicate appropriately those things, not through behavior but give some strategies for calming and for working through those things was really helpful.

**Interviewer**: Good example. Any other things about children and trauma that you want to take away from that, that might impact your practice with kids?

**Respondent:** I’m Kirsten Piden, I work at the Child Development Services here in Lander. One of the biggest things that kind of stuck with me is that the strategies for dealing with a child who is experiencing trauma in the classroom are those that we learn, and we teach in our social emotional lessons for just kids with challenging behaviors. A lot of it, the overall goal is just to help the child get back to feeling calm and feeling safe in order to work through kind of what triggered the trauma and to help them gain that kind of mutual relationship with you.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, I thought that was really, interesting how she talked about in general the strategies are the same but sometimes the goals differ, depending on what’s causing that behavior. I think that’s a lot to think about for all of us. Any other things that stand out?

**Respondent:** My name is Angie Bomenham from the Child Development Center in Casper and kind of going of what Kirsten was talking about the goal of trauma education, you know we’re not expected to make whole new curriculum because it should already align with that social emotional curriculum that you’re using and so when we’re first learning about all this it kind of seems like a lot to take in but it’s kind of, there’s some comfort knowing that we’re not going to have to like recreate the wheel when it comes to helping these children with manic experiences, we already have the tools now we just have to use them in the appropriate way I guess.

**Respondent:** Yeah, I think that’s key, Angie I’m glad you picked up on that. We have skills and tools available to us and we just need to think about intentionally why it is we’re using them with kids that have experienced trauma.

**Interviewer:** Okay, I want to ask this to all of you: Julie talked about how our goal is to try to rewire a brain to feel safe and when you think about that phrase – rewire a brain to feel safe – do any examples come to mind of you doing that kind of work with a child in your practice, in your program, do you have any stories to share of about how you’ve seen that happen or ways you’re trying to make that happen with a child currently that’s in your care?

**Respondent:** I have a thought, Nicky. My name is Jessica Polaski, I’m in Rock Springs Wyoming. Something that I really like doing to help the kiddos feel safe is just acknowledging and validating whatever emotion that they’re feeling, if they’re super worked up, super angry, you know just sharing in that with them and trying to describe like what’s happening, how they’re feeling, what you’re seeing and just: I know you’re really mad, I know you’re super, super mad – about whatever may have happened and just describing to them sometimes my anger may come out in my fists and I squeeze them really, really tight and helping them to understand that those sensations that are paired with what they’re feeling and how things can kind of come out.

**Interviewer:** That’s a great example. Validation leads to feelings of safety, for sure.

**Respondent:** It’s Laurie Majors again from Cheyenne. I had a student this year and then a student last year was and am their person that they go to. I have a relationship with them because they both have had trauma in the past and I just became their person that they went to, built that relationship from the bottom up, they started doing more things in class, participating more because they knew that they were safe, just to becoming their person I didn’t get on them for their behaviors or anything, it was like: oh, I can go to her and I’m safe.

**Interviewer:** I love hearing you say that Laurie because that’s a phrase I’ve used a lot over the years too. I think children who have experienced trauma can sense if you’re fully invested in that relationship with them or if you’re going to go away when things get hard, and when you make that commitment to be that person for them, I think it really does make all the difference in building trust. Savannah, I see you nodding about that. Do you have any comments or thoughts related to that?

**Respondent:** Yes, my name’s Tiana Conrad and I’m from the Child Development Center here in Casper and I just, relationships is just a huge thing for me. I think just validating like Jessie talked about and Laurie was talking about being that person, I really just think that getting down on their level, finding their interests that they’re into, building on that, just having a conversation with them about what they do, what they like to do. In our class I have one little boy that, I do love rituals in my classroom which are really wonderful for little things like a little mouse, and it’s kind of a touch kind of thing so we can just, just kind of like hand plays or something that you can do and it’s really great and so, I’ve noticed that like my other kids will start doing that and when people are like, I need a extra love or hug and we just need to be their people. So, I think relationships are just huge. So, Laurie, {inaudible} to you. That’s awesome. If we could find more teachers that have the passion like that, I think that would just be a wonderful world to live in.

**Interviewer:** I agree completely. Any other thoughts about kids from anyone?

**Respondent:** Ah Nicky this is like {inaudible} again, this is from another training but just those simple things I think they’ve been mentioned but just like the gentle boy’s proximity coming in close or respecting their space if they may be totally defensive, maybe a gentle touch or a firm touch depending on and then not noticing and relating, so just making the child feel seen and heard, giving them a voice.

**Interviewer:** Things like, see that makes me think about what Julie talked about which we can share our calm with them. Let’s talk about that ideal a little bit more, so, what we need to do to be able to respond to children who are in that state, feeling unsafe and being able to bring a sense of calm which has to originate from all of us. And so, Julie and I talked as you guys heard about how adults are the key to healing children’s trauma and so when you heard some of those ideas about adults, I’d love to hear your thoughts about yourself and your practice, some insights that you might have gained, things that you would want other early childhood educators in the state to remember.

**Respondent:** I am Britney {inaudible} I’m from Sheridan and I teach at Holy {inaudible} Catholic School here. I think one of my favorite quotes from her was how I have to be aware of my own inner world and triggers in order to interact successfully in the world with everyone else and just how to deal with my big emotions and I think we all know as teachers like what she talked about when we go in just depleted, when we’re just having those kind of mornings and the kids just feed off of that, cause those are the mornings that everyone just is driving you crazy and nothing is going right, but if you go in and you have that, you know your gas tank is full and you’re happy and the kids feed off that and it’s just an awesome day. So, I like to just note on self-care and even just those one-to-two-minute times just making sure to take that time out for you, even if you need to walk away out of your classroom for a minute and just take a breather, do it because those kids need it and especially when we’re dealing with children of trauma, they’re going to feed off of that too. So, if you come in and that high energy and your {inaudible} is active, they’re going to feed off of that and that’s not going to make them feel safe. So, we have to be aware of how we are presenting ourselves in order for those children to feel safe and calm in our classrooms.

**Interviewer:** Thanks Britney. How do we do that? What do you guys think?

**Respondent:** Pepper again. Practice, whether it’s in your classroom, at home in the mirror, I think it’s practice, you might take some parenting classes and some others and it seems silly but practicing it to myself, practicing it with my daughter when she’s barking a lot and think find those moments to practice and then practice in the class and then re-asses and evaluate is the only way to get better and to manage, like Britney said, you know our inner world, so we can influence those children’s inner world.

**Respondent:** It’s Laurie Majors again. I also in the class to do that in the classroom for myself and the kids if I’m feeling like out of sorts, I might to yoga and the kids do yoga with me. We might sing songs because I need a pep-me-up, we might to snow angels in middle of the classroom or even in the hall, but I’m feeling something that I know I’ve got to get out of it and the kids just go along with me, like getting myself out of it.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Respondent:** My name is Rachel Stoddard and I’m in Evenson Wyoming at {inaudible} and Child Development Association, going along with what Laurie said with having the kids do the yoga with you when you’re feeling out of sorts. On days that I am depleted and need to go into work, I try to use, I’m just very frustrated and can see myself if I’m not able to go out and take a ten second breather, if it’s really a chaotic day in the classroom, I try to take those moments as a teaching moment with the students to explain where my emotions are at and kind of having them help, like using what I’ve taught them in the past to teach me, like, oh, how can I help myself calm down, what can I do? You guys help me, I’m feeling kind of frustrated right now, what can I do? And then they start saying different things that we’ve taught them or that new ideas like you can go pet a puppy! Things like that to help me calm down if I’m feeling frustrated or exhausted that day.

**Interviewer:** I love that idea Rachel, I just, it positions you as a co-learner with children allows them to teach and model the things that you’ve been sharing with them. That’s really empowering, thanks for sharing that. Anybody else?

**Respondent:** Hi, it’s Tiffany. I’m in Cheyenne at Stride Learning Center. The podcast we listened to, she said that we don’t necessarily need to know the difference between trauma triggers and challenging behaviors, so I think it’s important that we reinforce that to teachers. A lot of times some teachers they don’t exactly know how to approach a student that has had trauma in the past. So, she said how social emotional strategies are the same for both, so it could be important to teach teachers or share with teachers but some of the strategies to help the students regulate the importance of {inaudible} in the classroom and how it can be a safe space for the kids and not just necessarily a punishment space that they might associate it with or you know some kids kind of associate it with a “time-out” but more of a safe space for them to regulate themselves.

**Interviewer:** So, a question I have for you are for our listeners since we have a whole group of early childhood professionals here that can share ideas. There’s probably someone listening to this podcast right now who is feeling completely depleted and is struggling with some children who might really have some challenging behaviors and is trying to figure out ways to restore quickly or efficiently or in some way that’s very positive for them, so that they can enter that space with kids and be emotionally available to do this really difficult work. So, I just want to toss out to this group: what do you do to restore, that’s what Julie called it, how do you restore? Self-care – is a big buzz-phrase right now and I think one great thing that came from my discussion with Julie was this idea, as somebody already mentioned, one to two minutes, so you can do something quick that just helps you come back and center yourself. So, I would love to hear you all toss out some ideas about things you do, and it can be more than just one or two minutes, but what kind of things do you do to restore, to get back centered and to be ready to do this hard work with kids?

**Respondent:** It’s Britney again. I think my big one is just having someone to talk to. My other pre-care teacher that I work with, I wouldn’t be in the position I am if it wasn’t for her and when I need those moments, she’s the first person I go to and even if I have a child where I just don’t know what to do, she can step in an aid me with that, and I love her to death. And like I said, she’s amazing, so just finding that person, whether it be someone at work, even someone significant other, a brother or sister, just anyone, find that person that you can talk to because that, I don’t know what I’d do without her. So, I think everyone needs that someone.

**Interviewer:** Thanks Britney. It’s fantastic advice.

**Respondent:** Going off of what Britney said, I’m Jenny, I’m from CDC in Casper, we have assistant teachers in our classrooms and one thing I guess that we do daily, even when we don’t realize that we’re doing it, we de-brief after each class and so talk about frustrations or different things that happened and we try to come up with solutions or try to just help support each other any way that we can and if we’re tapping out because it’s time to tap out, we’ve reached our limit, somebody, one of them always jumps in and we can walk away from the situation and take a few breaths, just breathing, that’s like the most important thing ever. You don’t realize, just breathing, hanging your head upside down gives you fresh blood to your brain and just taking some deep breaths is amazing. Everybody should do it several times a day. That’s what I say.

**Interviewer:** That’s awesome, thanks Jenny and I just want to come back really quick to that de-brief. How many minutes does that take? Do you have to do that for 30 minutes or can you do that quickly and have it help and fill you up?

**Respondent:** No, we usually do it, it takes, it can take any amount of time but usually five minutes sometimes, maybe just a couple of minutes while we’re cleaning the classrooms, sanitizing all the toys, all the things that you have to do between classes, but I mean just to be able to say: oh my gosh, did you see when this happened, like I was feeling like this and just for them to say: I felt the same way. Just validating that it’s okay to feel that way and that maybe somebody else felt that way too or they saw it in a totally different way than you did, it’s just cool to be able to talk about it.

**Respondent:** This is Rachel again. When I just need a break, I try to think of some of my favorite puns because I die and laugh my head off at the cheesiest jokes like: why did the chicken cross the playground? To get to the other side! And I just laugh and die and my brain’s back.

**Interviewer:** I love that, Rachel. I mean no offense, but telling bad jokes, that’s brilliant, not that that joke was really bad! That’s a great idea.

**Respondent:** One thing that I do and could be so silly but when I am having a bad moment, I have the good luck to be able to go to all the classes so a lot of times I go one class and I just ask: who wants to give Miss Gavi hug? And someone for sure want to do that, probably just go out of their circle time or whatever, but I think for me just that hug helps me to slow down and to think that I can do something for someone in there. So, just take me two minutes and there are a lot of voluntaries!

**Interviewer:** That’s amazing Gavi. Will you introduce yourself for our listeners? Tell us your name.

**Respondent:** Its Gavi (inaudible) from Sweet Water County, {inaudible}.

**Interviewer:** Great advice. Thanks, Gavi.

**Respondent:** Hi, Hoby again. So, I grew up in the early YouTube age of funny cat videos, so I know when I get really overwhelmed, during quarantines {inaudible} I got really {inaudible} and so my feed is all animals doing what animals do. So, a couple of videos of cats being cats and dogs being dogs really helps me relax and I like to share them with the class too, because I know if I’m starting to feel really overwhelmed, at least one of them probably is too and so a video of a baby goat knocking over another goat just being a goat, is a really good way to alleviate a lot of that tension in the classroom and they all laugh at it, it just helps.

**Interviewer:** That’s amazing. Listeners, I hope you’re just adding all of these to your toolbox, right, and let’s see Julie called it your emergency first responder kit. So, just consider just adding some more tools to your emergency first responder kit, what you can do when you need a moment. This is brilliant. What else do you all have?

**Respondent:** I have some advice that was shared with me in my first year of teaching. I’m Kelsey Wild Ridge in Casper at the Child Development Center. My favorite thing that was told to me was make a moment a vacation in your day and it’s almost more fun when you are doing something that you always do or you decide that it’s a moment of vacation, so sometimes I just have to turn around and sneak a drink of my tea that’s getting cold in my classroom and say: “um, I’m on vacation, this is delicious”. Or I always walk down the hallway to talk to another teacher but today I’m going on an adventure down the hall. What will I find? It’s a vacation. So, that’s just a way to reframe your thinking and raise your spirits a little bit.

**Interviewer:** That’s powerful Kelsey, I’m going to try that! I’m going to try that tomorrow. Anybody else?

**Respondent:** It’s Kirsten again. So, I suffer a lot from anxiety and so one of the ways to calm down anxiety attacks are I just start at five and I count back using each of my senses to look around the room and see things or when I’m feeling overwhelmed one thing I’ve taught and I’ve taught a couple of my kiddos to do this, although my kiddos in the pre-school, they still have trouble counting backwards but I have two girls that I am raising right now that trust that, suffer from traumatic events in their early childhood, and so I’ve taught them to kind of do, instead of the five things that they kind of see, hear or anything in the room, it’s things you like. So, five things that you like the taste of or things you like the smell of, three things you like to look at, two things you like to hear and one thing that is your favorite thing to touch. And that kind of helps recenter their brain and kind of helps them get back to focus and I know it really helps me, especially in those overwhelming days when everything is just a little more chaotic.

**Interviewer:** Love it!

**Respondent:** Angie again. So going of what Kelsey was talking about vacation, I think that one of the biggest things that teachers are guilty of is never taking enough vacation time because sometimes it’s just harder to be gone than anything. I feel like we could mostly agree with that and I’m totally guilty of this too. Don’t be afraid to take vacation days if you need it. If it’s that bad, take a vacation day and I definitely, like I need to take my own advice on that, but you know they give that to you for a reason because teachers need it really bad. So, take those vacation days that they give you and do something for yourself.

**Interviewer:** We’ve added to everybody’s emergency first responder toolkit a little bit. Let’s just think while we wrap this up, as we think about what trauma informed practices really means to all of us, what would you most want to tell another colleague of yours, somewhere out in the State, there might be somebody that’s in a family home childcare setting who is trying to do their best with kids, feeling stressed, worried about some of the kids or families in their care, or there’s somebody in an infant toddler classroom, those are really busy places and they really want to try to get this right. Any final advice anyone wants to offer for your colleagues that are out there in the State in the workforce? And it’s okay if you don’t think you’re an expert. None of us are right? Or we all are, but what would you share?

**Respondent:** It’s Laurie Majors again. My biggest thing is for all the kids, be it the trauma or even not trauma, is love. They all just need love, unconditional love and we all just need to give that to them, just love, love, love these kids.

**Interviewer:** Thanks Laurie. Nicole, did you have a comment?

Respondent: I was just going to say something about love as well and just we don’t know these kids go to when they leave us and the minute they’re in my care, they’re my kids and I know I love and treat my own kids great and so I just want to make sure that I extend my love and care to them and I there’s probably not an hour that goes by that I don’t tell a kid that I love them. If they want a hug, the get a hug, if they come up and put a kiss on a cheek, then they put a kiss on my cheek, because they need that and I’m not going to deny them of that, so the more love the better.

**Interviewer:** Thanks Nicole and will you introduce yourself to our listeners?

**Respondent:** I’m Nicole Harper from Sweet Water {inaudible} Center and Green River.

**Interviewer:** Thanks Nicole.

**Respondent:** Hi, this is Savannah again. Going off on what all the ladies were talking about, I learned something last year from one of our trainees and it was about being like the solid object and just being that constant calm in their life. There’s a difference between yelling and being firm with them and I feel like if we build that relationship at the beginning then when we need to be firm, we already have that relationship built and they know it’s coming from a part of me that cares about them and I’m not just trying to be {inaudible}. So, I think being that constant calm for them and realizing when we’re overwhelmed, we’re overwhelmed. There are times in my day when I have to just shut my eyes for and I count to three really quick and then I open and I have to think about how thankful I am to be in this career and understand that it’s really a privilege, what we do.

**Interviewer:** Thanks Savannah. And just thank you so much to all my amazing students for sharing your wisdom with us on the podcast today and thank you so much for your work with the most vulnerable children in our State, you all represent everything that a true professional is to me and I just feel so lucky that I get to spend time together with you all each week and thank you listeners for joining us on Voices from the Village tonight for this special podcast. This podcast is made possible with support from the Federal Pre-School Development Grant and is produced by the University of Wyoming Early Childhood Outreach Network. We recorded our interview tonight during my class on Zoom. Voices from the Village is directed and edited by Bryce Tugwell.

**[End of Recording: 00:29:11]**