S9E6- The Gap Between Education and Emotional Wellbeing- Why resilience support isn't optional anymore

Hello and welcome back to the Resilient Kid Podcast with me, Ashley Costello.

This week feels really reflective for me. As you'll know if you're on the newsletter, my youngest turned 16 — it's his last year of school.

He's six foot two, thoughtful, handsome, and on the edge of becoming a man. We had his friend stay over and hosted a big family party. Since the weekend's craziness, it's been quieter at home.

I've been watching him. He's been making dinner — it's half term — helping clean up, popping next door to see his nana. And it really made me think:

Who are we building education systems for?

Are we building a system that nurtures young people into who they're becoming? Or are we asking them to constantly adapt under pressure?

Schools Are Not Failing — They Are Stretched

Before I go any further, I want to be very clear.

Schools are not failing.

They are stretched.

Budgets are stretched. Teachers are stretched beyond belief.

Are some schools struggling? Yes. Is it intentional? No.

And that distinction really matters.

What I see when I go into schools — the schools we train in, the families we support, the young people we work with — isn't a failure of care.

It's a failure of capacity.

The pressure that teachers are under, that children are under, that the system is under — it's creating a gap.

The Reality Schools Are Facing

Through the CPD work we do and the Resilient Schools training we deliver, we consistently see:

• Rising anxiety in primary-aged children

• Emotional dysregulation presenting as behaviour

• Staff carrying huge emotional containment demands

• Increased neurodivergent identification, with children masking heavily

• Performance pressure filtering down — younger and younger

Teachers are not just teaching.

They are regulating nervous systems. They are mediating social conflict. They are absorbing pent-up emotion in classrooms of up to 30 children. They are often the only safe adult in that room.

And they are tired.

By this time of year — February half term — you can feel it.

Children are tired. Staff are tired. Parents are tired.

The system is structured around academics, assessments, safeguarding, performance.

But where is the emotional regulation? Where is the preventative resilience work? Where is the shared language between home and school?

A lot of our job is advocating for the child or teen within that school setting — because there's a gap.

We're not always meeting children where they are. We're not always listening.

The Emotional Wellbeing Gap

Schools have behavioural policies, curriculum frameworks, safeguarding protocols — I could go on.

But what hasn't been embedded is emotional scaffolding.

I feel like I'm banging the same drum I was during my TEDx talk in 2019.

Why are we still learning information by rote when we can access it in seconds? Why aren't we teaching emotional regulation tools?

We are often reacting to crisis instead of building capacity.

When I talk about safety, I mean psychological safety .

What does psychological safety actually mean?

It means having someone to turn to.

In primary school, children have one consistent teacher. They know exactly who to go to if they're hurt, upset, confused, or overwhelmed. Everyone knows their name and their family.

Then we move them into high school:

• From 200 children to 1,500

• From one key adult to many rotating teachers

• Into noisy corridors, bright lights, narrow spaces

• Everyone at lunch at the same time

I would estimate that 75% of children don't sit down to eat lunch.

Let that land.

We encourage families to sit together and connect at dinner. But at school? Grab and go. Eat standing. No adults sitting with them.

Children are constantly adapting to what the system needs.

And that isn't fair.

Adolescence: Brains Under Pressure

During the teenage years, the part of the brain that seeks intensity and excitement develops faster than the part responsible for impulse control and long-term thinking.

Big feelings. Big reactions. Big risks.

Without fully developed brakes.

Now add:

• Academic pressure

• Social comparison

• Online exposure

• Reduced creative outlets

• Fear of failure

When children are little, creativity wires the brain beautifully. But as they move through school, those outlets shrink.

We are seeing burnout in Year 6. We are seeing high-functioning anxiety in teens who look fine on paper but are exhausted.

This isn't about blaming schools. Teachers are doing their best in a system that often isn't fit for purpose.

But we must acknowledge the weight being carried by young nervous systems.

Creativity Gets Squeezed

Schools don't intentionally suppress creativity. But when performance becomes more visible than curiosity, when testing becomes more urgent than exploration, when time pressure reduces play — something gets squeezed.

Creativity requires:

• Psychological safety

• Tolerance for mistakes

• Space to experiment

Under constant evaluation, creativity narrows quickly.

When identity becomes performance-based, mental health becomes fragile.

Why Some Young People Disengage

It's rarely because they don't care.

It's because they feel:

• Misunderstood

• "Not academic"

• Chronically overwhelmed

• Unseen

• Unheard

When belonging feels threatened, behaviour shifts.

Belonging is not a reward. It's a nervous system need. A DNA need.

When that need isn't met consistently, anxiety rises. Avoidance appears — and avoidance is a stress response.

What Needs to Change

We must strengthen the emotional scaffolding around the system.

We need:

• Shared language between home and school

• Staff trained in emotional containment

• Preventative resilience work

• Practical tools (not just theory)

• Support for adults as much as children

Final Reflection

As I watched my 16-year-old this week, becoming more himself, I realised something:

He didn't become this version of himself because of pressure.

He became this version of himself because of support.

The system matters.

But the scaffolding around it matters more.

If we want confident, emotionally intelligent young people, resilience cannot be an afterthought.

It has to be intentional. And it has to be preventative.

Thank you for listening to this short, sharp episode.

Whether you're a parent, teacher, or professional, I'd love to continue this conversation.

Email: ashley@theresilientkid.co.uk