

## Ep #306: Emotional Literacy



**Full Episode Transcript**

**With Your Host**

**Angela Kelly**

The Empowered Principal® Podcast

## Ep #306: Emotional Literacy

Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 306.

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.

Well, hello my empowered leaders and happy Tuesday. Welcome to the podcast. Hey, if you're new, welcome. We're so happy you're here. I love this podcast. I love all of you. I love the work that all of us are doing in the world. Happy November. I have a very quick, short podcast for you today, but it resonated with myself and my client so deeply that I wanted to share it in real time because I believe that this message, although short but sweet, is very powerful for school leaders to hear, okay.

I was working with a client this morning. She was very triggered. She was frustrated. She was feeling defensive because a member of her team has been showing up in a way that she considers inappropriate or not quite meeting the standards of the school culture. So this is a person who has been talking about the principal to other teachers. This person has been being less than kind to parents, maybe making remarks that sound a little bit snarky, or come across as rude or inappropriate.

So the principal was feeling very frustrated by this. She was feeling that this person was talking about her to multiple people. Multiple people were coming to the principal saying I'm uncomfortable with these conversations. I just want you to know they're happening. The principal herself was hearing and seeing and witnessing behaviors and hearing words coming out of this person's mouth.

Now, I want you to know that if you are dealing with a staff member, whether it's office staff member, paraprofessional, teacher, anybody on

## Ep #306: Emotional Literacy

your campus that you are directly in charge of per se, that you are their direct report. First of all, I want you to consider the idea that their behavior is not a reflection on you. The way that a person behaves is not you. You are separate from that human being. There's step one, okay?

So when somebody is behaving in a way, a lot of times leaders will feel embarrassed, and they take that person's behavior upon themselves to try and fix. Because we're like they shouldn't be behaving this way. They're under my leadership. When we do that, then we think it's our job to fix them or change them or to tell them what to do and how to be.

Just notice this because if you get into that mindset, you're going to want to probably approach them in a way that feels a little controlling and authoritarian and kind of this top down approach, right. Like, almost like parenting them. Okay? Be mindful of that.

So in this case, this staff member has been outwardly showing, although she's not saying it with her words, she's expressing that she's unhappy, or that she's not pleased with something. Something's going on with this staff member, okay. My client was feeling defensive, and feeling wrongly accused, and feeling that it was her job to rectify the situation.

She was really feeling like that she had to come in and clean up this person's behavior while also kind of defending herself because she's a first year principal at this school. It's her first principalship, and she's new to a school. Okay.

So when I asked my client to separate out fact from opinion, like the facts of what was happening, words being said, actions being observed versus her interpretation of those actions and words, we had to sift those through, right. So in your brain, there are facts. There are things you've observed that have happened. Words were said, actions were taken, those are the facts, but then your brain fills in all the gaps with interpretation.

## Ep #306: Emotional Literacy

That interpretation we have to sift out and put on the sidelines because our brain thinks it knows what those facts mean. It believes they are true, the story that it's coming up with, but the interpretation is actually just one interpretation of many.

So when you're thinking about what are the facts and what are the opinions of my brain, the interpretation my brain is making it mean, you're going to have to figure out how to separate those out. I just say write them down. Then if you can't prove it in a court of law, it goes into the interpretation side. So really, there are just like a handful of facts and lots and lots of interpretations.

So when somebody's misbehaving in your mind, right, and you feel the need to address them, step one is to really clear out in your mind the difference between the facts and the interpretations. Because there is no way that your brain can know with absolute certainty that person's intentions, that person's feelings or perspectives, or even that person's experience. We're not in their body 24/7. We're not around them 24/7 to know everything. Even if we were around them, it still doesn't mean we understand how their brain is interpreting the world around them, okay?

Now, if a person, an adult, is behaving in a way, it is expressing mannerisms as such that feel like they're childish to you. Maybe they're rolling their eyes or stomping their feet. They're acting like a teenager would in response to their job, right. So in this case, this person was like talking about other people, making comments under their breath, rolling their eyes. There were nonverbal cues and verbal cues. This person wasn't happy, but they weren't owning and expressing themselves in maybe a mature adult fashion.

Now, here's what I want to point out. Emotional maturity is really emotional literacy. We're not teaching emotional literacy in our schools. Most

## Ep #306: Emotional Literacy

households, most families, are not teaching emotional literacy to their children because they were not taught emotional literacy.

Now, definitely, there are people in the world who have emotional literacy. They're very skilled and very competent, and they're teaching their children at home. There are skilled teachers who are very competent in emotional literacy, and they are teaching emotional literacy and modeling it in their classrooms. But the people that you are thinking about who trigger you emotionally most oftentimes are deficit in emotional literacy.

I want to offer this as a principal or a district leader. It's not an adult's fault that they are emotionally illiterate. If a parent were to come to your school, let's say you're in an IEP meeting, and that parent were illiterate and they were not able to read the IEP, would you be upset with them? Would you be angry or frustrated with them? No, you wouldn't. You would have so much compassion for them because they weren't taught how to read. How could they possibly know how to read?

What I do is I help teach you and other school leaders how to be emotionally literate so that you can hold space for those who aren't as emotionally literate. You see, adults are humans. They're just in bigger bodies, and they've been around the planet a few more spins than the children have.

It's so easy for us to think about children and give them space and grace and permission to learn emotional literacy. We don't expect them to know how to manage their emotions all the time, or when they misbehave or their emotions burst out, and they behave and react to their emotional energy inside their bodies, we give them grace.

But when we think about adults, we don't. They should know better. They should be able to manage this. The problem with assuming that adults should be emotionally literate is that they haven't been taught. It's not a

## Ep #306: Emotional Literacy

mainstream practice, which is why I am trying to make emotional literacy a mainstream practice in our schools starting with all of you.

So in the case of my client, my client wasn't even emotionally regulated because she felt wrongly accused. In response to her thought that I'm being accused for something I haven't done by this person who's now speaking it to all the people and now all the people are going to hate me, right? Your brain kind of goes to the worst case scenario. That puts you have emotional regulation when you feel triggered.

The first thing you have to do is you have to reregulate yourself. The way you learn how to regulate your own emotional, like your nervous system reaction that's happening internally. The way you do that is to have emotional literacy practice, have a coach to help you manage your mind. Because your mind, the thoughts that are spinning through your brain, are what generate emotional energy. Managing our mind is the tool that we implement to create emotional literacy.

So I want you to imagine all your little kinders coming into kindergarten. They don't know how to read. They don't know how to self-regulate. They don't know how to add. We invite them in as they are as little five year olds. We say we get it. You don't know how to emotionally regulate. You don't know how to read. You don't know how to do math. You don't know how to be in school. That's okay, I've got you. We're going to teach you all of these things.

I want you to embrace the adults on your campus as though they were kinders. They are coming in for the first time, learning how to be teachers when they've never taught before. Learning how to be emotionally regulated when they've never been taught before. Learning how to navigate the demands of education coming at them from all the angles, from students, from parents, from colleagues, from their principals, from their district staff, from the community.

## Ep #306: Emotional Literacy

They are walking the same walk you're walking. They're trying to figure this out too. Their capacity as teachers and staff members to be emotionally literate is the capacity to which we are willing to learn how to be more emotionally literate. I get it. It kind of stinks. As the school leader, you do have to go first because you are the leader.

So yes, you have to learn to emotionally regulate yourself before your teachers will emotionally regulate. Because you can't expect it of them if you're not doing it and vice versa. So as the leaders yes, it is our job to go first. To say hey, I'm going to figure out how to do this myself so that I can hold space for you to figure out how to do it because your life as a teacher or any member of this campus will feel so much better when you have tools to learn how to self-regulate so you don't have to blame other people or blame the situation or abdicate responsibility.

You can take ownership of your emotions, which is our job here on planet Earth. It's our job to stay in our lane, manage our thoughts so that we can regulate our emotions so we can pause and take action only after we have regulated ourselves enough to get back into our prefrontal cortex to make our decisions based on our three month plan and our three year plan.

Come on into EPC you guys. We've got it mapped out for you. But these are the skills I teach you. I teach you how to be emotionally literate so that you can hold space and model and teach your teachers how to also be emotionally literate. This is a movement, my friends. We're doing it over here at EPC. I want you to join us. Doors are going to open very soon. The next cohort begins in January right after the new year.

All right. So reach out. You've got my contact information in the show notes. Reach out as soon as possible. We'll get you started on emotional literacy. We'll bring your school up to speed. Okay, have a beautiful day my friends. I will talk to you next week. Take good care. Bye.

## Ep #306: Emotional Literacy

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Look, you don't have to overwork and overexert to be a successful school leader. You'll be mentored weekly and surrounded by supportive like minded colleagues who truly understand what it means to be a school leader. So join us today and become a member of the only certified life and leadership coaching program for school leaders in the country. Just head on over to [angelakellycoaching.com/work-with-me](http://angelakellycoaching.com/work-with-me) to learn more and join. I'll see you inside of the Empowered Principal® Collaborative.

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