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I hope that every nurse gives themselves the permission to be their true feelings selves, because it's hard to be a nurse. You're a first responder, and I want to just say, "A. I appreciate you for the work you do, and self-care is not selfish."

Speaker 2:

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Donna Mazyck:

Welcome to the NASN School Nurse Chat podcast. This is Donna Mazyck, Executive Director for the National Association of School Nurses. The focus of today's podcast is the topic "Permission to Feel: Healthy Emotions and Stress Management". This is a topic that we'll have at our NASN 2021 Virtual Conference opening keynote, and we are so excited that we have that keynote speaker with us today on the podcast; he's Dr. Marc Brackett. Dr. Brackett is the founding director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, and he's a professor in the Child Study Center at the Yale School of Medicine. He's a distinguished scientist on the National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development, and he's on the board of directors for the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning CASEL. Dr. Bracket is the lead developer of RULER, a systemic evidence-based approach to social and emotional learning that has been adopted by over 2000 public, charter, and private preschools through high schools across this nation and other nations. I am so happy to welcome you, Dr. Marc Brackett to the NASN School Nurse Chat podcast.

Marc Brackett:

Well, Donna, thank you for inviting me. I'm honored to be here with you.

Donna Mazyck:

Wonderful to have you here. And I know you want me to call you Marc here on out, and that's how I'll address you. I wanted to start off, Marc, with what is emotional intelligence? Are we born with it or is it taught? Can we learn it? Tell us more.

Marc Brackett:

So, it is something that has to be learned. And it's interesting because a lot of people think of it as, "Well, either you are, or you aren't emotionally intelligent," and I'm going to tell everybody, these are a set of skills that we all have to develop across our entire lives. And we define them as the RULER skills, R-U-L-E-R. The first is recognizing emotions, both in ourself and other people. How am I feeling? How are you feeling? The second skill is understanding emotions. What's causing my feelings? What makes me feel angry? And how is that different from what makes me feel disappointed or frustrated?

Marc Brackett:

The third is getting really precise with the language of emotion. Am I angry or am I just peeved? Am I ecstatic? Or am I just contempt? The E in RULER is expressing emotions, knowing how, and when to express emotions with different people across contexts, understanding the role of culture. And then finally emotion regulation. The last R, regulating emotions. One of the strategies that I can use to help myself have greater wellbeing to deal with life's ups and downs, and what are the strategies that I can help other people use to support their health?

Donna Mazyck:

Well, thank you for breaking that down for us. It's certainly a lot different than our language of mad, glad, sad.

Marc Brackett:

Yes it is.

Donna Mazyck:

[crosstalk 00:04:31] And being able to identify those emotions is so important. You have a book titled Permission to Feel, and that term alone evokes so much that deals with where we are in our lives right now. What is the mindset and message behind Permission to Feel?

Marc Brackett:

You know, just to get personal for a minute. As a kid, I struggled a lot. I had abuse in my childhood, which was very unfortunate. And I had a lot of bullying in my childhood, which also was not helpful. And as a victim, I was basically robbed of my feelings, like many people I think are in life. And whether it be about gender, whether it be about your race, your sexual orientation, so many people feel like they can't be their true, full feeling selves. And that's why I called it Permission to Feel, because I believe that we all need that permission to feel and we're born with it, but our culture pulls it out of us. And we grow up thinking we have to hide our feelings. We have to suppress our feelings. We have to repress our feelings as opposed to being our true, full feeling selves.

Donna Mazyck:

That's incredible. You had me at robbed of feelings. That's a situation that many of us find our human selves in. Brené Brown recently said, "That your book is practical, tactical and actionable." Can you give us an example from your book that speaks to her words?

Marc Brackett:

Can we play a little game with each other, Donna?

Donna Mazyck:

Yeah, sure.

Marc Brackett:

All right. So Donna, ask me how I'm feeling.

Donna Mazyck:

Hi, Marc. How are you feeling today?

Marc Brackett:

Fine.

Donna Mazyck:

Hmmm.

Marc Brackett:

See, it doesn't go anywhere.

Donna Mazyck:

Doesn't go anywhere. Nope.

Marc Brackett:

I mean, let's be honest. Isn't that what we mostly say? Fine. Okay. Uh, an exaggerated kind of busy. Ask me again, Donna.

Donna Mazyck:

Okay. Hi Marc. How are you feeling today?

Marc Brackett:

Hi Donna. You know, it's been rough. It's like this odd mixture of like, I'm kind of frustrated, overwhelmed, anxious, and feeling a little hopeless.

Donna Mazyck:

Can you tell me what's going on Marc? I'd love to listen to what's happening to you right now.

Marc Brackett:

Well, you get an A+ in permission to feel, Donna, and that's why you're a nurse and that's why you're so loving and caring. You know, most people, right, they're like in their heads, they're thinking to themselves, "Oh my goodness. What am I going to do with this information?" If you're a parent, right, you're like, "Oh gosh, I got to go to work this morning. I don't have time to deal with this anxiety, frustration, despair."

Marc Brackett:

And so my point really is when you talk about actionable, well, there's some action steps. One, we've got to get comfortable, not saying, "How's it going?", but "How are you feeling?" We also have to get better at pausing and listening and having a facial expression that says, "I'm really eager to hear what you have to say, and I'm not going to judge you for what you say." And then we have to be open to supporting people. You know, because especially right now, during these multiple pandemics, think about it. People are suffering.

Donna Mazyck:

Yes.

Marc Brackett:

People are having a lot of feelings and people have been in isolation. My goodness, if there's one actionable step it's build relationships with kids in your schools, build relationships with other adults. Check in with their feelings. Don't judge them for their feelings and offer to be that close person that they can problem solve with.

Donna Mazyck:

That was pretty actionable and a huge takeaway just in the middle of our conversation. Thank you for that, Marc. We know the school nurses oftentimes are like a lot of professionals in a school dealing with what's happening in front of them. And in these uncertain and highly stressful times that you talked about, we know that from you, identifying and managing their emotions, that's really key to how we process and move forward in our lives. How can school nurses prepare themselves to address the various levels of trauma, social, emotional needs that students and families in their school communities will have?

Marc Brackett:

And I think school nurses are typically, for me, just to be honest, under appreciated in schools. They're not always part of the professional development that educators themselves get, the typical teacher. And so in our work in schools, we have an approach that's called RULER, which is an evidence-based approach to social, emotional learning.

Marc Brackett:

We're in 3000 schools across the United States. And a big part of our recommendations and training is everybody who works in the school must get education in emotional intelligence because then there's a common language. And so if the child in the classroom is used to talking about their feelings with our tool, which we call the mood meter, then the nurse, it would be great for her to have that tool, because then there's a consistency for that child. And so I will give every nurse that attends my session and every nurse through NASN a free version of my mood meter, so they can download it and print it out and put it on their office. And essentially it's a simple tool that just allows you to help children and yourselves label your feelings. Because think about it, most kids don't go to the nurse's office, right, because they're excited, happy.

Donna Mazyck:

So true.

Marc Brackett:

No. And so oftentimes even we confuse our feelings with physical ailments. To give you an example, I'm a chronic worker. I mean, I work way too many hours. And sometimes at night I'm at home and I'll say something like, "Oh, I'm so anxious." I realize I'm not anxious. I'm just tired. And my body is starting to shake and I'm feeling depleted. And so my brain says, "Oh, that's anxious," but I don't need a strategy to regulate my anxiety. What I need to do is go to bed.

Marc Brackett:

And so there's so much confusion in our world with our physical self and our emotional self. And I think that nurses can be the perfect people to help kids really understand how they're feeling, especially when things are not going well, when there is something wrong to help them not ruminate or be obsessive and help them feel that they're getting the support they need. But also, help kids make sense out of, sometimes it's just something physical and we're going to fix that and you're going to be fine.

Donna Mazyck:

That is just groundbreaking and life changing and life giving, Marc, being able to separate the emotional from the physical. And as you said, school nurses often encounter students in the health room who are calling a physical issue, not dealing with the physical issue, but where that emotion is.

Speaker 2:

Join Dr. Marc Brackett for the Permission to Feel book club Spring/Summer 2021. The book club will meet for five consecutive Thursdays at 7:00 PM Eastern for 45 minutes, starting May 20th, 2021. Your task is to read or listen to the book, preferably with some friends, colleagues or family members, so you can process the content in community. Then you just show up for the virtual club each week with Dr. Brackett. It's also recorded for those of you who have conflicts with the time. These recordings will be made available on Dr. Brackett's YouTube and Facebook channels. It's not too late to join. Register for the book club today and get access to the recordings. Sign up via www.marcbrackett.com.

Marc Brackett:

And when it comes to trauma, which unfortunately too many kids have experienced in our nation and the world. Sometimes for example, we can misidentify emotion because of a child's behavior, especially when there's trauma. So for example, a child comes in, "I hate school. I don't want to go back to school," and it looks like they're angry, but that's how they're behaving. That's not actually how they're feeling. And so until we understand what's really happening for that child, that maybe that child feels shame because they were bullied on the playground and someone diminished their self-worth and now they have a stomachache and they're coming in and acting out. And then all of a sudden we're treating the anger that we've made up when it really is the shame and the bullying. And so, this is why I talk about in my book, why we all need to become compassionate, emotion scientists, right, curious explorers.

Donna Mazyck:

Compassionate, emotional scientists, curious explorers. I'm looking forward to that mood meter, Marc. You also teach a course. I've seen it on Coursera Free Course on managing emotions in times of uncertainty and stress. And in that course, you share survey results from the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, where over 2,500 educators nationwide found their top emotions included being anxious, exhausted, frustrated, stressed, and overwhelmed. And we talked about students coming to the school nurse with their physical symptoms and maybe needing help in identifying emotions. How can school nurses be supportive to school staff members that may present to the health office with those types of emotions that are recorded in that study?

Marc Brackett:

Firstly, what our research shows is that we're terrible at labeling our feelings. And so what I mean by that is when I say, "I'm stressed," it may not mean that I'm stressed. It may mean that I'm anxious. It might mean that I'm overwhelmed. It might mean that I'm frustrated. It might mean that I'm feeling fear. And all of those emotions are different. So I think nurses can be wonderful coaches. And as they have a deeper understanding of these different emotions, it makes it easier to help people because think about it, I'll give you the best example. I'll give you a personal one. When you're a professor, you have to go up the ranks, assistant professor, et cetera, and you get tenure. So when I was going up for full professor, I went to the doctor and I was really stressed out. And the doctor said to me, "Oh, this is what happens. Here's your Prilosec for your heartburn, and here's your Ativan for your anxiety." And I was like, "Okay, I don't know. That's it? Five minute meeting."

Marc Brackett:

And so I left that meeting and I said, "Marc, you're the Director of the Center for Emotional Intelligence. How are you feeling?" And I said, "I'm not really stressed because stressed is when you have too many demands and not enough resources. Okay. Well, am I afraid? No, there's no danger here. Am I anxious? You know, well, there's not that much uncertainty. I've done the work. So what the heck am I feeling?" Then I realized I was chronically overwhelmed. I didn't give myself any breaks. And I was just working like a dog every day and I had no freedom. And so think about that. If I were anxious, right, you might want to help me do some mindfulness exercises or breathing exercises, but because I was overwhelmed and the reasons for it, I don't need to add more mindfulness exercises to my routine. I need to stop doing things, right?

Marc Brackett:

I need like better routines instead of structure. Go to bed earlier and sleep a little bit later and give yourself some breaks during the day. And so, there's a saying, which is you got a name it to tame it.

Donna Mazyck:

Yes.

Marc Brackett:

One of my goals in life, and the reason why I wrote my book and have these courses is to help people appreciate the value of emotion language.

Donna Mazyck:

Wow, Marc. That was a great example. And it was very instructive to hear how you processed what you were feeling by going through different feelings until you found what really resonated with what you were feeling.

Marc Brackett:

Exactly.

Donna Mazyck:

And then you can apply the remedy.

Marc Brackett:

Exactly. And you know, by the way, the first remedy is that it's all okay. Just want to put that out there.

Donna Mazyck:

Yes.

Marc Brackett:

You know, the concept of Permission to Feel is that there's no such thing as a bad emotion. Emotions are our life experiences. We're not going to judge them as good or bad. We're just going to appreciate that they're there.

Donna Mazyck:

That's great. I'm really looking forward to your session at the NASN in 2021 conference, Marc. You do give very practical and actionable information. And as we think about school nurses preparing for the new school year to come in 2021/2022, and listening to you at the conference, will provide them, I believe, with something they can work on before the school year starts. So what key takeaways would you want school nurses to receive after participating in your session?

Marc Brackett:

Well, a couple of things. The first is I actually, now that I think about it, I would like to offer every nurse that's part of your organization to participate in a survey so that we can learn from them about how they've been feeling and what their needs are. I will provide tailored support for you, free of cost. And so I just want to let people know that I'm going to create a survey for you to participate in and get that link out to you to tailor it, because I think the more tailored the approach, the better.

Marc Brackett:

But there's some general ideas here, Donna. I think the first is, I hope that every nurse gives themselves the permission to be their true feeling selves because it's hard to be a nurse. You're a first responder. And I want to just say, "A. I appreciate you for the work you do. And self-care is not selfish." We've got to find ways to set personal goals, right? To have our own wellbeing. Everyone deserves wellbeing in life. It is a human right to be well. And I think, while I have a hunch that nurses are more inclined to be emotionally intelligent than others, just because of the nature of their work, this is life's work. And so we can always learn more words to be more precise in our feelings. We can always learn more strategies.

Marc Brackett:

I'm endlessly learning new strategies to help me manage my feelings. And I will tell you that during the pandemic, I went into this thinking, "Oh well, I'm a leading expert in emotional intelligence." And then April came, May came and I was working from home. My mother-in-law moved in with us because she was visiting from Panama and couldn't go home for eight months. And let me tell you, Donna, I needed like major help.

Marc Brackett:

I was like, "Ooh, I need new strategies."

Donna Mazyck:

Yes.

Marc Brackett:

And so if we approach our own and others' emotional lives as compassionate, emotion scientists, there's always opportunities to grow and learn. That's what I'm excited to share with everybody and get into more details about things like the mood meter, which everyone can use. And really, one of the research based strategies that we know are very effective.

Donna Mazyck:

Marc, I really appreciate this time hearing from you and the term of compassionate, emotional scientists truly resonates with this nurse. And thank you so much for taking time to have this conversation. And I'm really looking forward to our school nurses taking advantage of hearing you during our conference. Thank you so much, Marc.

Marc Brackett:

Thank you for having me. I'm honored.

Donna Mazyck:

It's been wonderful. Our guests today, Dr. Marc Brackett, helping us learn how to give ourselves permission to feel what we feel. And there'll be more to come. Come to NASN in 2021. We're excited to have you listen to us today on the NASN School Nurse Chat podcast. Until next time.

Speaker 2:

Join us for the NASN 2021 Virtual Conference starting on Monday, June 21st through Friday, June 25th, 2021. Our opening keynote speaker is the Director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, Dr. Marc Brackett. His session titled "Permission to Feel: Healthy Emotion Regulation During Uncertain and Stressful Times" is Tuesday, June 22nd from 11:00 AM to 12:15 PM eastern standard time. Do not miss this interactive session that will give you the evidence-based research strategies to support your emotional health and wellbeing during these stressful and uncertain time. Give yourself the permission to feel. Sign up today for the NASN 2021 Virtual Conference via www.nasn.org.