

Ep #318: The Key to Thriving Schools with Jessica Sinarski



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 318.

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. Happy Tuesday, and welcome to this very special episode of *The Empowered Principal® Podcast*. I am so happy to introduce to you Jessica Sinarski. Jessica is a specialist in brain development. She has an amazing background.

What I love about Jessica, and you're going to learn all about her in today's interview, is how she's able to break down what's going on inside of our brains to child speak. What's great about that for us as school leaders is it's so tangible and easy for us to understand what's going on in our brains and in the adult brains on campus.

Jessica is just releasing her next book called *Light Up the Learning Brain*, and it talks all about how to connect with kids at the brain level, which is what we are here to do. As an empowered principal, my job is to help you generate awareness and alignment inside of your own feelings and your own thoughts to generate energy and momentum to guide yourself, your school, and your students in the direction forward where they're making progress along the journey.

This conversation with Jessica is going to inspire you and ignite you into full momentum. I can't wait for you to hear everything that she has to say. Don't forget to check out her new book *Light Up the Learning Brain*.

Angela: Hello empowered principals. Welcome to the podcast. I am so excited to be here with you guys today. I have a very special guest. I'm

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going to let her introduce herself and tell you a little bit about her. We're going to dive in because she does some amazing work with families and kids and schools. I can't wait for you to hear all about her. Jessica, welcome to the podcast.

Jessica: Thanks, Angela. I'm glad to be here.

Angela: Yay. Why don't you tell the listeners a little bit about yourself, who you are, what you do?

Jessica: Sure.

Angela: And how you work with schools.

Jessica: So my name is Jessica Sinarski. I came to my work with schools sort of a circuitous route. My background is in mental health. I think we all are feeling right now the impact of struggling mental health across the world of education.

So I worked pretty extensively with kids with significant trauma histories. I do a lot of work in the adoption and foster care world and always have. Very quickly realized I did not know what I needed to know to be helpful, as I think many of us in helping professions find. So that set me on a path to figure out what was really going on with these big behaviors that kids were expressing and struggling relationships and everything in between.

As I started to learn more about the brain and our attachment system, the impact of safe and secure relationships on our well-being, that just really shifted everything in my work. Now I feel like I have magic beans that I want everyone to have, from parents and kids, but also teachers and principals and district leaders around what is going on with these challenging behaviors with staff burnout, with the pieces of the puzzle that

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we just seem to be moving around and maybe struggling to get to fit into place.

Angela: Yeah, yes. I love your work so much. I know we've talked prior to this podcast recording, but I loved the mission and the vision that you have for helping our schools in this capacity. I really like how you break down the conversation to help make it tangible for teachers and for students. So can you speak a little to that, some of the process that you use to share with teachers on what's happening with kids, how to reframe it in their minds, and then how to communicate that with students?

Jessica: Yes. So I do it a couple different ways. So one of the ways that I found to be super helpful for both kids and adults is through picture books. Picture books give us not only story, but also the visual element. We know when we experience learning in a multi-sensory way, that is better. That's better for our brain to be able to hold on to things.

The other thing that I have found to be really helpful with stories, picture book visuals, is taking some of the shame and blame out of it, making tough topics approachable. So I have two books series that dig into different elements of really all behavior comes from the brain.

So the brain is my passion and helping people understand the brain and understanding how the brain is connected to the body and our actual eight sensory systems, not just our five sensory systems, and all these things that I feel a lot of the teachers and mental health professionals for that matter that I work with are like, "Why didn't no one tell me this?" Yeah, I felt the same way.

Angela: Yes.

Jessica: So there's the picture book side. Then I also have been doing training with schools and at conferences and with individual schools and at

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school districts to help bridge the gap between what the science is telling us and how we put that in practice. So my professional development or consultation tends to be really, really concentrated on where the rubber meets the road.

So okay, this is what's going on in the brain when a kid is defiant. What do we do with that? What's going on to your brain and body as a result of that and the 14 other things that are sort of activating the defense system in your brain and body? That's normal. It's normal that's happening.

Teachers, there are some ways that when we sort of put on these brain goggles, when we sort of get our x-ray vision, we can see ourselves with more compassion, we can see our students with more compassion, we can see each other with more compassion. That wakes up that powerhouse of the brain, the upstairs brain, that lets us feel and deal, that lets us plan, that lets us sort of be curious and creative. Be a team.

I know one of the things I love that we talked about, you and I talked about when we met a while ago, was how powerful it is to realize that we're on the same team. Just that little realization reduces threat, right?

Angela: Yes.

Jessica: Our brains respond to so many little signals of threat all around us all the time. With all those little signals of threat, it can get hard to notice the signals of safety, the little moments of joy in our work. So I know principals, district leaders who are listening, that's part of what you're trying to spark and encourage in your staff. So my role tends to be that in between of translating neuroscience into action steps. What does this mean for the practical day to day?

Through the course of doing that over the last several years, I worked with one of my publishers around, she kept encouraging me like, "You need to

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get this in book form. You need to spell it out.” So that is what's coming in January. In fact, right, I think as this podcast is airing, there is a new book called *Light Up the Learning Brain* that in 150 or so pages sort of puts things in visual, tangible, practical, take this and run with it format.

Angela: Excellent. Oh, yes. We'll definitely have the link to the book, or if it's the presale, depends on when we land this podcast. But definitely, I want all school leaders to have access to this book because I do really believe, Jessica, that I call this emotional literacy. Understanding our emotions and being literate in them. I see it as a curriculum we just haven't yet explored. But I see it as the foundational curriculum.

Because I taught kindergarten. When they come in at four and five years old, if we could start teaching emotional literacy then. Parents are doing it to different capacities, to the best of their capacity at home. We're not receiving them as blank slates, but building that foundation of what is emotional literacy? What does it look like? How do we feel emotion? Why do we feel emotion? How do we regulate emotion? How can we feel an emotion without reacting to it?

Jessica: Yes.

Angela: Here's what I'm noticing in our schools because I'm working at the site and district leadership level. At our level, whether you're leading a district or a school, you're asking yourself why are all the people that I'm leading unable to emotionally regulate? Why are they so unhappy, disgruntled, dissatisfied, or overstimulated? What's going on? My response to that is it's not their fault. We just haven't taught this before in this way.

Jessica: That's right.

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Angela: Like you're saying this upstairs and downstairs brain. So I just say when you are in your amygdala brain, you do not have access to your prefrontal cortex.

Jessica: That's right.

Angela: You need to be able to pause and lower the perceived threat, even though it's not actual threat, it feels like threat to the body, and get back into that prefrontal cortex. But for kids, the language is so much more applicable. Yeah.

Jessica: Sure. Yeah, we can make it playful and fun. I find even I've worked with leaders who are understanding exactly what you're saying. Like, okay, I get that this is happening in the brain. I get that there's this body response. That's understandable. But what do we do with that?

Angela: Yes.

Jessica: Breaking that down partly with playful language can be helpful because your teachers have so much on their plates. So when they can frame it that, "Okay, my tiger brain kicks into action, and I want to take away recess, and I want to control, and I want to roar." Right? Like, I feel what that feels like. I don't have to make very many mental leaps, right? Or your porcupine brain. We all know what that grumpy prickly porcupine. You guys can't see us as you're listening to this, but both of us just raised our shoulders.

Angela: Like hunched up little. Because you get prickly, yes.

Jessica: So I think about staff meetings, and porcupine brain is contagious. So one little porcupine moment spreads to another, and we end up with porcupine brain sort of running the show instead of that whatever you want to call it, your prefrontal cortex, your wise self, your upstairs brain.

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So I find that from a trauma sensitive perspective as well as just from teacher fatigue perspective that as silly as it sounds, that playful language, which is what you'll find in *Light Up the Learning Brain* as well as *Your Amazing Brain*, which is a nonfiction picture book. That helps.

It's doing everybody service of lightening the load to learn these things, that like you said was not part of teacher prep. It wasn't part of leader prep, right? It wasn't part of my mental health training. I'm mental health. You would think I would learn about the brain, but the science is just coming in leaps and bounds. Translating it to what do we do? What do we do? How do we apply this? That's the gap that I feel like I get to stand in.

Angela: Yeah, that's so good. I mean, I think this really is the key to healthier schools and to maintain a not just survival. We're just surviving in our schools, but actually creating really robust, healthy, thriving communities of schools where people learn emotional literacy from a young age.

We talk about it as an integral part of our school on the regular for the adults, and the leaders, because we need our leaders to be able to embrace this, which requires us to be open and vulnerable and honest and feel emotions that we're not used to feeling.

Because quite honestly, I feel when we were growing up, we were taught I-messages, which were like stop doing that because it makes me feel bad. Then there's no ownership of the emotion, right? I mean, it was a great way to communicate how you're feeling. It leaves the person, if the person doesn't stop doing, the behavior, it leaves you powerless over, your perceived powerlessness over the emotion.

So my work and your work is about what part of our emotional experience do we own? The truth is we own all of it. Now, it doesn't feel that when you're in fight or flight, when you're in your downstairs brain. That intensity,

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that urge to react has been played over and over. We've practiced it for long periods of time, especially as adults. So we have to learn ways to kind of unlearn that, slowly, give ourselves a lot of grace.

What are some tips or suggestions that you have? There's the awareness piece, which is I intellectually understand what's being said here, but how does it play out in real time?

Jessica: So, man, we could go a lot of different directions here. I'm going to go with, I mean, my brain is just firing with all of the different ideas. But let me start with so if we think about our motivating teachers, helping teachers grab on to this.

Angela: Yes.

Jessica: I think about, so teachers care about students. That's why they chose this profession, right? They're there for the kids. Even though it's hard and draining and there's a million details to keep track of as you're trying to navigate daily life.

So a couple things come to mind. So one is just some quick tips around reducing decision fatigue. So anything that you can automate. Our brain likes to act without thinking. So sometimes that serves us really well, being able to drive a car while you're doing thousand different things without thinking about it. But when you first started driving your car, that was really hard.

So the same is true in your teaching. I've heard you talk about this as well. That anything that you can chunk, you can automate, you can make it so that your act without thinking brain is doing it, that's going to help you out.

Okay, so if we've cleared a little bit of mental clutter, then I think about okay, you're there for the students. We know that for students to learn, they need

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these three foundational building blocks. So this is from Turnaround for Children from Dr. Pam Cantor's work, researched going all the way up through academic tenacity and civic identity and all of these, growth mindset, all of these things that we want kids to be able to do.

But the foundation really comes back to attachment, otherwise known as safe and secure relationships, stress management, and self-regulation. If those three building blocks aren't in place, your classroom is going to be a hot mess.

So then we can take that a step further and sort of flip that for ourselves as educators. So as you're working with your teachers, where are their safe and secure relationships? Not that you're managing their family life, just your teachers aren't managing their students family life, right. But thinking about in the school building. When this teacher is flipping to fight or flight all the time are on the verge all the time, who are their safe people? Who is the instructional coach they can reach out to? Who's part of their learning community? Or who is safe in the community for them?

What are their stress management strategies? How are we encouraging that in our staff, in our community, that it's normal to feel stress. That's not a bad thing. Learning, processing, building in patterns to feel and deal, to actively navigate the ups and downs of the day. That's part of creating that foundation for a healthy community. Not pie in the sky self-care, that kind of stuff. But really practical what does this look like? How are we managing those triggers?

In fact, you talked about power, how we sort of lose our power when we get caught up in our emotion sometimes. I apologize if you could hear the siren outside the window. In case anyone's amygdala is alarming right now because of the fight or flight.

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Angela: I know I was just telling you I live downtown. I've got planes, trains, automobiles, sirens. It's all the things. But you know what? Every time I listen to the podcasts, I never hear it. So hopefully listeners out there, your alarms are not set off.

Jessica: Stress management makes me think about our nervous system getting an overload. Part of holding your power, part of navigating stress is having solutions to your biggest stress triggers. I was talking with a teacher a couple months ago, and she said, "The students can't take my power. My power lies in knowing my triggers and having a plan."

Because kids are going to act out. Their brains are not fully mature. You're going to have messes, you're going to have defiance, you're going to have whatever the infraction is, missing homework or whatever the things are that push your buttons, that's going to happen. So what's our plan?

Angela: Yes.

Jessica: Well, that plan requires some upstairs brain power. So let's build that in and normalize that, right. So these parallel processes, safe and secure relationships for students and teachers, stress management for students, and teachers modeling for students all the way through the ages. Then that self-regulation. I think, there's been a misnomer that the requirement is to be calm. We hear that a lot, right?

Angela: Yep.

Jessica: I see that knowing a smile on your face. Where do you think I'm going with this?

Angela: Yes. We agree because in school leadership when people reach out and hire me to be their coach, I'm like how do you want to feel as a school leader? They're like peaceful and calm. They expect classrooms to

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be peaceful and calm. That's because, in my opinion, we have labeled emotions. We've identified emotions as good or bad, right or wrong, better or worse, acceptable, not acceptable. So when we have the actual human experience, which is the entire spectrum of emotion, we think something's gone wrong when we are feeling a negative emotion. Is that right on track?

Jessica: Yes, 100%. So what I think about for us as adults, is that self-regulation isn't about remaining perfectly calm all the time, or remaining happy all of the time. That's not realistic. Self-regulation is about sort of navigating the waves of life. Sometimes that means activating to meet a challenge.

Sometimes that means, so I talk a lot about big tiger moments seem to get the most attention because that's what destroys classrooms. That's what hurts other students. That's what gets people fired. Tiger was our problem. So one of the things I talk about a lot is if you think about when you are really angry about something, I feel like as a therapist I was taught to be to use my therapist voice. Really calming. But if you are fuming mad, Angela, you could have been really mad at me today because I was late. I'm so sorry.

Angela: I was thinking this just happened to me yesterday.

Jessica: Right? So when you are flaming mad, does it help you for somebody to say let's sit and calmly talk about it?

Angela: No, it almost dismisses the anger. It invalidates the anger because the anger is here for a purpose. It's here to tell us something. It doesn't mean act or react from anger. It doesn't mean given to that first urge, which is to yell or scream or control. But it is here to get your attention. All emotions are. They're here for your attention.

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Whether it's joy to bring attention to gratitude and the present moment, or whether it's anger because there's something that doesn't seem right, that needs to be adjusted or fixed, and we have to figure out what that is.

Jessica: That's right.

Angela: The anger is the invitation into that conversation with yourself.

Jessica: That's right. Yeah, I could not agree more with all of those pieces. That emotions are messengers. So a big piece of self-regulation is for us, as the adults, to understand those messages, and to begin to understand what messages we're sending, whether we mean to or not. So that's when we're starting to level up.

So the second sort of level of these building blocks of learning include social awareness, right? Some of those social skill building, those kinds of things. But really, the foundation is safe and secure relationships, stress management, and self-regulation. I think for each of those, we've been sort of sold a lie along the way, or there's been so much misinformation about what.

Angela: Just misled I feel like.

Jessica: Yeah.

Angela: Or misunderstanding. The people that came before us didn't understand the emotions in the way that we can now because of the science breakthroughs that we've had.

Jessica: I think that's very true. Yeah, systems are slow to change. Humans are slow to change. So as we understand these things better, as we begin

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to practice the pause. So even your anger example, there are things that we might do as a result of noticing that emotion of anger.

But is it your act without thinking team in your brain that's doing it, or think before acting team that is processing gosh, I felt really left out. So part of what I need to do, part of why I'm feeling angry is I need some social time. I need to connect with my people, or I'm feeling really angry because this is unjust. These are the things that I can do to navigate this injustice. Or I'm feeling angry because I'm super tired and feeling disrespected. So I need to reach out for some support or take a nap.

Angela: Right?

Jessica: That's my best action point is either to eat food or take a nap.

Angela: Yes. Well, it's interesting because I always tell people there is physical fatigue, mental fatigue, emotional fatigue, decision fatigue. A lot of times when we're at that point, the school leaders give so much of themselves. They go and go and go that extra mile every single day. Teachers are doing it. All up the chain, everybody's doing this.

But you'll hit that point where you're like no one's respecting me. No one's appreciating me. I don't need external validation, but it'd be kind of nice. When you get there, I know that we've hit a fatigue wall. We just have to realize is it physical fatigue? Do you just need a nap and some food?

Is it a mental fatigue? You're making so many decisions and trying to push so hard your school forward. Or is it emotional fatigue? You're going through multiple challenging, emotionally challenging things at once. Maybe the loss of a student or a parent or a beloved teacher, and you're just emotionally fatigued.

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When you start to feel yourself shutting down or feeling somewhat dissatisfied or disgruntled yourself, that disgruntlement is not a problem. It's serving a purpose. It's there to say hey, it's okay to take a breath and ask yourself what you most need right now, to take care of you.

Jessica: Yeah.

Angela: It's a hard thing to do to give yourself the courtesy to slow down and check in with you because you feel the right thing to do, I say that in air quotes, is to always be serving in. We know intellectually we can't serve if there's nothing left to give. But we don't feel like we have the permission, either from ourselves or from the powers that be in our minds, right? The bosses, the district, whatever, people, the pressure, right? Yeah, we don't feel it's appropriate or even allowable to do that.

So in your work, you're working with teachers who are, the stress management has been coming up a lot. How do you help them? Like, what are some ways that they can identify? Because the first thing is awareness, right?

Jessica: Yeah, that's right. Okay. As you're talking, it makes me think so one of the things that you're bringing up is just how powerful curiosity can be. So when you said figuring out what is the need? That when we can tap into curiosity with some compassion, not judgmental curiosity of what's wrong with you? Really genuine what's the need here? What's going on? That is so powerful.

So there are so many little acronyms or ways you can do this that break this down. I'll tell you in *Your Amazing Brain* one of the ways that I talk about it that tends to be really helpful is just ABC. So take a quick pause, take a breath. Maybe if you're really spiraling, maybe it's leaving the room, maybe it's journaling for a minute, talking with.

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Angela: Go for a walk.

Jessica: Exactly. Move your body, right? Movement is so powerful. So a quick pause. Be curious. So notice what's happening. Oh, gosh, I was feeling this yesterday and the day before and the day before. It seems to have started when I got that news about that student.

Or it's been really hard since those two teachers left, and I'm juggling three different jobs at the same time. Or I have kids of my own that I'm trying to navigate some challenges with and do this Herculean job. Whatever it is. Be curious about what's really going on, notice the sensations in your body, feel that pit in your stomach, or whatever it is that's giving you some clues.

Then your C is to choose wisely. Choose one next step. You don't have to have it all figured out. So a lot of times that choose wisely is maybe a text to a mentor. Maybe it's okay, I haven't eaten a single green thing in a month. I probably need some nutrients in my body if I'm going to be able to function through this really stressful time.

Or wow, I've been getting five hours of sleep every night. That's just not sustainable. So maybe my wise choice is to figure out how I can bump that back an hour tonight or 15 minutes. How can I get 15 more minutes of sleep? What is that? How can you choose one next step.

Another way I think about it is with using the N's. So to notice what's going on, to name it if you can so that's a little bit higher level. Part of why I have the ABCs for kids is they can't always name the emotion. So part of building the skill is just helping them tune into what's happening in their body even if they can't name it.

But as we get to be older, we could name oh, I felt disrespected when this happened. I felt hurt. I felt lonely. I felt scared that I'm not going to get done what I need to get done. I feel overwhelmed. Whatever it is. Notice it, name

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it, normalize it. I find the word and to be super helpful. That we're not dismissing what we feel, but we're not getting stuck in what we feel.

That I'm having a hard time, and I've gotten through tough stuff before. Or I feel really sad about this, and I know I'm not alone in that. I really need to reach out to so and so, or I need to connect in this way, or I need to give myself some time to process or grieve.

Even what I'm saying right now is that fourth N. So you're going to notice, you're going to name, you're going to normalize, and then you're checking in with yourself about what is the need? Like, what do I need in this moment? Our minds can spy role in all of the things that aren't in our power, or I'll do this exercise with groups of teachers. Well, I need smaller class sizes, or I need X, Y, and Z.

So I think so. Okay, so let's break that down. Is that something that you have the power to control? Is it something you can you feel in a position to advocate for? What is your power in that situation? If you have no power in that situation, let's figure out what other needs we can meet along the way.

I need better tools then to manage the 25 kids in front of me. Yes. Okay. How are you going to build relationships with those 25 kids when you're feeling stressed, and they are dysregulated? How can I help you get the most bang for your buck by adding in a little playfulness or by systematizing some something, or with some self-compassion, or teaching kids about their brain so that you have a shared language that you guys can work to regulate better? Right?

So really narrowing in on noticing what's happening, naming it, normalizing it often with those and statements, and then checking in with what is the need? What's really going on that you have the power to impact? You'll be amazed at what you actually have the power to impact even when you're feeling in overload.

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Angela: Yeah, oh, my gosh. This is so good. I feel we could talk on and on about this. The one thing I just wanted to say we're teaching the same thing on just different levels and different ways. I think that's why you and I just geek out all the time.

But really, what it comes down to, this is what I've noticed is that breaking into conversations around emotion is the hardest part. There's a threshold there yet because we're so afraid of them. Because it's been labeled right, wrong, good, bad, acceptable, not acceptable. Like, women don't feel these fields or women shouldn't be this way, or men shouldn't cry. It's like we have all these gender roles, stereotypes, weak, strong.

There's so much language. There's so many just stories that we've created around what emotions are and what they're not. They're very powerful stories. If we can start the conversation by every human on the planet, they're not exempt from any emotion. There is nobody on the planet who is exempt from feeling all of the feelings. We've just been taught to kind of avoid or push down some of it. They're still inside of you. We're just avoiding them or resisting them.

But bringing them to the surface does not make them worse. It doesn't make you a bad person. I think talking about the fear of even addressing emotions and having conversations around emotions in our schools as the norm, whether that's at the district level, site level, school level, or classroom level. I think what you said about normalizing emotion.

It's interesting. I think we name it, we might be able to name it, but we judge it. Then we'll alter the name because we're judging the emotion. We think it's bad or wrong. We shouldn't feel a certain way. Versus validating, acknowledging that emotions are just the way the body communicates to the brain because it doesn't have language.

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My body's telling me. My internal compass is trying to get my attention and tell me something. I'm just going to listen and trust that emotion is valid. Anger, frustration, whether you feel rejected, dismissed, and just humiliated. I'm trying to think about all the really yucky ones.

Jessica: Failure.

Angela: Or that you're not enough. All those thoughts around not enough or worthiness or deservedness as a human. There are people out in the world who can help you if you do need like somatic therapy, if you need trauma therapy. There's people who do cognitive therapy as well. So you can release and express emotion one of two ways, through mindset work or through body work. There's people who do those different things.

So if you're listening and you need that support, I can put some resources in the links. But you can definitely reach out to Jessica for this work she's doing with teachers and students. You can reach out to me if you need leadership support. But there are other resources available out there.

I just think the fact that we're able to have this conversation about emotions in our schools, and you're out there doing it, I'm out there doing it, tells me we're ready for it in the industry.

Jessica: Yeah.

Angela: That once we start to crack this open a little bit, the relief that's on the other side of education, of educators and school leadership, is going to be so tremendous because we can stop fight. There's an internal war. Then we feel we have to put up our walls, our barriers, and have this exterior because we feel everything's coming at us, and we can't crack. But the crack isn't the problem at all.

Jessica: That's right.

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Angela: Actually opening that up just let those old wounds heal. It brings up a stronger, wiser, more knowledgeable, more open experience for the leader, the teacher, and the student.

Jessica: Yeah, I agree. I agree. I think talking about emotion is so vulnerable. So I think that's where having support around finding safe ways to do it, finding supportive ways that everyone's voice matters, and all of those pieces is so important. Because you're right. Otherwise, we stay in this sort of activated fight/flight state that's not doing anyone any good, including the person who's in that state.

There's a protectiveness to it. There's a reason that that we sort of go into that state. That makes sense. So that's where I find the compassion for self, compassion for others to be so powerful. Because there's a reason you have your wall up, and that's not the end of the story, right? You can be the boss of your brain. You can find your safe people. You can learn some ways to bolster your stress management, your self-regulation, your sources of connection so that that layer of protection doesn't have to work so hard.

Then you feel that ease, things become more hopeful, things become more connected. That's what we want. We love those light bulb moments. We love those sparks of community and safety and learning. We're all there to help kids learn. So that's where I find myself holding hope, even in the midst of things feeling really hard out there right now.

Angela: They do. Just acknowledging that. You said something about conversation around emotion is vulnerable. I think the reason that it feels vulnerable is because of the judgment we've placed on it. Because if we didn't have judge, if somebody was, think about we watch babies and toddlers, and even young children, have emotional reactions. They're having their emotional reaction with no vulnerability at all because they're not thinking about what we're thinking. They're just in the actual moment.

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Jessica: Yeah.

Angela: We've been conditioned to make it vulnerable because it's like it's inappropriate or that's not acceptable. We have these judgments around emotion. I think about grief. When my mom passed away in November of 2019, I was down for the count. Well, she died at the end of November, right around Thanksgiving. So the holidays were a wipe out for me.

But because grief is acceptable, like oh, of course she's grieving. She lost her mother. My grief, if I'm crying, or I'm upset, or I'm just in bed for the day, whatever it was just processing the grief. It was completely acceptable. I could be vulnerable in my grief with no worry that it was going to be judged.

Jessica: Yeah, that's huge.

Angela: Thinking about toddlers, they just have their moment without us judging them. We're holding space for them. Letting them have their tantrum, and then it's done and we move on. If we can normalize and rewrite the story about what emotions are and without judgment. That they're a gift as a human. That we're blessed with emotion because you can't have the best feeling ones without the hard one.

Jessica: Yeah.

Angela: Just embracing all of it. That it's okay to be mad. It's okay to be sad. It's okay to be in fear. Just communicating with that emotion openly. I think that, dropping the vulnerability story, would be just such a gift to everybody who goes to our schools.

Jessica: Yeah, I love that. It's really beautiful. Yeah.

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Angela: Yeah. So where can they find you? If they want more information, where can they find you? We're going to put all the links in the show notes. How can they connect with you?

Jessica: Yeah, well, the best place to go is bravebrains.com. You can find resource library, stuff around professional development.

Angela: That's a great website.

Jessica: Toolkits for educators, all of that stuff is there. I am on social media at Jessica Sinarski. I would love to connect there as well.

Angela: Awesome. Thank you so much for your time today. I really appreciate it. I know you have an event tonight. So I don't want to keep you, but I'm so glad we could connect and share this with our leaders. Leaders if there's anything you walk away with this, I just want you to consider that conversation around emotion, it doesn't have to be such a heavy topic. It can be light hearted and fun.

We can just delight in knowing every person in that room has had the same experience. We can actually use emotional experiences to connect with one another and relate to one another. Being able to do so with some fun and levity, I think, just makes the conversation that much easier.

Jessica: Absolutely. Yeah. I love that.

Angela: Awesome. Awesome. Thank you, Jessica. Thanks for being on the podcast, and I look forward to working with you again in the future.

Jessica: Me too. Thanks, Angela.

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Angela: All right, take good care, everybody. We'll talk to you guys next week. Bye.

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