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CORWIN

# CHAPTER 1

## HOPE MAKERS

**P**eople are born with hope. The moment your eyes open to this great big world, life takes hold. As young children, we seek to discover the world's secrets. We push ourselves to learn and master its wonders. Curiosity controls our days. Then it starts to become messy. Maybe, for you, it was when your cat ran away, or perhaps it hit you when a beloved family member died, or you felt it when you lost your best friend: pain. This is life too, after all, and this is hard.

Eventually, life is no longer simple. Some days are blue skies and others rain. On most days the clouds of sadness can be kept at bay, but sometimes they leak in and take the form of tears on your paper.

Will hope prevail? For one of my former students, it almost ran out.

I remember the moment vividly. It was a late Friday evening. I told my husband it would only be a few minutes until we could leave to go out, and he rolled his eyes. I just needed to write one quick school e-mail to start the weekend. I never wrote that e-mail. When I opened my inbox, a subject line stood out in bold. It merely said "bye." It was from a current student. Curious, I got sidetracked and opened the e-mail. It started with words that are forever etched in my brain: "I am completely broken." Various lines jumped out to me from the computer screen. I read with more worry and alarm. "I know you care, but no one wants to talk to me or help me. I just can't keep going on. People bully me and look at me weird. I feel so bad. I'm sorry. Goodbye."

I sat in shock for a minute, and then my brain went into action. I'd had no idea that this student was suffering. I felt overwhelmed, helpless, and desperate, all in one instant. Quickly I called the principal and school counselor for guidance. They took over. Phone calls were made. A crisis was averted, but it left me drained and empty.

How could I teach a kid every day, connect with that kid, and not once see this pain? Could this moment have been averted? School counselors and psychologists are equipped for these moments, but could I have provided tools and support for mental wellness in the classroom? The thoughts nagged at me.

School counselors and psychologists typically have hundreds to thousands of students on their caseload. The school counselor also didn't know about this moment until I did. She was running ragged, helping kids. There had to be something that could be done. Some intermediary that could help improve the well-being of the students and school staff.

How could the student have lost hope? In the question stood the answer: hope.

## HOPE

We hear people use the term *hope* every day. But what exactly is it? People use it in daily conversations: "I hope I get this job." "I hope tomorrow's better." "I hope I win." The word *hope* has developed a vague definition. It intermixes wishful thinking and a bit of luck. It hints that something will take place magically, without effort. In this definition of *hope*, a passive bystander waits for an outcome to appear. Many people are unaware of the power behind this small four-letter word.

According to science, the hope you have inside and the hope mentioned in this book is an active force that plays a pivotal role in a person's life and future success. Psychological hope aids a person's cognition by providing goals, pathways, and agency to achieve outcomes. Dr. Charles R. Snyder, a psychologist and pioneer on hope research from the University of Kansas, says, "Hope is a positive cognitive state based on a sense of successful goal-directed determination and planning to meet these goals."<sup>1</sup> Hope is not an obscure concept with a vague definition; it is a powerful, scientifically quantifiable force that drives a person to positive life outcomes.

Hope has been proven to help a person achieve goals, increase positive life outcomes, aid in academic achievement and educational attainment, and contribute to a person's personal and psychological health. Even in the face of difficult life circumstances, hope allows a person to conceive of and aim for a different future. It is a powerful force. It gives a person a pathway to reach the potential they have inside. Hope helps us endure. Hope helps us thrive.

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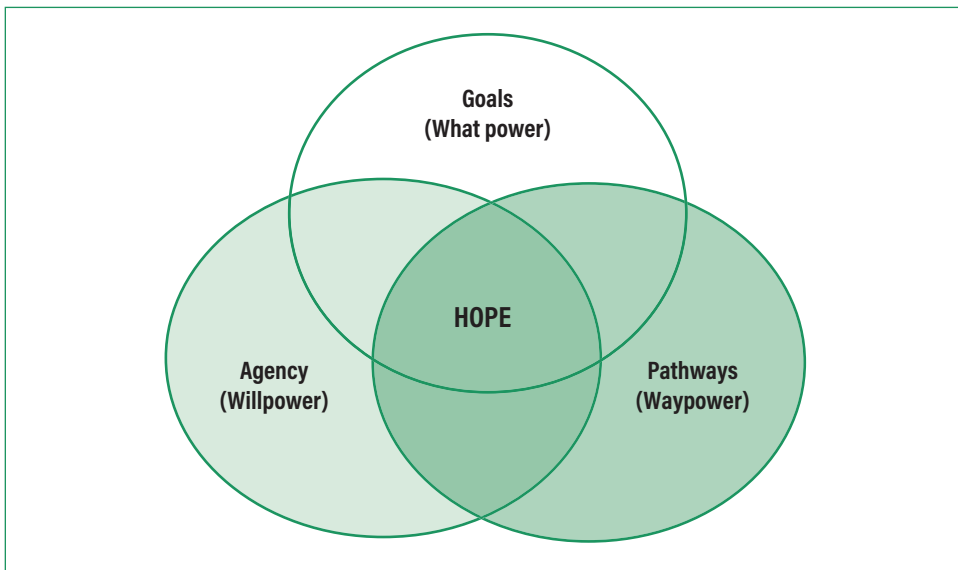
The studies on hope and its impact are numerous. Psychologists have researched how to test it, strengthen it, and nurture it. They've discovered that those with high hope scores tend to be more resilient and have higher life satisfaction levels

regardless of family background, socioeconomic status, or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Hope is an equal opportunity asset all people can access. It's a powerful cognitive asset that could help schools improve academic achievement, motivate and assist our most vulnerable students, and provide a protective buffer against psychological stress and trauma.

So how is hope created? Three primary components work together to form hope: goals, agency, and pathways. Hope becomes a way of thinking that we utilize in every aspect of our life. It impacts whether we set easy or hard goals, if we can find ways to solve problems, and if we have the will to even try. Hope can be strengthened or weakened through various practices, relationships, and experiences. The people we interact with and the things we face teach us to hope or give up.

**Three primary components work together to form hope: goals, agency, and pathways.**

**FIGURE 1.1 HOPE**



SOURCE: Adapted from Snyder, C. (2002). Hope theory: Rainbows in the mind. *Psychological Inquiry*, 13(4), 249–275. <http://jstor.org/stable/1448867>

With so many positive results linked to it, we need to start interweaving psychological hope into school. People need hope because reality can be dark. Sometimes moments can get so dark that hope dims and fights to go on. My student faced a moment of darkness, and the reality is she isn't alone.

## THE REALITY

According to health insurance data from forty-one million health records,<sup>2</sup> “Major depression is on the rise among Americans from all age groups but is rising fastest among teens and young adults.” This statistic has a significant impact on hope because hope negatively correlates to depression. As one rises, the other falls. It seems the average person is losing hope. What could be causing this, and how can we stop it?

First, we need to look at neurobiology. Your brain has safety mechanisms to remember danger to keep you safe.<sup>3</sup> In the days of our early ancestors, remembering that you nearly drowned in a lake might make you walk a dryer, safer path. That trauma was a guidepost in your mind to keep destruction away. Remembering and reliving minor pain kept you in balance. It wasn’t around all the time and served a purpose.

Fast forward to today. That same brain that remembers pain and reacts with fight, flight, or freeze is thrown into modern society, constantly connected to the happenings of the world. The news and Internet broadcast famine, destruction, and pain. Broadcasters choose to show the tragedies. Fire down the street? Buy an extinguisher. Robbery down the road? Lock your doors. The world is doing you a service by highlighting everyday problems. You see the pain and therefore avoid it. However, how can you avoid it if it’s everywhere? What if that same lake that nearly drowned your early ancestor surrounded him? He had to see it every day, every second, and out of nowhere, the lake would pop back up. What would happen?

Every day more teachers, students, and staff are walking into school buildings with larger problems. In a nation of vast resources, thirty-seven million people are going hungry (eleven million children),<sup>4</sup> 553,000 are homeless,<sup>5</sup> and more than 10 percent lives in poverty.<sup>6</sup> On top of that, add in trauma. According to *Psychology Today*, trauma is defined as an “emotional response to an event or an experience that is deeply distressing or disturbing.”<sup>7</sup> So, while witnessing the world’s problems, many people are also forced to face everyday traumas that can befall them due to divorce, death, addiction, abuse, and neglect, to name some sources.

**Trauma is defined as an “emotional response to an event or an experience that is deeply distressing or disturbing.”**

To protect us, our brains and bodies are built to adapt to trauma and change. Over a short period, those adaptations might be helpful to get a person through a tough moment. However, those adaptations can negatively impact a person’s quality of life and health over the long term. Various forms of physical and emotional abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction that occur before age eighteen are classified as ACEs. The category was later expanded beyond the

original scale to include forms of oppression and environmental determinants of health. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) discovered a direct link between ACEs and risky health behaviors, chronic health conditions, low life potential, and early death. ACEs are common among people.<sup>8</sup> According to the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) in 2018, "Almost half of the nation's children have experienced one or more types of serious childhood trauma."<sup>9</sup> So, in an average class of twenty-eight kids, fourteen of them have experienced trauma. It's not just *some* kids who experience trauma, *it's most* kids.

**According to the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) in 2018, "Almost half of the nation's children have experienced one or more types of serious childhood trauma."**

That average can increase drastically with natural disasters, environmental factors, and global catastrophes. For example, the global pandemic of COVID-19 has caused more children to experience trauma due to families losing jobs and income, quarantining and isolation, and a fear of leaving home due to the threat of illness. As the number of ACEs increases, so does the risk for negative life repercussions. The biggest problem is that if a person's mental health isn't addressed, the toxic stress that develops from ACEs can change the human brain.

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The human brain is highly malleable. It adapts and changes as a result of our interactions with our environment. Neuroplasticity starts when our brain begins to develop; cells come together and reorganize in response to the body's changing needs. The brain continues adapting and evolving through our entire lives until the day we die.<sup>10</sup> Neuroplasticity is the reason the early ancestor from above, who nearly drowned in the lake, developed an aversion to water. His brain adapted and created pathways to fear water.

Neuroplasticity is also a reason to have hope. The brain can adapt and change to new positive stimuli just as readily as it adapts to negative stimuli. The man with the fear of water can also conquer that fear. Our brains are not set in stone. There is hope that the brain can overcome past traumatic events that evoke anxiety and stress. However, it won't be easy. Having stress pathways in the brain constantly on high alert from trauma leads to anxiety and impaired learning and memory. Your brain adapts to prolonged trauma with decreased gray matter in the prefrontal cortex and increased amygdala volume to make you hypervigilant, which reduces attention control.<sup>11</sup> Basically, a person who is used to being unsafe is continuously on the lookout for the next hazardous moment. A person can't concentrate on learning when perpetually on the lookout for pain.

That overwhelming feeling is similar to getting struck by a wave in the ocean. It sucks you under, but you push to the surface, catch your breath, and adapt. A wave in the sea isn't so bad until it becomes wave after wave after wave. Teachers must gain practices to help relieve trauma so they can free students to concentrate and grow. If a teacher's job is to help students learn, it's vital to recognize that trauma can hinder learning during even the greatest lesson.

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Sometimes we want to dive in to rescue those we see in pain. Caregivers of people in trauma have the potential to develop vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue from trying to help those stuck in the deep waters of despair. You jump in to save someone but wind up stuck and need to save yourself. You try to help, but while pouring out compassion for the trauma of children, co-workers, or staff, you can become drained and overwhelmed. It can even cause you to feel depressed. You cannot pour from an empty cup, but you keep trying.

Most of us have learned to insulate ourselves against the hurts of the world. This armor is for protection. It keeps the pain away and our feelings in check. It's better to feel nothing than be overwhelmed, right? It keeps the world out. When we feel weak, we go to our armor for strength. Pain bounces off the armor like rain hitting a windshield. It puts a barrier between knowing a person and caring for them. We choose to save ourselves because there seems to be no other way.

Armor creates a divide. It's great for protecting feelings, but those with trauma don't have the luxury of turning their back on what they've experienced. Surrounded by trauma, they feel and react. They don't have the privilege of choosing to look away. We offer armor as a coping mechanism, but full protection does not exist. People who experience trauma can't protect themselves from their reality. The sad thing is choosing to look away from the pain causes us to miss something important—genuinely seeing and understanding a person.

The good news is there is a key to countering trauma: hope. Hope is not a fixed quantity, and with a mix of positive psychology, social-emotional learning (SEL), and trauma-informed practices, we can provide it to others. We can shed our armor, balance our cup of caring, and do more with what we have. We have the ability to change the world. We have the ability to help. We can create school cultures and classrooms of hope. And it starts with you.

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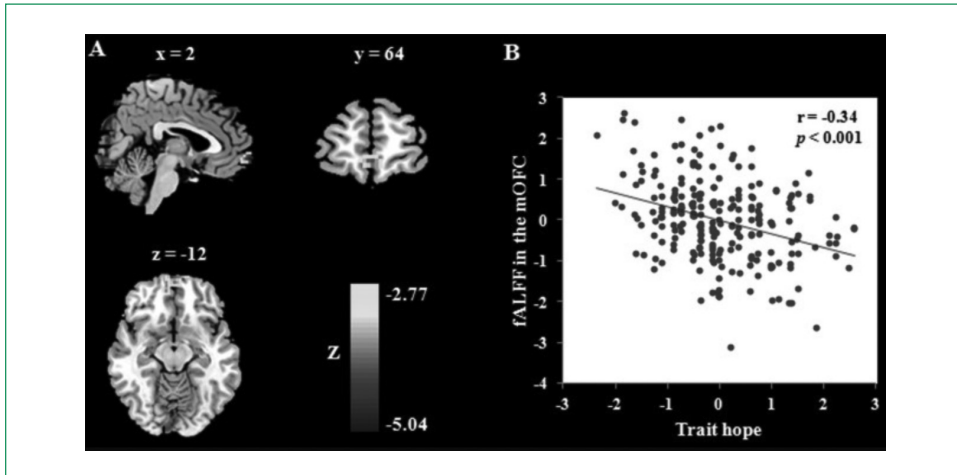
## WHY HOPE?

Hope gives us something to live for. It's necessary for dealing with problems and failures and gives us motivation to keep going in the face of obstacles. It helps us get back up when we get knocked down. The smallest seed of hope can keep us moving even in the darkest situation. The belief that a brighter moment exists right around the corner edges us just to keep going. Hope creates resilience.

Resilience has been documented in fMRI studies of the brain. Hope can be seen and felt. A neuroimaging research study on adolescent brains from 2017 revealed hope exists and impacts the medial orbitofrontal cortex. The medial orbitofrontal cortex is where our reward-related processing, motivation production, problem-solving, and goal-directed behaviors live. It's where we learn, grow, and plan for our future. The researchers discovered that as hope goes up, the neural activity associated with anxiety goes down.

**A neuroimaging research study on adolescent brains from 2017 revealed hope exists and impacts the medial orbitofrontal cortex.**

**FIGURE 1.2 HOPE IN THE BRAIN**



**SOURCE:** Wang, S., Xu, X., Zhou, M., Chen, T., Yang, X., Chen, G., & Gong, Q. (2017). Hope and the brain: Trait hope mediates the protective role of medial orbitofrontal cortex spontaneous activity against anxiety. *NeuroImage*, 157, 439–447. <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1016/j.neuroimage.2017.05.056>

### What Does This Mean?

Hope can't take away the pain or fix your problems, but these results show hope works to help us think critically and keep going despite the anxiety or stress we



face. Hope helps us bounce back, supporting the brain to form new neural pathways and learn new ways of thinking even amid difficulties. The brain can do its job and think so we can do our jobs and teach.

Hope fosters resilience, which helps students face problems and bounce back throughout their lives. Hope breeds happier, more successful, and healthier people who can face adversity and overcome it. Our children deserve success, happiness, and overall wellness. Hope starts with positive attachments. The relationships you build make all the difference in the world.

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## ISOLATION AND ATTACHMENT

Relationships matter more today than ever because the modern world can be very isolating. You can go through an entire day and never speak to a person. Need to talk to a friend? Send a text. Need groceries? Get them delivered to your door. Need to work on a project with a group? Meet on Google and work on the document at the same time. We can connect instantly but go through the whole day without one human touch, spoken word, or smile.

Through screens and filters, people don't always notice the tear in the corner of a person's eye or the face that winces in pain. Even if they do, they may ignore it because it's hard to look suffering in the face. It's one of the reasons we run from vulnerability. Pain. Is. Hard. We may look at each other, but we don't *see* each other. You can change that.

School is one of the few places people still have the chance to connect. You can show people they matter. Students and staff cannot do effective work if they don't feel safe, known, and cared for within their schools. We can give compassion and provide meaningful connections.

When you take the time to gain tools to interact and connect, it matters. Positive school connections create positive school culture. When you are intentional with meeting people where they are, you give them a chance to grow.

**Positive school connections create positive school culture.**

I got into education to make a difference and inspire others to greatness. That starts with hope. Today more than ever, people need hope. Through the strategies, tools, and resources provided in this book, you will gain new ways to foster hope and lead people to a more positive outlook.

## CONNECTIONS OF HOPE

Why does a positive outlook matter? Because our views either become ladders to more extraordinary things or walls of limitation. When people go through pain or trauma, they build walls, which don't allow others in and keep a person isolated from the world, much like armor. It's a natural human reaction. The early man who nearly drowned in the water built a wall to avoid all things wet. He did this to protect himself from getting hurt again. A wall of fear hinders him from seeing the good side of water. He no longer trusts water. Avoiding the water keeps him safe but limits him from leading a full life.

**When people go through pain or trauma, they build walls, which don't allow others in and keep a person isolated from the world, much like armor.**

People who have experienced trauma lower their trust in the world.<sup>12</sup> A person who lacks trust is going to have trouble building relationships and facing fears. By following a path of trauma-informed practices centered around building hope that we will explore in the following chapters, you will gain a map of understanding to dismantle barriers of fear. With the help of a trusted person, the early man might have had the courage to walk near the water. Perhaps he would even have had the gusto to learn to swim. Providing that bond can give someone a chance to envision a brighter future.

The most exciting news? The relationships you form and the practices you employ can change the weighted impact of trauma.<sup>13</sup> Imagine a two-sided scale with trauma on one side and relationships, hope, resiliency, and coping skills on the other side. As we fill up the positive side of the scale, the weight of trauma becomes less. That's why two people can go through the same traumatic situation and have entirely different reactions. It all depends on how much positive weight a person has when trauma occurs. As educators, we can help change the impact trauma has on others and provide a shield of hope to help others push through difficult times. The relationships we provide can go beyond nurturing and supportive, they can be transformative.

The people who are going to change the world don't need to be presidents, members of the United Nations, or diplomats. It can start simply with us, one person at a time. Let's start this journey of possibilities together. Together we can create a movement to put well-being in front of test scores, caring in front of curriculum, and show the world the most important lesson: that we exist to help and care for each other.

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This book is organized into four sections that break down resources to help schools foster hope. The four main sections spell out HOPE to make them easy to remember (healing, overcoming, planning, and energizing).

Section one, “Healing,” contains ways to help people with hurts and trauma. Section two, “Overcoming,” deals with resources and tools used in positive psychology to support budding hope and counteract maladaptive thinking processes that hold a person back. The third section, “Planning,” deals with fostering resiliency through practices that develop problem-solving skills and ways to face trials and problems. The last section, “Energizing,” focuses on tools to grow internal motivation and a person’s drive to succeed. Every chapter ends with a “Compassion for Colleagues” section that addresses how to use tools presented in the chapter to support staff members and foster school cultures of hope.

Throughout the chapters I have added section stops to allow you to process information and develop ways to apply what you learn. My hope is that you continue your thinking with colleagues, both in person and online (using the hashtag #HOPEforEdu). Your voice, thoughts, and ideas are essential in this discussion. We can create lasting change because none of us can do what all of us can do. It is not enough for a single educator to nurture hope in our students. We need to build entire school communities that work together to ensure all students thrive and utilize hope to promote purpose and self-worth. This should be done not only for the children, but also for the teachers, service providers, and administrators who serve them. A school of hope.

As Aristotle once said, “Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.”



# HEART TO HEART

## QUESTIONS AND IDEAS FOR ACTION

*Reflect, discuss with a group, or share your thoughts on social media using the book's hashtag, #HOPEforEdu.*

### Questions

1. How does the rise in depression for teens and young adults relate to anything you have discovered or noticed in your own profession, organization, or community?
2. What do the findings on how ACEs and trauma impact the brain mean to your profession, organization, or community? How does this information impact the day-to-day in the classroom?
3. Relationships can change the weighted impact of trauma. Give an example from your own life when a relationship truly helped you or someone you know through a tough moment or traumatic event. How did that relationship impact the person?
4. It's hard to justify working on mental wellness in school because it's not part of the curriculum. How would you defend using time, energy, and school resources to increase mental wellness for students and staff?

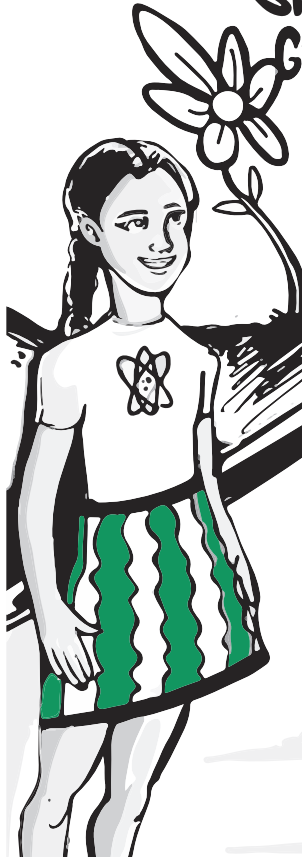
### Ideas for Action

- Be intentional and expose yourself to the needs, problems, strengths, and assets in your community. The community is the backbone of every school. Getting to know the weaknesses, strengths, and people who make up the community gives you insight into the backstories of students and staff.
- Schedule time to talk with someone you feel is making a positive difference in the well-being of others. Ask them what keeps them going on tough days. What tools do they use? How do they help others when they are experiencing trauma?
- There are numerous stories of how a teacher sparked hope and transformation for a student despite the challenges the student was facing. Either recall an instance from your career in education where you spurred hope and transformation for a student or look up a story where another teacher made a difference. What did you or the teacher in the story do that helped students flourish?

# COPING:

STRATEGIES TO FILL  
IN THE G.A.P.  
GROUNDING  
ANALYZING  
PROGRESS BUILDING

STAY  
GROUNDED



## BUILDING SAFETY WITH THE THREE C'S

CONSISTENCY — CARE  
COMMUNICATION



## CONNECTIONS

- BUILDING POSITIVE  
RELATIONSHIPS AND  
BUILDING TRUST
- ASSET BASED  
TEACHING
- STRENGTHS FOR  
STRUGGLES
- RESTORATIVE  
REINTEGRATION

