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Where Do You Stand?

Abandonment. Divorce. Death. Three negative, lurking, yet impacting words. There are pivotal moments enlaced in our accumulated existence that have brought us to this very moment in time. We stand here now, simply being and breathing. We stand here because of choices we have made, choices people have made for us, and events, good and bad, that have shaped us. None the less, we still stand here. The idea that we are still standing shows that we have gotten by, have persevered or achieved success in spite of it all. Obstacles or hardships are universally known in the world of education as risk factors. Risk factors are more commonly linked to fear of academic failure or drop out, which ultimately is the end of a school guided education.

Abandonment by definition is to leave completely and finally, to forsake utterly. It is that mother in panic, emotionally packing in the middle of the night and leaving only a note for her family of four that ultimately translated in their eyes as, “I did not love you enough.” It is that teacher that walks away from a difficult student and freely displays to the child that they are too far gone to be helped; a lost cause. It is the embellished synonym of alone. Children who are abandoned lack self esteem, and if at a young enough age, can drive them to having behavioral and attachment disorders. This can put a barrier up in the classroom and make building a trusting and open relationship with the teacher difficult. Instead of asking for help or applying themselves they may shut down completely and allow for them to fall behind temporarily or indefinitely.

Divorce is a prevalent risk factor that has spiked in its commonness among families. Divorce can be seen to the naked eye as negative and one dimensional, that being the break in a parental relationship causing only a negative effect. However; divorce can have positive factors and almost aid in academic achievement. This can sometimes be said if the relationship was toxic and negatively displayed to the child what a healthy, loving relationship is supposed to look like. In these instances, it was probably a good thing to remove the child from the situation prior to them displaying an unwanted learned behavior. Also, the divorce could be mature, where in fact, both parents are stable. They could both enforce and guide their parenting consistently and cohesively with one another, just choose, for the sake of their children and themselves, to not cohabitate.

Alongside positive side effects, divorce can lead children to adopt behavioral issues and rebellion that can press against the teaching philosophy of that teacher. When there is instability and constant change in a household a child may develop a lack of motivation or a negative attitude toward new material because of the new stimuli created. Also as a result of divorce a child could be asked to take on more responsibilities, such as watching siblings or getting a job to help out. This could all lead to failure to finish school work and make them fall behind, leaving them discouraged to catch up.

Last, the idea of seeing death as a risk factor. Death in the very word leaves a haunting and unsettling feeling when said out loud. It is among one of the most common fears people have because of the high anxiety that is attached to it. In retrospect, death is seen as a very high risk factor that associates with academic failure because of its permanence. Think if a primary care giver were to pass away or an influential, positive, and encouraging role model were to fall sick suddenly and leave behind that individual what would they do? There is the possibility that a home, transportation to school, or even that unspoken support would vanish completely. If children do not have a home environment or way to get to school or resources to carry on in school what are they to do? Many, if old enough, would think in survival mode and give up school to support their basic needs. If too young, foster care may be instilled but who is to say what family they will be placed into.

Though there are high academic failure and dropout rates that are attached to risk factors, there is also a high chance that academic success is the outcome in spite the adversity. Teachers are this bridge between that unbearable home life and higher education that seems like a treacherous and long journey. It is our responsibility to show and explain to them different resources schools have to offer as far as social workers and school counselors. We are to make our classrooms safe and inviting while placing ourselves entirely in that positive atmosphere to be a role model and identify with our students’ struggles to build trusting and lasting relationships. It is our job to understand, to know what is going on and use brain based learning altered and specific to each student and how best they learn or cope with a difficulty. At the end of the day these children need our attention, love, and support.

So as we all are standing, standing and being in this present moment, we as teachers choose to not stand there alone. We choose to stand there with those at risk children.