



# ***Bridging Invisible Barriers***

***Empowering Resiliency for English Learners Experiencing Homelessness***

Presented by:  
Dr. Naomi Cortez

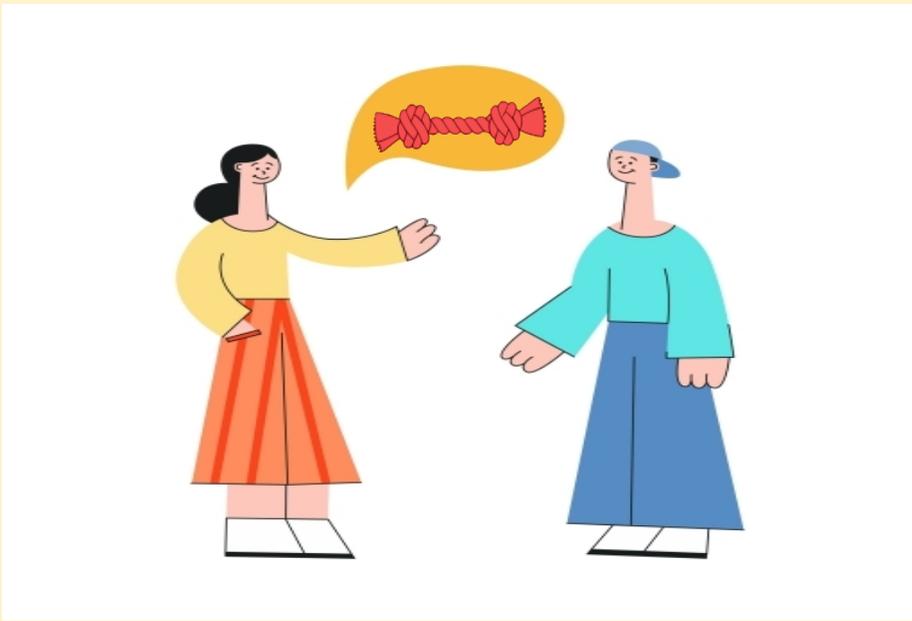


# THE ELEPHANT ROPE



# Reflection: What Rope Exists in Your System?

Identify one barrier



❖ Discuss with your table

❖ Any ropes that exist at your sites?

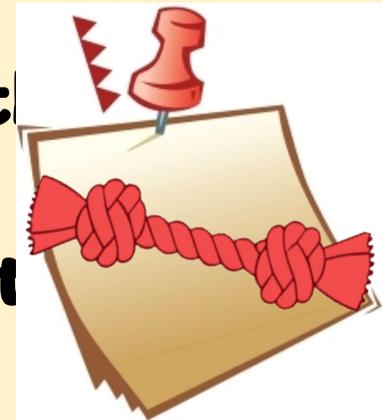
- Mindset
- Practice
- System

# Reflection:

## Now it is your turn

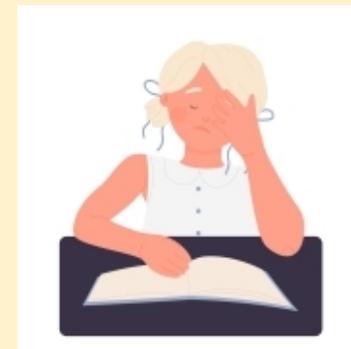
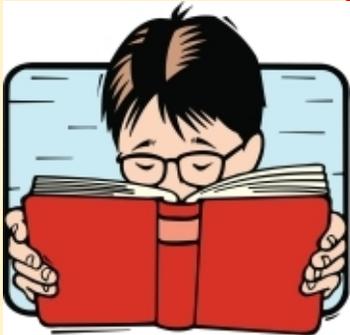
Identify one barrier that you experienced or currently experience that may prevent you from growing professionally, personally or spiritually?

- ❖ **Write your barrier/rope on the sticky note**
- ❖ **Share your barrier or a barrier you see with your students.**
- ❖ **Look at the responses. Did any resonate with you?**
- ❖ **Would you like to share your rope?**
- ❖ **Think of the action you will take to knock down that barrier.**



# 1.2 Million

**Students experiencing homelessness in U.S. schools each year.**



# 270,000

**Students experiencing homelessness in California.**

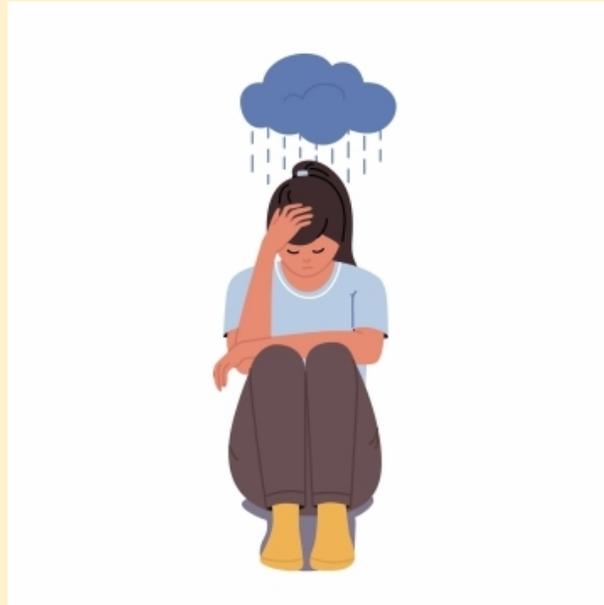
## 245 Schools



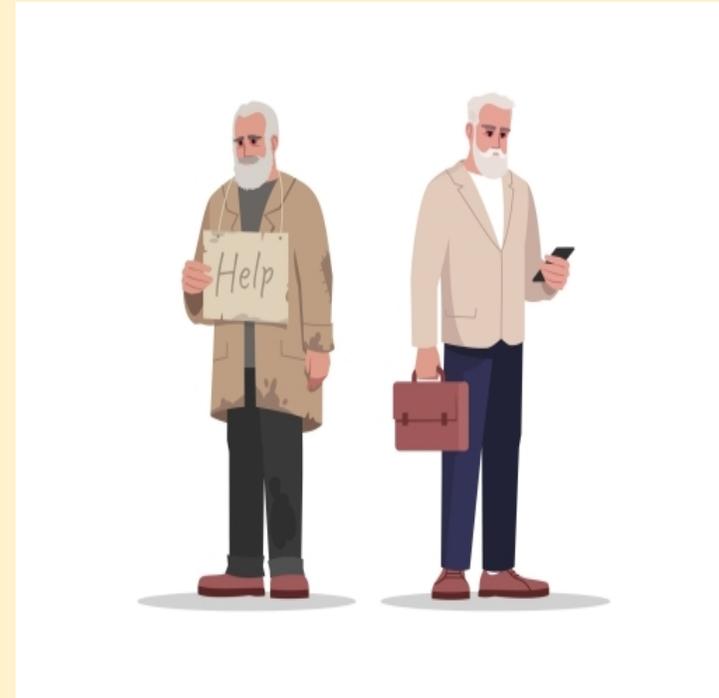
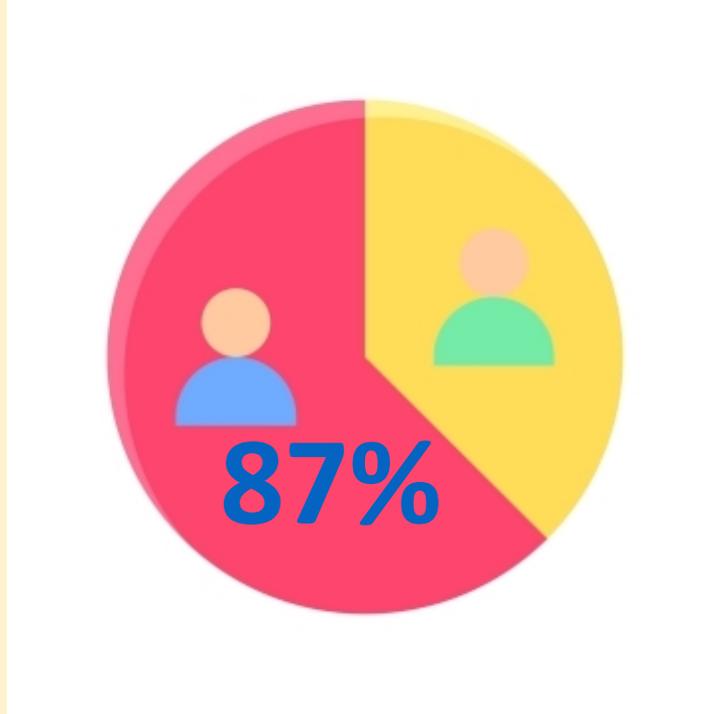
## 12,272 classrooms



**Students experiencing homelessness change schools 3-6 times more often.**



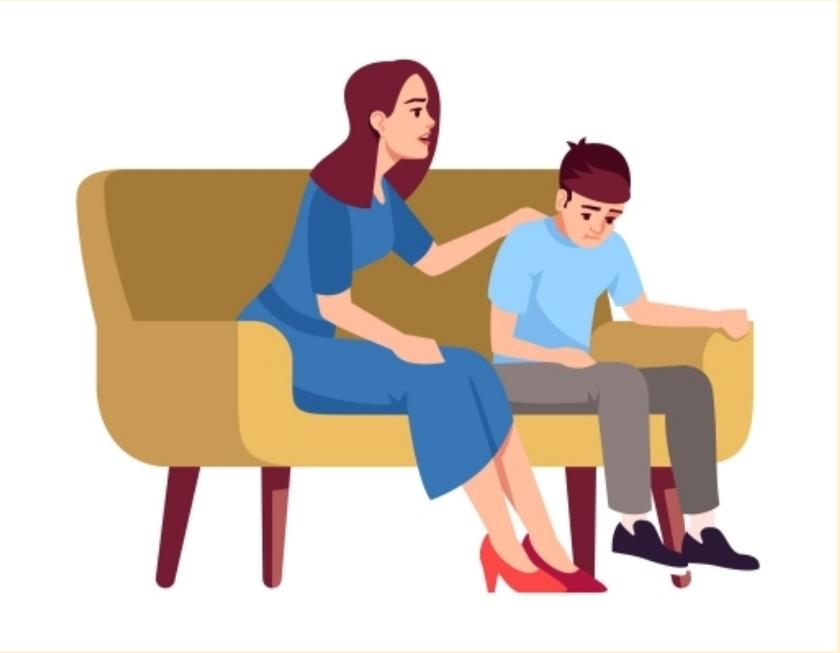
# Higher likelihood of dropping out.



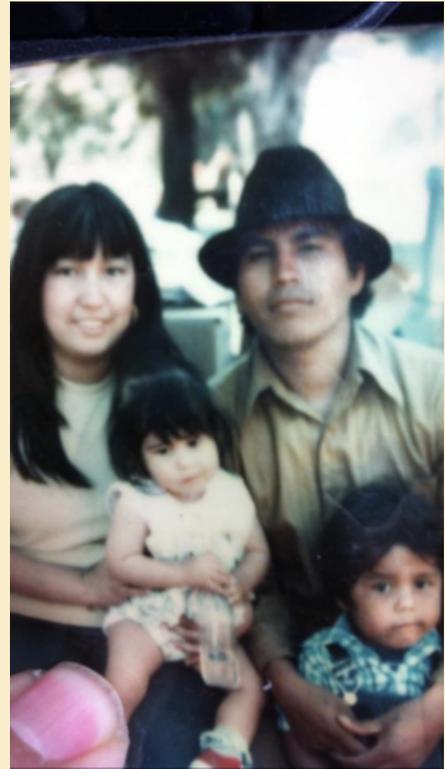
**One caring adult**

**can change a**

**life.**



# A Students Story



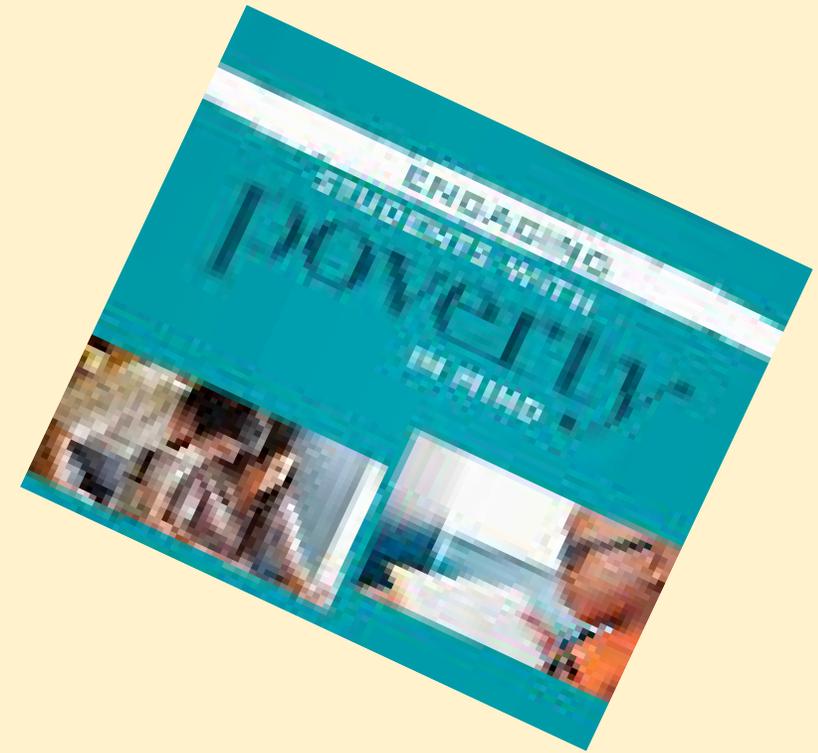
**When we understand the  
scale of the challenge...the  
next question becomes:**

**What is happening inside the  
brain of a child navigating  
this level of stress?**



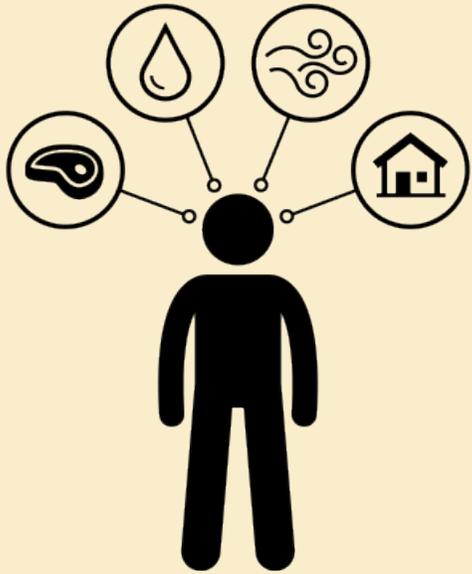
# The Neuroscience of Poverty (Eric Jensen)

- Acute stress and Chronic stress impacts brain development
  - Survival brain
  - Executive function and language

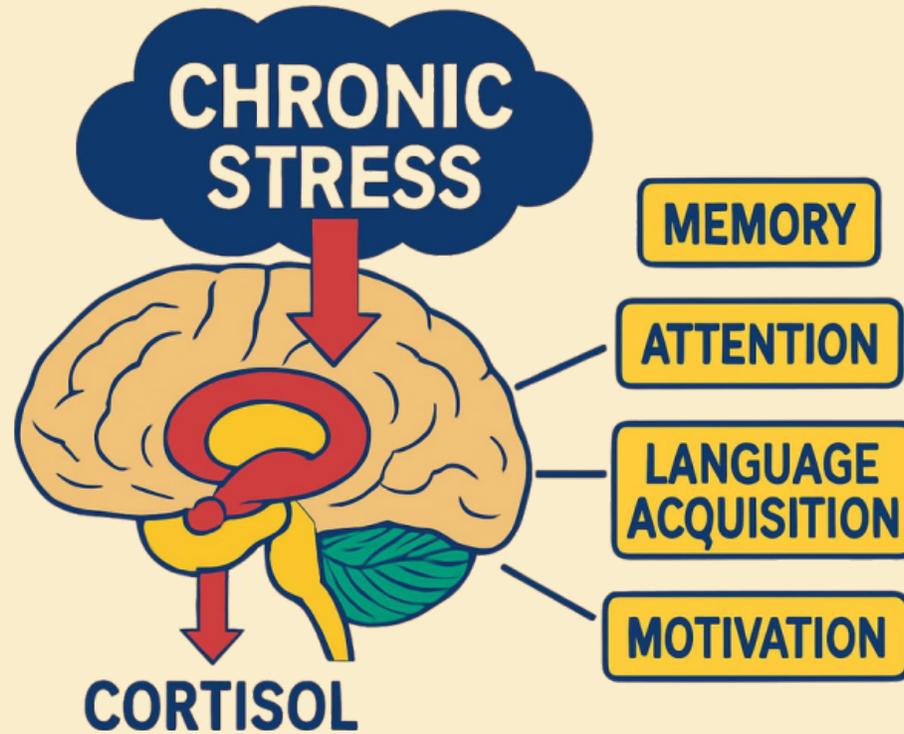


# The Brain on Poverty & Trauma

Eric Jensen



Survival



Behavior is not defiance; it is **communication**.



# The BRIDGE Model

**B- Build Trust** Trauma-Informed Communication

**R- Respond** Cultural Humility

**I- Identify** Strengths, Not Deficits

**D- Design** Collaborative Supports

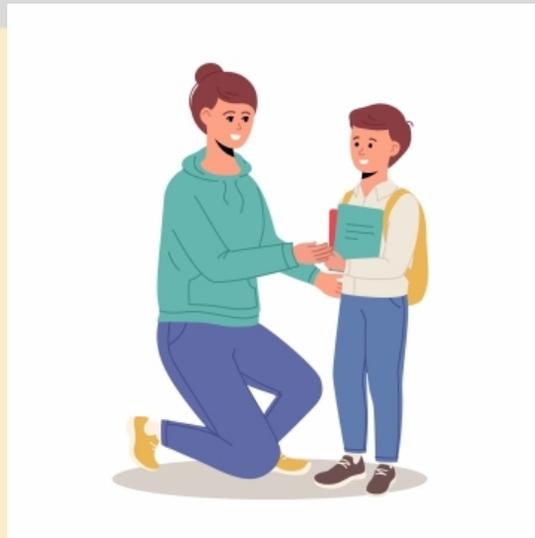
**G- Grow** Resiliency Through Relationships

**E- Empower** Student and Family Voice



# Build Trust

## Trauma-Informed Communication



# 2x10 Strategy:

## Getting to Know Your Students



Spend **2 minutes** a day for **10 days** in a row getting to know your student.

### Build Positive Connections



Show genuine interest & listen.

### Ask Open-Ended Questions



What are your hobbies?  
What's your favorite book?  
Tell me about your weekend...

### Find the Right Moment



Hallways, before class, recess, etc.

### Be Consistent



Stick with it for the full 10 days.

### Benefits of the 2x10 Strategy



Builds Trust & Rapport



Improves Student Behavior



Enhances Classroom Climate

A small effort can make a big impact!

# 2x10 Strategy

## for 6th-12th Educators



Spend **2 minutes** a day for **10 days** in a row getting to know your students.

### Core Concept



2 minutes per day



10 consecutive days



Personal connection

### Implementation Steps

- Be Reflective...
- Conversation Topics...
- After 10-Day Review

### Planning



Target struggling or apathetic students



Timing: best fit for your schedule



Goal: Create positive relationships

### Key Competencies

- Active listening skills
- Empathy
- Consistency & Follow-through

### Benefits



Improves Behavior



Builds Trust



Reduces Conflicts

### Post-Results Reflection

- Assess student responses
- Refine skills for perception & future strategies



Make a Meaningful Impact!



# Respond

## Cultural Humility



## Cultural Competence

- Attitude: feeling as if you know everything there is to know.
- Knowing the background of cultures.
- Knowing a culture's values.
- Objective set of best practices and facts.
- Self-awareness.
- More knowledge = more competent.

Working collaboratively

Addressing inequalities

Recognising individual life experiences

Working with difference

## Cultural Humility

- Attitude: being vulnerable, humble, knowing you do not have all the answers.
- Lifelong learning, understanding, curiosity.
- Critical self-reflection and education.
- Intrapersonal and interpersonal approach.
- Empathy, compassion, equality.
- Reducing power imbalances.



# Identify

**Strengths, Not Deficits**



### Reframing Language

Instead of saying.....	Try saying.....
"Homeless student with many issues"	"Student experiencing homelessness who shows resilience"
"Low English Proficiency"	"Emerging bilingual learner"
"Family lacks resources"	"Family navigating significant challenges with strengths"
"Student can't focus"	"Student benefits from supportive routines"
<b>Language matters because deficit labels shape expectations and limit opportunities for students.</b>	

### The SPOT Framework Strength-Based Practices for Students

<b>S- Strength Observation</b>	Look intentionally for student strengths in classrooms, hallways, and activities.
<b>P- Progress Over Perfection</b>	Encourage growth and improvement rather than perfection.
<b>O- Opportunity to Shine</b>	Create multiple chances for students to demonstrate their talents and strengths
<b>T- Teach, Try, Tap Strengths</b>	Teach students to name their strengths, try them in new ways, and collaborate with peers
<b><u>Teacher Strategies</u></b>	<b><u>Student Reflection Prompts</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share strengths you observe with students.</li> <li>• Encourage reflection: What are you good at? What do you love doing?</li> <li>• Use the power of 'yet' to build a growth mindset.</li> <li>• Provide multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery.</li> <li>• Encourage students to use their strengths to help classmates.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What activities make you lose track of time?</li> <li>• What strengths do your friends or teachers notice in you?</li> <li>• When do you feel proud of your work?</li> <li>• How could you use one of your strengths to help someone else?</li> </ul>



# Design

## Collaborative Supports





# Simi Valley Unified School District

From Here to Anywhere

## McKinney-Vento & Foster Resources & Communication



Support ALL students in becoming the best potential version of themselves.

March 2026

Please post the [dinner site calendar](#) and share it with families in need at your site.

### District Foster & McKinney-Vento Support Contact Information:

Dr. Naomi Cortez,  
Coordinator of Learning for Diverse Populations  
[naomi.cortez@simivalleyusd.org](mailto:naomi.cortez@simivalleyusd.org)  
T: 805-306-4500 ext. 4209

Tammy White, Administrative Assistant of Learning  
for Diverse Populations,  
[tammy.white@simivalleyusd.org](mailto:tammy.white@simivalleyusd.org)  
T: 805-306-4500 ext. 4222

★ [Resources for District Liaisons and School Staff \(link\)](#)

### District McKinney-Vento & Foster Students #s

### Action Items

- ★ **Spring Break Planning & Outreach:** Prior to spring break, check in with families and unaccompanied homeless youth to confirm plans for housing and food while school is closed. Provide referrals and connect families to community resources as needed.
- ★ **Assist McKinney-Vento eligible students (high school seniors) with filling out the [FAESA application](#) or [Dream Act Application \(CADAA\)](#).**
- ★ **Attendance & Identification Review:** Review attendance data and cross-reference students with high absenteeism and those identified under McKinney-Vento.
  - For identified students, contact families to address barriers and develop attendance plans in accordance with district policy.
  - For unidentified students, check in regarding living situations, as homelessness or mobility may be impacting attendance. Identify eligible students and initiate services as needed.
- ★ **Secondary & Senior Supports:** Plan supports for high school seniors experiencing homelessness, including senior activities, transitions, and postsecondary preparation.
- ★ **Invite your families to our Foster/Homeless/DELAC meeting**
  - [Calendar](#) with Zoom link if they cannot attend in person
- ★ **Video-** Teacher and School Staff Training

- ★ Ensure that a public notice of the rights of homeless youth is posted at school sites that are visible to the public and students.

### School-Community Partnerships Toolkit [\(link\)](#) [\(New\)](#)

The California HETAC's School-Community Partnerships Toolkit aims to support schools and community agencies in building mutually beneficial, stable, and responsive partnerships that benefit both partner agencies and the children, youth, and families they serve.

### Moorpark College Raiders Central Basic Needs [\(link\)](#) [\(New\)](#)

Free food, baby supplies for student parents, mental health, hygiene, clothing, and additional resources. Information and map [\(link\)](#)

### Moorpark College EOPS Program [\(link\)](#) [\(New\)](#)

Provides special services to full-time community college students. They provide academic counseling, priority registration, book grant, meal voucher, parking permit, laptop loan, school supplies, academic success workshops, university transfer assistance, UC/CSU application fee waivers, graduation cap and gown, and so much more. See the link for eligibility.

### Moorpark CARE [\(link\)](#) [\(New\)](#)

CARE is a program for students enrolled in EOPS, single parents with at least one dependent, at least 18 years old, enrolled in a minimum of 9 units. CARE offers academic counseling, priority registration, CARE grants, meal vouchers, school supplies, field trips, and community and campus referrals.

### Moorpark College STEM Program IMPACTO [\(link\)](#) [\(New\)](#)

One-on-One Support and benefits include: earn up to \$750 each semester, paid internships, instant peer group, direct pathways to high-paying jobs, or transfer

### Moorpark College DREAMERS [\(link\)](#) [\(New\)](#)

Bilingual support to help clarify the enrollment process, assistance and referrals for the AB 540 form, CA Dream Act, counseling, and other campus services, CA Dream Act Service Incentive Grant Program (DSIG) Assistance, free confidential immigration legal services, and one-on-one support.

### Moorpark College Free Immigration Legal Services [\(link\)](#) [\(New\)](#)

Free Immigration legal services for all students, staff, and faculty. They will have access to personalized immigration legal services from highly qualified attorneys and accredited representatives in multiple languages, including English, Spanish, Mandarin, Mixteco, and more.

### Next Up: Moorpark College [\(site link\)](#) [\(flyer link\)](#) [\(New\)](#)

This program supports the academic and personal goals of current and former foster youth. To be eligible, they needed to have been in a CA foster youth program at age 13 or older, be under 26 at the start of the academic year, be enrolled in at least one unit, and be dual enrolled. ALL three community colleges have this program.

### Oxnard College Dental Clinic [\(link\)](#) [\(New\)](#)

Low-cost Dental Prophylaxis or Periodontal Maintenance, Deep Cleaning, Full Mouth X-Rays, Bitewing X-Rays, Single X-Rays, Dental Sealants.

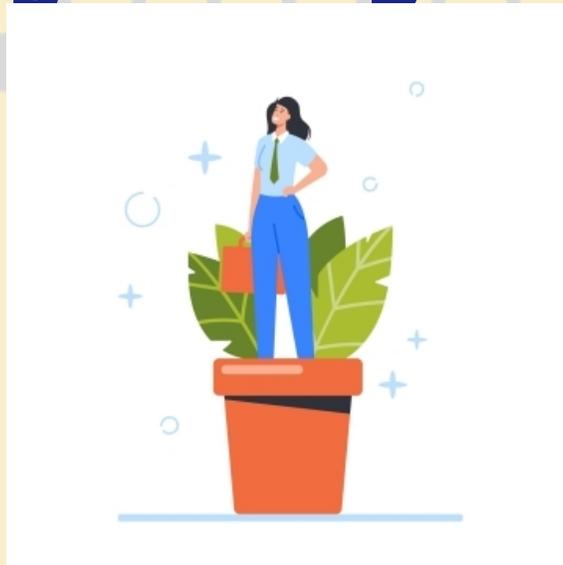
### Learning Links [\(New\)](#)

- **Article:** [In School Every Day: Addressing Chronic Absenteeism Among Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness](#)
- **Fact Sheet:** [MiKinney-Vento Act Quick Reference?](#)



# Grow

## Resiliency Through Relationships



## Question Prompts

### Interests & Hobbies

1. What are your favorite hobbies?
2. In your free time, what do you like to do?
3. Have you volunteered in your community?
4. What was the hardest part of the past week for you?
5. What is your favorite book?
6. What is your favorite TV show?
7. What is your favorite movie?
8. What is your favorite color?
9. What is your favorite food?
10. What do you like to eat for breakfast?
11. What is your favorite sport, if you have one?
12. If you could be an animal for a day, what would you be and why?
13. What kind of music do you like to listen to?

### Academic Strengths and Opportunities

#### Academic Get to Know You Questions

51. What is your favorite subject and why?
52. What is your least favorite subject and why? What is the best way I can support you when we work on that subject?
53. What is one thing you think you do well as a student?
54. What is one thing you would like to do better as a student?
55. What do you like most about school?
56. What do you like least about school?
57. What is something you would really want to learn about at school?
58. Which of the following is your favorite way to learn: by talking with others, by listening, or by reading?
59. What would be your dream field trip?
60. Would you rather do schoolwork as a group or by yourself?
61. What is the best school project or lesson you can remember?
62. What is the best way I can support you outside of class?



# Empower

## Student and Family Voice



*Full Sail Ahead: Supporting Students Navigating Smooth & Stormy Waters*

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## Parent Tips: What You'll Find in This Section



### How Schools Work

Schools in the U.S. have some things in common with schools in other countries, but other things may be very different than what you are used to. These resources provide an introduction to what you can expect as you get to know your child's school.



### Parent Tips: Back-to-School

As your child gets ready for a new school year, there are some steps you can take to help him/her get off to a great start - and to make it a little easier for you too! Here are some back-to-school ideas for parents of kids of all ages.



### Parent Tips: Homework Help

There are lots of ways to make it easier for your child to get homework done each night, even if you are unable to be there during homework time. These tips offer a variety of ideas and also describe steps you can take if your child has difficulty with homework during the school year.



### Parent Tips: Conferences

Every year, schools invite all parents to meet with teachers at parent-teacher conferences. This section provides an overview of what to expect from that meeting and examples of questions you may want to ask.



### Parent Tips: Assessment

Taking tests has always been part of going to school, but in recent years, the kinds of tests and the number of tests kids take have increased. Learn more about those changes and how you can help your child do his or her best, whether for a short spelling quiz or a longer standardized assessment.



### What You Can Do at Home

As a parent, there are many ways that you can help your child succeed every single day! Helping your child get to school on time, get enough sleep at night, and do homework will make a difference in your child's day. These tips describe many ways that you can help support that success.



### Helping Your Child Stay Healthy

Your child's health can have a big impact on his / her ability to succeed in school. If your child needs glasses, has a toothache, or isn't getting enough sleep, it will be very difficult for them to concentrate at school. Here are some tips on keeping your child healthy or seeking extra care when needed.

# The BRIDGE Model

**B- Build Trust** Trauma-Informed Communication

**R- Respond** Cultural Humility

**I- Identify** Strengths, Not Deficits

**D- Design** Collaborative Supports

**G- Grow** Resiliency Through Relationships

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# Interrupting the Stress Cycle



Connection disrupts the cycle



Relationships restores learning



# From Learned Helplessness to Learned Hope

Rewire belief systems through **consistent, relational experiences**

**Hope** is a biological intervention.



# Call to Action: Break the Rope

## Commitments:



- Write one rope you are committed to breaking
  - Mindset
  - Practice
  - System Change



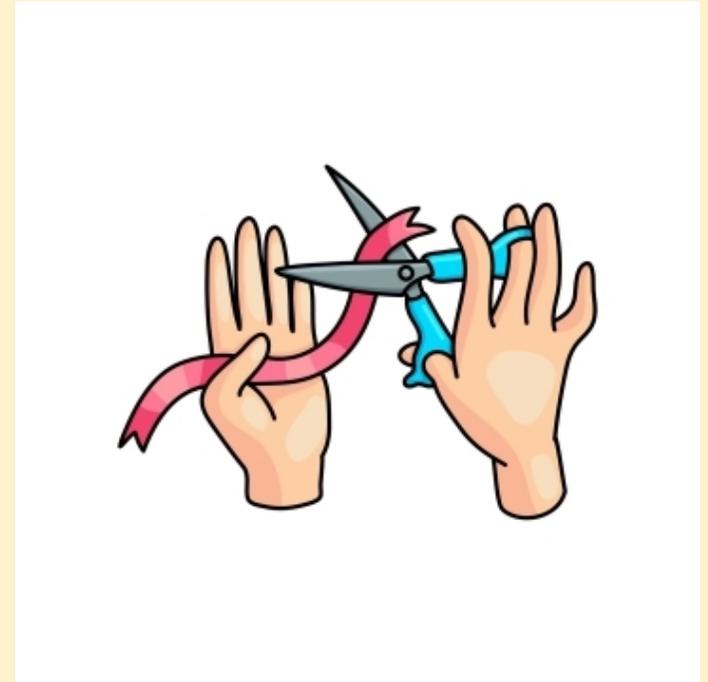
Our students don't need us to save them. They need us to **believe in their strength until they can believe in it themselves.**



# Be the Adult Who Cuts the Rope

See assets before deficits

- Respond with curiosity
- Hold expectations high with support

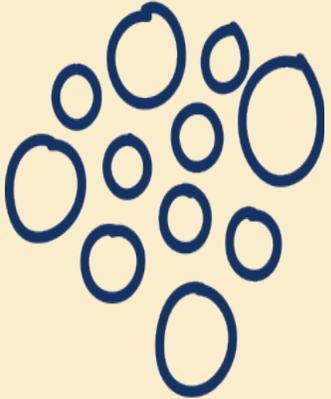


***Education is the only  
profession that impacts  
every profession.***

***We impact the world!***

- Marcia L. Tate





# ***Closing Message***

**The rope is never stronger than our belief that we can't break it.  
Thank you for being the bridge.**



# ***Resources***

## **Resources Folder**



