Bad Behavior vs. Developmental Trauma

Interview of Heather Forbes, LCSW, Owner/Director, Beyond Consequences Institute
Interviewed by Julie Beem, MBA, Executive Director ATN

Julie: Hello, everyone. This is Julie Beem from The Attachment & Trauma Network, and we are here today with another interview from the Educating Traumatized Children Summit, an online gathering of expert voices in how to provide trauma-informed school experiences for children.

This summit has been created by The Attachment & Trauma Network's "Creating Trauma-Sensitive Schools Program," and we are thrilled today to have with us Heather Forbes. Heather is going to be talking to us about the difference between bad behavior and developmental trauma.

To tell you a little bit about Heather, she is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, and is the owner of the Beyond Consequences Institute. Heather has worked in the field of trauma and healing since 1999. She is an internationally published author on the topics of raising children with difficult and severe behaviors and the impact of trauma on the developing child as well as adoptive motherhood and self-development.

Coming from a family of educators, Heather has a real heart for children in the classroom and for finding ways to teach the child that is often deemed "unteachable." Her signature style is to bridge the gap between scientific research and real-life application so that she can equip parents, educators, and therapists with practical and effective tools. Much of her experience and insight on understanding trauma, disruptive behaviors, and adoption-related issues come directly from her mothering experience. She's the mother of two adopted children.

Welcome, Heather.

Heather: Thank you. It's great to be here.
Julie: Can you start us off by just... When we were talking about this topic, we talked about that people underestimate the impact that trauma has on children in the classroom. What do you mean by "underestimating"?

Heather: I think one of the main things that people don't understand is that trauma lasts forever, and that's sort of a pessimistic kind of way to look at it, but it is the truth. When a child is even taken out of a traumatic environment, or the situation has leveled out and now the child is in a very stable, loving, nurturing home, the trauma doesn't just disappear. Trauma is something that children have to work through, really pretty much their whole developmental journey and beyond because it lays a blueprint within them that tells them that the world is not safe. Their perspective of how the world functions and how to relate to people completely changes. You can take a child out of the trauma but getting the trauma out of the child is going to be the journey, I think, that all of us are called to help our kids through.

Julie: Right, right. So, in a classroom setting, in particular, because obviously our audience is going to be mostly educators, what does this look like?

Heather: I'll give you a great example. I had a kindergarten teacher tell me, she said she had this one little student - we'll call him Billy - comes in the classroom and he stomps his feet, he puts his hands on his hips and he goes, "You're not in charge of me. I am!"

And she's like, "He's five!" And so, knowing, though, his history... Luckily, we had a teacher who understood what that was all about. It wasn't about a child walking in and saying, you know, that they're going to be defiant and they're not going to have anyone in charge of them. It was basically a little boy saying, "I have been hurt before. I used to allow adults in charge of me to take care of me, but they didn't take care of me. They hurt me, and now I know what vulnerability is, so you're not going to do that to me."
Julie: Mm-hmm.

Heather: It makes perfect sense that kids coming out of any kind of traumatic environment, or we have a lot of kids that go home every night to more trauma, that they're going to be skewed in the way that they perceive the rules and the hierarchy of the school environment. I think that it is up to the educators to understand that what that child needs is not discipline in the way we've always done it, in a punitive way, but more of a relationship, and working with that child to be able to let their guard down, let them be able to trust again.

There's one word, I think, that I work with all the time and that's just the word “trust”. We've got kids who don't trust adults. This may be a teacher that is the most loving teacher on the planet, and it's not a reflection of the teacher. It's really a reflection of the blueprint that that child is working out of and so, in a classroom, you really see those types of behaviors show up.

Julie: Right, and those behaviors are often labeled "bad behaviors" if you can't get it to the other lens, that's what you're saying.

Heather: Yes, and I see that a lot. I'll look at a report that someone has written up, maybe an observation of a child, and it will say, you know, "Child has problems with authority." Well, it's not that they have problems with authority, they've had problems in the past of being hurt by those in authority. So, just even the write-up of how we perceive kids as adults, I think it's important to get away from some of the old terminology because it doesn't really take into account what's happened to these children.

Julie: Right. Right. As a schoolteacher and educator, how do you know that? I mean, the questions that are often coming back to us when we're talking in that language to educators is, "How do I know whether this is trauma or bad behavior?"
Heather: You know, in my book, it’s all the same, because any child... Let's take that one example of a five year old that walks in. It has to be something that happened to that child. You're not born this way. You know, children come in in an ideal environment. Children are born into a loving home and they, you know, when babies are born, they're fresh, they're new, they're curious, and things happen in families, unfortunately, where they're robbed of that curiosity. They're robbed of the ability to let others in charge.

To me, it is all about a child that's had an experience where they have been disconnected from, probably, the parent figure or another adult in charge, and so I do put the label of trauma pretty globally. We define trauma, typically, as something like an event that is just this huge event. I think we need to broaden that and understand that any type of attachment relationship that is broken, that is damaged, you have now a child that has been impacted by trauma at some level. Instead of looking to say, "Well, let me see. Is that trauma or is it bad behavior?" I think that's the wrong approach. We just say, hey, we have a child - whether they're five years old, ten years old, or fifty years old - that somehow isn't working within the system of the hierarchy of the school. We gotta' pull that child back into connection, back into a place of emotional safety in order to help them to regain that piece that they need to become dependent on others.

I think what we see, especially with our teenagers and our high schoolers, is that they - and some of this is just normal development of them pulling away and trying to become independent. However, our students that are impacted by trauma, that gets exasperated, and so you have kids who won't listen to anything. I mean, it's not just your typical teenager, it's a teenager that has been impacted by trauma, and so you have a student, then, that is so far out on the independence scale that it does take the power of a relationship to pull them back into emotional safety, back into being able to learn how to trust people as well.

Julie: Mm-hmm. For sure. That's a tough step to take at that juncture, if nobody's intervened before that, isn't it?
Heather: Oh, it is, and that's why when I work with early-childhood education programs I just jump up and down and do the happy dance because the more that we can do this with our young children, the more we're going to set them up for a much better educational experience. It's not impossible, either, and obviously when you have a high schooler, you have someone who has more cognitive ability. They're able to have more language and more understanding, so you do have that in your favor as well.

Julie: Right. Right. So, let's go back for a second. Since the title of this particular interview is about the difference between bad behavior and developmental trauma, can you give our audience just a little background in, what is developmental trauma?

Heather: Yeah, absolutely. When I talk about developmental trauma, I talk about the very beginning of any child's life, and that I'm going to say, from a neurological perspective, is actually conception. So, you have nine months in a womb where that fetus is developing. Now, let's take - I always like to use two children to show the contrast between the two - let's take our child I typically call Andy. Andy is the child that has been in the womb of a mother who wants to be pregnant, who is taking care of herself. She is decreasing her stress, she is exercising, all of these wonderful things that we know are beneficial to a developing fetus.

That baby, when they're born, they're going to be at a much better level than the child that is in the womb of a mother who might be understand a lot of stress. It might be financial stress, marital stress, it might be that she got kicked out of her house, it might be numerous domestic violence situations. So now, that baby is born - we'll call that baby Billy. At birth, that baby is completely wired in a different way. That baby is wired for fear. That baby is wired to react. Their ability to be able to stay calm is completely compromised. They have a neurological system that is simply revved up and tuned up. So, now, we're looking at two very different children.

As we move along that developmental pathway, we move into the first year, second year of life, and Andy is going to, hopefully, have a parent in that ideal environment as a parent stays home with that child or they're just in an environment that is predictable, it is nurturing, it is taking care of their emotional needs. Then we contrast it with Billy, who might be passed around from caregiver to caregiver, maybe moved a lot. By three years old, you have two children entering preschool, very, very different on their
perspectives of the world. I could continue with this whole thought process, but you can see that certainly by the time that child gets to elementary school, middle school, and high school, if there hasn't been any intervention, the difference between your Andys in the classroom versus your Billys in the classroom is going to be hugely different.

Andy is a child that can walk into the classroom. Andy is still curious. Andy is able to problem solve. Andy is able to know that everything is going to be okay. Maybe there's a bad situation that happens, but Andy doesn't completely decompensate over it because Andy just knows, you know, things work out. Well, Billy, it might be one little thing that happens and he completely blows. He goes into this aggressive state because he's so wired for things not working out, and trying to take control, and trying to make it okay himself. So, you see the difference then, between a child that can be able to function in a classroom versus a child that, unfortunately, we've deemed in the past as the bad child, or the child that is disruptive, or noncompliant, or all the words - negative words - we've put on that child.

It's not that child's fault in the sense that the environment has created the nervous system that's very different, the belief system that is different, the whole perspective that is different. But ultimately, we do have to help that child take ownership and that's where I say we've got to do this differently. That's where all my work really stems from.

**Julie:** Right. Okay. So, what can we tell the teachers about how to do this differently? We could talk about it, I guess, from two ways, what works or what doesn't work. What tips can you give them?

**Heather:** Let's break this down into the different areas of development because every child is going to be a little bit different. There's basically six areas of development that I like to look at. The first is cognitive, the second is language, then academic, social development, physical development, and emotional development.

What I find with our kids that are impacted by trauma is that cognitively, a lot of our kids are really on the genius scale in the sense that they've had to learn to be resourceful. They are street smart. They know how to get things done. A lot of them, I've had
teachers describe children that are impacted by trauma as more gifted than the gifted kids, because they sort of had to grow up. They've had to learn the ways of the world.

The problem is that they have been deficient in some of the other areas. Let's take language development. Again, let's compare our two children. Language for Andy is a mom or dad or parent set that has been reading to Andy. Books, right? Even in the womb, we're reading to our children. So, how many books has Andy been read by the time that Andy walks into kindergarten? You know, it's like, in the thousands.

Julie: Right.

Heather: Well, look at Billy. A lot of the times, Billy has had no one reading to him, no one even talking to him in a nice, conversational way to build that receptive vocabulary and learn what that looks like. So now we have two brains that are wired very differently for language. Academic development, what we see is where kids who have been impacted by trauma, they have a hard time paying attention because trauma happens by surprise, so you're always on this hypervigilant stage, making sure that you're okay. They're looking out to make sure they're okay - they can't pay attention to the teacher giving instructions. Their mind and their thought process is on something else.

These are kids who have a hard time with just general concentration, their ability to process information. Their brains are very much wired in a different way because, again, that trauma piece that keeps them in the hypervigilant state, so being able to take time to process and break concepts down in very sequential ways becomes compromised, and their ability to organize.

You know, think about Billy's world. Billy's world has been pretty chaotic, and so you ask Billy to organize his desk or organize his backpack, he doesn't even know what that is. He doesn't. There's nothing in his history, or maybe there has been recently, but his deeper blueprint is complete chaos, so he gets mad and he throws his backpack on the ground because he's frustrated, and we see it as a behavioral problem. It's not a behavioral problem. It's a brain issue.
Then we've got social development. Here's a big one I see with a lot of our students is that they have not learned how to socialize appropriately. When you look back at maybe a preschooler, there's a lot of work done in preschools or parents can do to help kids learn how to share and how to think about the other person's perspective. Well, a lot of our students, they're in survival. They've not only not learned that - or if they have, they can't even access that because they're still concerned about their own safety, about who they are and what their needs are going to be met. They don't have space to look out for somebody else.

**Julie:** Right.

**Heather:** Physical development we look at because a lot of our students, depending on what kind of homes they came out of, they may be more failure-to-thrive, you know, they haven't had the nutritional value. Maybe they haven't had what they need to really grow and thrive. So physically, we have kids who might be actually smaller, and if you're living from a fear-based perspective... Let's say you're a third grader and you walk into a classroom and you're small compared to the other kids. You might become, verbally, more like the bully because you're trying to overcompensate for being physically small because you've automatically felt that you're threatened, like you can't defend yourself because you don't have that.

**Julie:** Right.

**Heather:** The sixth piece that I look at is emotional development. Very typically, children that are impacted by trauma are very, very immature emotionally, because they have not had their emotional needs met. They don't know how to deal with these feelings and how to really work with regulating themselves back down when they get angry. A lot of the modeling that our kids have had in the home, are that when someone gets angry they yell, they scream, they do violent things, and so that's what kids do. They learn by modeling. When a lot of our students get angry, then, they just go right into what they've seen and what they've heard and what they've experienced. They have not had training to be able to learn to say, "I'm mad. I'm sad." Even with a lot of our high
schoolers. I work with our schools to help our kids develop that emotional language, and starting with basic words, to learn to say, "I'm sad. I'm mad."

Even in the classroom, part of the curriculum that I've worked with teachers a lot, is to be able to take a typical assignment and add these pieces in that I've just talked about. Let's say you've got an English class, a middle school, high school. You're reading a novel that's required to read. Well, typically, teachers will focus on the main character, what is happening, the theme, the main idea, all of those, and that's important.

**Julie:** Right.

**Heather:** But let's add in, just say... Maybe on the book report, the question becomes, "Which character was most dysregulated? What did this character do when they got upset?", so that we start having kids look at different... I guess, basically, as a neutral place. Look at a book rather than themselves. Look at another character, identify what those emotions are. You can weave this into the basic curriculum in a school very, very easily without having to take away from what is already required because I know our teachers have so much that is required on what they have to do.

**Julie:** Exactly.

**Heather:** Right? I'm not asking them to go, "Okay, let's now add another course." What I'm saying, let's weave all of this into what we already have as the curriculum and it won't take away from it. In fact, I think it will actually help and expand it.

So, those are the six areas of development - to answer your question in a long way - of what we first have to look at and for teachers to identify. Here's what I have for teachers to do. I say, "Okay, take your most challenging student and look at these six areas of development. What age is this child in these developmental areas?"
Now, you can get some testing done and that's helpful, but I think for teachers, when they just observe the student and they look at it from the lens of development - other than bad behavior - they can start to identify, "Hey, you know, I've got eight-year-old Billy here, but cognitively, I think he's a genius. He's like, eleven, twelve years old. He can read these books that are amazing, he can talk about nuclear physics, but when I ask him to sit down and organize his backpack, he completely crumbles."

**Julie:** Right.

**Heather:** That tells me that academically, his development is probably more like a six-year-old, so to go through and identify the age of their development that is different, then, from their chronological age, is really one of the first steps. I think it is very telling that you understand, then, that this child may be genius on a cognitive level but then when they go out on the playground they don't know how to share and they're stealing the ball from the other children, that they're just behind developmentally and that's where we need to start in with our interventions.

**Julie:** That's so powerful, Heather, because what you're really saying is that a lot of times, what happens when the kids are super resourceful and you can see their cognition working really well, you're thinking, "Then why are they misbehaving? Why are they bad kids?" But when you can shift it and put that lens of development on there to look for the pockets of where they're underdeveloped for their age, then you can start to see those as what they are - a development delay in that area instead of a misbehavior. A can't, if you will, instead of a won't.

**Heather:** Exactly, and it is really hard because when you sit there and you realize this child's so smart, it's easy to assume that they're going to get the other pieces. Especially with our older students. You know, here's a sixteen-year-old budding young man. He's growing a beard and you have to treat him like he's a ten-year-old socially. It really goes against what we see, but when we pull down the façade of the outside and really look...
deeper from where that brain is being developed, we really can see that we've got some pockets that really have to be addressed. Otherwise, it's really a disservice to our students to penalize them or put them in timeout, or suspensions, or all these things that we do. We're not even addressing the real issue. In fact, those types of punitive responses only make it worse and then we keep our kids in these negative cycles.

**Julie:** Exactly. Which leads me to a point that you and I - we talked briefly - that we totally agree on and we want to drive home because we want others in the world of education to really understand is that so much of what we do currently in classrooms to address behaviors are counterproductive for kids of trauma. Would you say that?

**Heather:** Yeah, they are. Absolutely. I think the other piece, when we talk about development is that our students haven't learned how to regulate. I like using the word regulation because it puts a different spin on why some of our students are reacting so negatively. Let's say you have Billy in the classroom, and Billy gets upset. Billy gets stressed out, and it may not even be something the teacher's aware of. It might just be the “threat” and I put that in quotes, but the “threat” of a test, because Billy now is so scared that Billy's going to fail, that Billy's not going to be okay. Billy goes into these exaggerated responses so that you might be doing just even a simple quiz, and Billy completely falls apart. That's not a child that's reacting from a behavioral level, but they're reacting from more of a neurological, physical level where they don't know how to calm down. They never learned to be able to destress.

Again, I go back to early-childhood. Let's take our two students, Andy and Billy. When Andy is upset, maybe as a toddler, then the parent is right there. The parent pulls the toddler in and cuddles the toddler and nurtures and calms the toddler down. So, the toddler learns how to get upset, then through the context of relationship, the child learns how to come back down to what we call calm arousal, where now they're regulated. Those types of scenarios happen every single day - ten, twelve, twenty times a day.

Fast-forward. By third grade, Andy knows how to be upset but then come back down. Andy has learned how to self-regulate.
Heather: Now, let's compare back to Billy. Billy's a toddler, Billy gets upset. Something happened, just typical toddler stuff, and the parent either isn't there or yells at the child, shuts the child down, or spanks the child in a way that's more abusive. So now, Billy never learned how to calm down. By third grade, Billy gets upset, overreacts - and some of our kids, literally, they don't know how to calm down at all. I've worked with a lot of schools and you get now kids who are completely aggressive. They can't even be in the classroom because the stress level inside of them is so explosive that even a nice attempt to calm down doesn't work.

That's where we have to learn to say, "Okay, this is a regulatory issue."

This is a child that doesn't know how to self-regulate. This is a child that needs to be able to maybe be in a calm corner in the classroom, have some calming activities, when the teacher can be able to come back and work with that student, or maybe that student needs to go - in a lot of schools they're developing calm rooms where they can just take a ten, five minute break. It's a timeout in a positive way. It's a timeout to say, "Hey, I can't handle the classroom right now. I just need to go re-regulate, calm myself back so I can get back to the classroom."

These types of things are much more productive to be able to help our students learn how to self-regulate rather than some of the punitive things that we've done in the past. The punitive things do nothing but add more fear and put a child into a deeper state of dysregulation.

Julie: Mm-hmm.

Heather: And let me add to that, also, because I want to make sure I cover not just elementary school but high school, middle school, the whole spectrum of education. We
see this, it's very obvious with a lot of our high schoolers. They don't know how to self-regulate and so what do they do? They use external means. These are the kids that are going off campus to smoke pot, or to drink, or to sex, all these things that they're using to be able to try to calm down the internal state of the body. What we want to do is pull them into relationship so that they don't have to escape through these means, that they can learn to be able to talk about it, to be able to process it, to be able to trust someone, to be able to have someone there supporting them - not judging them, not fixing them, but simply to listen, to validate, to communicate with them to help them be able to find that level of regulation that they're seeking. But now, we show them how to do it through relationship.

**Julie:** Mm-hmm. So, when you say all of that to educators who have typically-structured behavior-management plans and things like that, what's the most challenging? Right now, I'm thinking, there's lots of questions popping up in people's minds as they're hearing this, especially if they're hearing this for the first time. You know, they're thinking, "How can this be? How can I turn this around into this more positive, more relational way, and still do it in a classroom full of twenty-x kids?"

**Heather:** Right, no, I totally honor those questions because that is the reality of it. It's easy for me to sit here on the phone and talk about it and say, "Oh, it's so easy!" But it's not. It's one of the hardest things there is to actually implement.

So, in working with teachers and schools, what we really have been doing is to show how absolutely you need boundaries, right? We need rules, we need hierarchy. That has to be established. In fact, that's one of the solutions that I work with with schools is say, "I want you to actually visually draw a hierarchy of who's in the school, and who's in charge, and who's in the classroom." So, you put the principal on top, right? Then the vice-principal, then maybe you have a couple of support people, then the teacher, then you have the students. So, visually, now, the students can see where they fit into the whole system of the school, because again, when we look back at some of the family blueprints our children have, they were the ones in charge. You know, maybe they're the ones taking care of their siblings. Maybe they were the ones taking care of mom or dad. So they don't understand even the basic setup of the school system. We have to teach that for them.
I correlate that to, as adults, we go into, maybe, a corporation. We get a job with a corporation that's large. One of the first things they give us in the training is the corporate hierarchy so you know who's in charge.

**Julie:** That's right, an organization chart. That's right.

**Heather:** Right, it's an organization chart. I think students from impacted backgrounds of trauma, they need that because they don't understand, first, the hierarchy, so you establish who's in charge.

**Julie:** Right.

**Heather:** That's absolutely imperative, right? So, they start learning what this system looks like and where they fit into that system and then you tell them, "Here's the principal, here's the teacher. We're in charge of you, but we are in charge of you to make sure that you are safe. We are in charge to make sure that you are successful. We are in charge to help you to learn." Where, unfortunately, traditionally, a lot of it has been shifted to say, "We're in charge to make you behave. We're in charge to make sure you stay in line and make you learn."

**Julie:** Make you follow these rules, yeah.

**Heather:** Exactly. The minute you come into a power struggle with a child impacted by trauma -
Julie: (laughs)

Heather: - no one wins, right?

Julie: Right.

Heather: They win, but that means that nobody wins, and so you can't come at this from a power standpoint. You have to come at this from an emotional connection but still have those boundaries, and I think that's why I want to emphasize the whole hierarchy because that absolutely has to happen, especially in a class with twenty-eight kids and one teacher - how does that happen?

When you establish, then, also, that whole idea within the family - oh, I should say within the classroom - you start saying, "Okay, our classroom's a family." That can be, again, that can be kindergarten, middle school, or high school, if it's just one hour a day. You say, "When you walk in this classroom, I'm in charge because we're going to be a family and we're going to learn how to treat one another appropriately."

That kind of environment sets the stage, then, for when a student becomes dysregulated, when they start acting out, the teacher can stop the lesson if she has to, address that one student in a positive, nurturing, loving way, give him some choices, "Do you need to leave? Go to the calm room?" Do you just, "Let's all the classroom take a break. Take some deep breaths." Do some calming, mindful activities? They don't take that long. Yes, they interrupt the academic structure, but in fact you're actually going to get back to the academics because you're taking the time to calm down the nervous system.

Then, you're able to be able to continue on the lesson. When you set up a classroom in that whole family atmosphere and the philosophy of, "We are here to support one another," you will see students support other students in a really positive way. That is where I say that teachers then, they don't feel like they're completely exhausted because
they're trying to take care of the needs of twenty-eight students. They have everyone working on that same line of thought.

Let me give you an example to really drive that point home.

**Julie:** Yes, please.

**Heather:** I had a teacher that talked to me after. This is a great example. The teacher, she said that she had a first or second grade class, and from the very beginning of the year, when they started school, she really emphasized, "We are a family." That whole concept that was doing the culture of the whole classroom for the whole year. She said at the end of the year they were having an end-of-the-school-year party, so they had the chips and the candy and the soda and all the things that get kids dysregulated.

**Julie:** (laughs) Right.

**Heather:** (laughing) But, you know, it's a party. It's a party. You have to have that. But then she noticed, it was the end of the year, and this one little student, she was very, very nervous and I think it was that transition from school back to home because her home environment wasn't very positive. So, that, along with the party - because any type of happy stress is still stress in the body, right?

**Julie:** It's still stress. Right.
Heather: So, we had a little girl who's so dysregulated, but she wants to have fun, and right then, the teacher looked over and she started - the little girl was peeing on the floor.

Julie: Oh, my.

Heather: She thought, "Oh, dear. This is going to be mortifying." Right? No. Before she could even think of what to do, another little boy thought faster than the teacher. He ran over, he took the Mountain Dew bottle, he poured it all over the floor where she was peeing just to cover it up for her.

Julie: (laughing) Just to help her not be embarrassed.

Heather: To help her! Rather than making fun of her. So that's where I say, if we can have first and second graders doing this, we're going to be fine. We can make every classroom work. So, that gives you a demonstration of, how do you create an environment where everyone's supporting one another, even when one child gets dysregulated, that the whole class doesn't fall apart?

Julie: Right.

Heather: And it doesn't drain the teacher.
Julie: Right, and not only does it not do that, but using those techniques that are trauma-informed, even if the children aren't traumatized, allows them to develop socially and emotionally, and have more empathy and all of those things as well.

Heather: Yes. Exactly. And if they're doing that in the early years, we're not going to have some of the problems that we've had by middle school and high school, and that's the beauty of it. Taking the time that whole year to create that family atmosphere, to really work the whole culture that is that trauma-informed perspective, a developmental perspective, that we're going to have students that are actually achieving much higher academically - which, of course, with a school, that is the ultimate goal.

Julie: Mm-hmm. Exactly. Oh, I love it, Heather, and I love that we're talking about the positive of that because it's so hard when you're talking about the topic of trauma and children being traumatized. Teachers have large hearts for children. That's why they do what they do. It's hard not to let that be overwhelming emotionally, so being able to talk about the hope and how these things really do help children to reset.

Heather: Yeah.

Julie: I mean, to help them be able to be successful.

Heather: And I do, I just love our kids who are, quote, the bad kids, because when you step back and you really understand them, you will just marvel at how incredibly resourceful they are. When you get into their perspective and understand their logic, what they do is actually perfectly logical. The problem is, we've been defining the logic from the adult perspective. So, to find that deeper love for our really challenging kids... And I know. I've been in classrooms where some of these kids, the hair on the back of your neck just stands up because they can be so irritating and so... You just want to scream because they just disrupt everything.
But when you can stop, step back, get to know that child, have some one-on-one, and that means having, maybe, time before class starts, maybe having that student who you most dislike, the child who is most challenging, have that child come and have lunch with you. Really get to know them because there's something underneath them that is absolutely beautiful, but there's something underneath them that is hurting as well. When we can tap into that, we can be able to heal these kids with broken hearts that they're just putting out these negative vibes and these negative behavior simply as a protective piece. You get them to break that wall down, you will have the most amazing kids in your classroom.

**Julie:** That's great, and it's definitely true. I want us to just end on this high note, unless there's something else in particular you want to jump in and tell the teachers before we quit? Because I'm just, I'm thinking the hope is definitely there.

**Heather:** Yeah, I think that, again, just... The minute teachers or parents or whoever is working with a student, you find yourself irritated, just take a deep breath and go, "Okay, there's something I just don't understand. That's all it's about. I don't understand." Step back, get yourself calmed back down, regulate yourself, give yourself some love and grace. Then, go into this with the... Put on your lens of development and your perspective of, that curiosity. What's really driving this student's behavior? When you really get to that, you're going to find yourself in a much better way to find the solution. The solutions are there. A lot of times what our kids are doing, is actually they're telling us what the solution is, they just don't know how to voice it.

When we can jump into their worlds and open our hearts, we'll find a way to help them. That's my biggest piece of advice, but I know, also, how challenging it can be, so I just want to encourage everyone that is working with children in the classroom. It is one of the hardest things you will ever do. I would rather have a class with twenty-eight Andys because it's just so much easier. Just know that if you've got a classroom full of a few little Billys in there, or several, you're definitely going to be challenged, but there's a way. There's always a way, it just takes broadening your perspective.
Julie: Okay. So, Heather, can you just tell folks... I mean, obviously, they can reach out to you and visit you at your website which is beyondconsequences.com - is that what it is?

Heather: Yeah, and actually, I'm going to give you the website that has all my school resources.

Julie: Please, do.

Heather: That website is thetraumainformedschool.com. So just thetraumainformedschool.com, all my resources are there. I've got my Help For Billy book, my study guides. I have an administrative guide. I'm actually - right now, right before I got on this call - I'm editing a new little manual of how to start a leadership team in the school, so we are continuing to build more and more resources for schools, so that's -

Julie: Awesome.

Heather: I am a lifetime learner and so I always want to make sure that our kids are able to really tap into their full academic potential and that means getting them onboard with the social-emotional platform as well.

Julie: Awesome. Well, thank you. Thanks for taking time out of your busy creation of all of these great materials, and the programs and trainings and things that you do to talk with us today, specifically about that.
Heather: Very welcome. Thank you for all the work that you do as well. It's been a pleasure.

Julie: Thank you. So, this is, again, Heather Forbes with Julie Beem at the ATN Educating Traumatized Children Summit.

This is one of eighteen interviews that are going to be part of this year's summit. If you would like the complete set of these recordings, you can buy recordings or recordings with transcripts through our website and you can check out more information about that. They'll be available at the end of the summit at www.creatingtraumasensitiveschools.org.

If you want to know more about the Attachment & Trauma Network's work, especially with families of traumatized children, you can visit us at www.attachtrauma.org.

Thank you all for tuning in today, and please join us again for the other interviews in this summit.

ATN sites:

http://creatingtraumasensitiveschools.org/
http://www.attachmenttraumanetwork.org/