

Ep #92: Mental Health



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With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello, Empowered Principals, welcome to episode 92.

Welcome to *The Empowered Principal Podcast*, a not so typical, educational resource that will teach you how to gain control of your career and get emotionally fit to lead your school and your life with joy, by refining your most powerful tool: your mind. Here's your host, certified life coach, Angela Kelly Robeck.

Hello, my empowered leaders. How are you doing? Happy October. This is the month of candy and crazy. Actually, I'm recording this quite early. It is the beginning of August, the first week of August. And as you know, I am recording several months of podcasts in advance because my husband and I are going on a dream come true three-week trip to Europe.

We leave in a couple of weeks – actually two weeks from today. Anyway, we are so excited to go and so we have been busting it to work long hours, get lots of work done, get our schedules all aligned so that we can go and be absolutely fancy free and have the best time of our lives.

So we are working crazy hours basically is what's happening, and I love it. I love my job. I love what I'm doing. And I especially love what I am going to talk about today in this episode.

So, today is August 7th as I'm recording this. You will not hear this podcast until October 1st, so it's almost two months in advance. But I want to record this right now because it's happening as I speak and it's something that we need to address in the field of education. And I believe this is exactly why I have been challenged and given the opportunity to establish this business in coaching for school leaders and school teams.

And I believe it's my calling. I believe this is why I have been given this task, to promote the emotional and mental wellbeing of our school leaders

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so that you all, in return, can promote the emotional and mental wellbeing of your students.

So as you know, in August, there have been several mass shootings over the course of – well, I think there's been four in the past week, but by the time you hear this, it will have been a couple of months ago. So, watching the news and hearing all of the different commentary about what's causing this problem, what people think the problem is, why this problem is happening, why it's getting worse.

And there's so much blame that's happening. People want to blame videogames, they want to blame gun control laws, they want to blame the president or other officials. They want to blame the schools for not addressing mental health. They want to blame parents. They want to just blame, blame, blame, and I understand why.

We so badly want to blame because if somebody else or something else is the cause of the problem, and that means if they're the cause then they're responsible for the solution. So what we do is we seek to blame outside of ourselves because, number one, if we're not the problem and something else is the problem, then that thing or that person has to be the solution, we can't do it.

Number two, it feels good to blame because it takes that burden, that weight that heaviness we feel every single time we hear about an event like this, it just burdens our hearts and heavies us. So instead of feeling that negative emotion, that grief, that sadness that comes with a tragic event, what we do is we shift our focus and energy to sadness or fear and we blame.

We blame other people, we blame situations, we blame the laws, we blame the guns, we blame whatever, we blame everything else that we can think of outside of us because then it's not our problem to have to solve and our

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problem to take ownership of. But this is exactly why I'm bringing this conversation to the surface.

I'm here to say, number one, that it is our problem. It is our problem to solve. It is our problem to create a solution for. It's our problem. We need to take ownership. And it's our responsibility to solve this problem. If we continue to blame, then there will be nobody who takes responsibility. We blame the guns and then the gun law people blame the president and then the president's going to blame the videogames and then the videogame people are – we're just going to go around and around and pointing of the finger, it just never stops.

And basically, what we're doing is we're just distracting ourselves from getting busy and solving the problem and getting to work on it. So number one, especially as school leaders, we have an obligation, a responsibility to bring these conversations up and to seek out solutions, not just talk about the problem. We don't want to focus on the problem. We want to focus on the solution.

And taking ownership that the results of what's happening in our country today is a product of each and every one of us, and we want to make it our responsibility and our job to seek out the solutions and that is how we will solve the problem, by owning the problem, by taking responsibility for what we can do. And it feels like, oh it's such a big problem that I can't personally handle it. Every individual in the country decided to take ownership for what they can be responsible for, which is themselves, and they learn why they behave the way they do, and behind every behavior is a thought and an emotion.

Thoughts generate emotions, emotions trigger the way we act. It's our approach to life. When we're upset about something and we're acting out of that feeling of being upset or being angered or being in fear, we respond,

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we react to life and to situations in that particular way. So blaming others and situations outside of us never ever solves a problem, any problem.

What it does is it allows us to ignore the problem and throw our hands up in the air so that when something awful happens, yet again, and we see the news and we're watching this and wondering, like, why is this happening again, and we start to blame and then that kind of dissipates because it's not our problem to solve, so we don't sit with it. We don't feel how awful it feels to know we are a part of the problem.

But that also means we are a part of the solution. Owning the responsibility of tackling what's going on right now is how we solve it. But what we do is we watch it in horror and we say, oh that's a shame. That is too bad. We need to get stronger gun control laws or we need to get the schools on board with mental health. We need somebody else to do something about it is what we're saying.

And then we go about our day saying, it's not our problem, it's not for us to solve. No, we have to take ownership, number one. And here's why it's hard. This is why we don't want to take ownership.

Number one, mental health is viewed as a weakness and it's very socially unacceptable. In the past, like years ago, even centuries ago, before we really studied and understood what mental health is and mental illness is and the spectrum – you know, there's a difference between I'm having a rough day today and I'm emotionally spent but on the regular I'm a normal person just getting through life and trying to figure out how to raise my kids, how to have a nice career and a nice home and what's the best way I can serve this world, like the everyday kind of Joe out there, versus there are people who have biological or neurological or chemical, something physical within the body that may create what scientists would call a disease and then we created and developed treatments and therapies around those diseases that are very scientific in nature.

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And I'm not here to say that there's not a place for therapy, for psychology, for psychiatric care, all of that stuff is definitely absolutely needed in this world, that's why people are doing it. If we didn't need it, it wouldn't be there. So I definitely am not saying that we don't look at mental illness issues and support those trying to support those people with mental illness issues.

What I'm suggesting and what I'm talking about is mental wellbeing, mental and emotional fitness, mental and emotional stamina, mental and emotional capacity and competency, like, the whole spectrum. It's just the same as physical health. There's a whole spectrum. There's people who are physically incapable. Maybe they're born with a physical or neurological disability and their bodies are not able to climb mountains to go on hikes or be physically active in some way.

And then there's people who are completely and utterly not able to be active because of the choices that they make. There's a difference, do you see that? So in the physical health world, number one, it's not a social stigma. Mental health is a social stigma. We look at mental health as being weak. We look at them as being different, unsafe, unstable, weird, mental, psycho. We use all of these words to describe, like, it's socially unacceptable to be on the end of the spectrum where your mental faculties are challenged in some way, shape, or form.

Physical health, on the other hand, we highly encourage people to work out. We idolize people who work out. We value it. We want people to have to work at it and that the work's not going to be easy all the time and we try to make it fun. We have group exercise and we value our physical health as a society, therefore it's not a stigma to go to the gym or to workout.

It's also not a stigma to not workout. Like, if you want to choose to be inactive, there are tons of people out in the world who choose not to be active, who choose not to be physically fit, and that's just one way of living,

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and the other way of living is people who are physically fit, and there's a whole spectrum of people. Mental health is the same way.

Most of us are just right in the middle, like, we're just trying to figure out life. We're making decisions day by day. We're approaching life day by day because we don't really understand how our brain works, how mental health works, how emotional health and wellbeing works. We don't understand it so we're afraid of it.

So what happens is we kind of put it in a corner, we try to mask it, hide it, put it under the rug because we don't understand it. And when we don't understand things, we fear them. So when we talk about mental health and we're like – you know, I just got approached by a journalist who wants to highlight this, which I think is fabulous, and they're asking, like, why aren't the schools doing anything about it? Should we be doing something about it?

And the truth is, the reason why we haven't been addressing mental health in schools, which number one, we have been, we've just been kind of having to do it on our own and in our own ways because it's kind of socially awkward or unacceptable as a society, collectively we are uncomfortable talking about mental wellbeing, emotional wellbeing so we shy away from it and we pretend we don't need it or it's not there.

But in school, the reason that it's not mainstream yet is because society hasn't accepted it as mainstream yet. So if it were as acceptable as physical health, then we'd have programs, just like we have PE programs. We would have mental awareness programs and curriculums and we'd have plenty of time for it because we'd make it a part of our day. We'd make it important.

But the reason we're not making it important is not because we don't want to make it important. It's because, as a society, we haven't deemed – it

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hasn't earned its stripes, so to speak. It's not on the top of the list. We value STEM a bazillion percent. So everything we talk about in school is STEM or STEAM. We want all of those things to be on the top. But we're not talking about teaching ourselves, first of all, and our children what mental health and awareness and mental wellbeing and emotional wellbeing, what that all looks like.

We're not teaching ourselves that situations outside of us don't cause the problem. They don't cause us to behave in a certain way. What causes is to behave in a certain way is always a thought and an emotion. We believe that it's the situation outside of us. We think that the guns are the problem. It's not about what we're thinking about the guns.

Some people have thoughts about guns that they shouldn't exist, they should be controlled, they should be not available. And there's other people who think that they should. So the gun isn't the problem. It's the thinking and the emotions are what triggers the way we approach the situation that is a gun.

And what I'm here to suggest to people and what my mission is and what I'm trying to accomplish in my service to the world is that just bringing our awareness that the way to mental health is to understand that we have thoughts that trigger emotions and those emotions are what determine the way we're going to approach something and that's how we're getting the results – until we can agree that that is an okay thing to talk about, we're not going to talk about it in our schools.

I'm totally going off-script here. I'm looking at my notes and I'm just so fired up. But I want to just check in and make sure that I'm covering everything here. So I love equating this back to the physical health as mental health and how we honor and we idolize, basically, physical health, but we almost demonize mental health and we look down. And we do it to ourselves.

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If we viewed mental health the same way that we viewed our physical health, then we would gladly be, like, raising our hand like, yeah, sign me up, I want to coach. Yeah, sign me up, I want somebody to show me how to do this. Yeah, sign me up, I want somebody to hold me accountable at the gym and make sure I'm doing all my reps.

Emotional wellbeing is exactly the same way. You have to know what to do, like, when you're brand new at the gym, you don't know how to run the machines. You need a coach to train you. You need a coach who's like, well, first you start here and then you do this exercise, and then when you plateau there, then you go to the next level. They know because they've studied it, they've done it themselves. They're a proof and a product that it works.

So mental and emotional wellbeing is the same way. You don't know what you don't know, and then a coach comes in and says, look, here's the model, here is the STEAR cycle. This is how it works. I'm going to show you how. I'm going to hold your hand, I'm going to teach you. We're going to do this together. It's going to be hard but you're going to be okay and you're going to practice it and practice it and practice it until it's not hard anymore or until you plateau and then you have a new challenge to face, and then you're going to go through the same process.

I mean, the way to build muscle is to lift weights and it doesn't matter if you're lifting five pounds or 25 pounds, the work, the process is the same. And the same is true of mental health. We have to decide, number one, to get rid of the stigma behind it. Part of the human experience is to experience thoughts and emotions. It's not a bad thing.

Emotions are not a negative thing. They're just a thing. And it's what we think about them, it's what we make them mean that gives them intensity. Like, in the example of all these shootings, when a person goes out and shoots, that's a result of their approach, their set of actions, and that set of

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actions created a result. If you go backwards in the STEAR Cycle, it's always because of a thought and emotion that that person was having.

They had thoughts about the situation, so in the example – I mean, I live in California, the shooting that was out nearby my house was the California Gilroy Garlic Festival. It's a darling little town. Gilroy is just south of San Jose, California, where Silicone Valley is. And every year, the garlic festival is this huge deal where thousands of people go to try all the things with garlic in them and it's just fun.

And there's music and it's just a festival. It's like State Fair or something like that. So people go, they feel safe, they take their children, their families, they go down there and somebody had a thought that he was unhappy about something and didn't want certain people being in his area – I don't know all the details behind it, I choose not to read it all.

But what I'm saying is this person had a thought that upset him deeply. And because he was upset so deeply and he was so attached to his story and believed in it so much and held it so true that it raised the intensity of his feelings to the point that his brain decided then that his action should be to get a gun and shoot people.

It happened in Dayton, Ohio. It happened in El Paso, Texas, where my brother-in-law and sister-in-law and their two children live. And the reason behind any result like this is because of a thought and an emotion.

So we have to get over that emotions and thoughts are something we shouldn't talk about. And once we do that, then we can start talking about, okay, how do we do it. Well here's how we do it; we have to practice daily being aware of the thoughts we're thinking.

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And the way that we become aware of them is through our emotions. Like, when we're feeling off or we're feeling intense or we're feeling really down or we're disappointed, if we're having a negative emotion, that's a signal that we're having thoughts that are creating that emotion.

When we're acting in a way that seems out of character or out of sorts, that's a signal. Our thoughts are off. If we're getting results that are not what we want and they're out of alignment, that's because our thinking is out of alignment and we have to, every day, check in; what's going on here? I say I'm believing in these results but I'm not getting them, so something's a miss, something is out of integrity, out of alignment.

It's not wrong. It's not bad. It's called being human. We just need to be human in deciding that all of the human experience is absolutely acceptable and okay.

Look, educators, we are in the business of learning and teaching. Education is the business of people, of growing little human beings and helping them expand their knowledge. And this is how I break it down. Learning is simply this. It's choosing to believe a new thought.

So when you're in kindergarten and you walk in and you're five years old and the teacher is reading books to you, little children are looking up thinking, you know, I love this, I love the story, I feel emotions attached to the story and my teacher, she can read, she knows how to read, but I don't.

So our job as kindergarten teachers, we show them that these little things, these little squiggly things on a piece of paper are called letters and we teach them letters and they're, like, oh, okay now I believe and now I know that that's a letter. And these letters, these symbols have sounds that are associated with them, and then we teach them the sounds to the letters.

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Okay, not I believe that these little squiggly things are called letters and they represent sounds and here are the sounds. So now I'm practicing the sounds. And now, oh, every time I see that letter A, it makes an A sound, okay, I'm believing it because I'm collecting evidence that that's true.

Then we go on to teach them that putting those sounds together creates new sounds, or what we call words. And then they learn the words and we teach them that putting words together in context creates a sentence. And then we show them the punctuation and then we teach them to create multiple sentences into a paragraph. And then we teach them that paragraphs tell stories. And then we teach them that when their eyes see these letters in this particular way, that their mind can read the symbols based on the sounds that they make.

And the kids don't walk into kindergarten believing that they know how to read, but we believe it for them. We know they're going to be able to learn how to read, as long as it takes. There's no time limit on allowing a child to learn to read. We can believe that they can learn to read until they can believe it for themselves. And once they believe it for themselves, then they're off reading. Mental health is the same way.

We don't believe that we're capable of handling negative emotion because we haven't given ourselves enough practice. We're not resilient in our emotions because we haven't been talking about them and practicing them and allowing ourselves to be open to the idea that some of our thinking and our thoughts that our brain is creating are not true. And we know they're not true when they don't feel good to us. That's how we know they're not true.

So when we say we should be doing something but we're not and then we feel bad about it, that's because, no, we shouldn't be doing it. And the reason we know we shouldn't be doing something is because the truth is that we're not doing it. So telling ourselves we should when we're not is a lie and lies feel bad, and we have a negative emotion experience.

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Now, back to mental health and the whole thing with the guns, what's really happening is it's simply somebody had a thought about a situation, that emotional response to that thought was so significant and so intense and the person did not know how to release that emotion or how to allow it to be present in the body without reacting to it, so they allowed the urge to overcome them and to actually take action, which their brain's idea, another thought that pops into their head was, this was the solution, that shooting people is the solution.

That now creates a new situation. Now we've got situations where, time and time again, people are seeing, like, oh when I'm this upset and I'm this angry or I'm this fearful that people are moving into my country or the United States and I believe they shouldn't be when they are, I'm seeing that the way to handle this is to shoot them. Like, that's what, in their mind, they think is valid.

And what we need to start teaching is, number one, ourselves. We need to practice this before we expose it to children. Because if we don't know really how to do it, how can we teach them? And if we're not willing to expose ourselves and say, like, wow I'm having really intense emotions, or wow, I was thinking thoughts that felt really bad, like I was actually thinking that that person doesn't have the right to be here at the garlic festival or that they shouldn't be in our hometown or my home state or whatever the person said he was feeling.

And then, you have to understand the thoughts. Then you have to understand, like, wow, there's an emotional attachment to that thought, and now I have to decide, am I going to act on that impulse or that urge or not? Or am I going to allow myself to be upset about it but handle myself in a different way and create a very different result?

So mental health starts with us. It starts with us talking about it, exposing it, demystifying it, not allowing it to be a negative stigma anymore. And we

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have to be the example of it. We have to start with us. Like, our teachers are not going to expose their emotions to us school leaders if we're not willing to expose our own emotions to them. It's just not going to work that way.

As the leader, you lead. This is our job. This is our obligation. I feel very passionate about this and I hope that you do too. Please share this podcast with as many people as possible. I know it's raw. I went at it with an outline and spirit in my heart to share this information with you, but this is where it starts. This is why I'm offering one on one private coaching because in a private setting, it's just you and me and you can say whatever you're thinking and whatever you're feeling.

There's nothing that you could do or say that is going to impact the way that I feel and believe about you. I believe it's possible for you to have an extreme level of mental and emotional fitness. I believe it's possible. You might not believe that. That's okay. You're just the kindergartener coming in. I believe it for you until I can hand off the baton and you can believe it in yourself.

And this work is never done. So as a school leader, if you want mental health for your students, you start with mental health with you and then you teach it to your teachers and then you all talk about it together. You all work through your own mental and emotional wellbeing together. And then you can teach kids. Don't expect the kids to get it if you don't. Don't expect the kids to practice it if you're not willing to practice it.

Alright, so, this is a little off-topic. We're going to focus on workload and we're going to look at how our thoughts about our workload and burnout and overwhelm and exhaustion and all of those things that come with working, especially in a field where we give a lot of ourselves, we're going to talk about how to build our emotional and mental wellbeing around our workload for the month of October.

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Because there are five weeks in October, this fit in perfectly as a little bonus and it really does kind of segue into if we can manage our thoughts around our workload, then we can certainly manage our thoughts around bringing mental health to our students, staffs, families.

Have a wonderful empowered amazing week and we will talk about workload next week. Take care, bye-bye.

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