

## Discussion Guide

# Restraint and Seclusion: Hear Our Stories

*a documentary by Dan Habib*



## Icebreaker Questions

1. To what extent do you have experience with restraint and seclusion (e.g., used them as a practice, have observed students being restrained, these practices have been used on you or your child, etc.)?
2. Do you know whether restraint and seclusion are currently being used in your school? If so, how often and why?
3. Before watching the film, to what extent had you considered the experience of being restrained or secluded from the point of view of the individual?
4. Have you heard it said that people with severe disabilities feel things differently, or don't feel pain or fear the way others do? Why do you think that is said? How would you respond to such a statement after viewing this film?
5. What about the stories presented in the film most resonated with you?
6. Has your opinion of the use of restraint and seclusion in schools changed as a result of listening to these stories?
7. What is one action that you will take as a result of watching this film?

## Understanding Behavior

1. To what extent do you think school professionals understand that all behavior—no matter how extreme—is a form of communication?
2. Brianna, Peyton and Andre stories all describe having ineffective ways to communicate their needs while in school. How do you view the relationship between communication supports and behavioral responses?
3. Consider the following quote from Andre's father, "I can only imagine what it's like even one day to need or want something, and to try to get that across to somebody and be unsuccessful." Have you ever been in such a position (e.g. injury, illness, you don't speak the language) and how did you respond and feel?
4. Reflect on Brianna's description of her teacher reading the same book every day. To what extent are instruction and curriculum designed to meet the diverse array of learning and social needs in our schools?
5. Positive school climate is an evidence-based predictor of student achievement. Yet, each of the stories illuminates how the individuals felt intimidated, belittled or afraid in school. To what extent have you observed professionals belittling, intimidating, or yelling at students in the name of 'behavior intervention'?

<http://stophurtingkids.com>

## Practices that Leave Children Traumatized

1. How did it make you feel hearing Helena talk about trying to take her own life as a result of how school personnel treated her? What was your emotional reaction to hearing descriptions of restraint and seeing pictures of Jino's injuries or hearing that Andre had 15-20 bruises all over his body?
2. How could their schools have done a better job of stopping the restraint and seclusion from escalating?
3. What, if anything, justifies using practices that can result in students being physically injured and emotionally traumatized?
4. Are you able to relate these stories to someone you know? In what ways are the descriptions of trauma similar to or different from the person you are thinking of?
5. To what extent are restraint and seclusion practices undermining children's healthy social-emotional development? Consider the following quotes:

*Peyton "Rest ignored as I locked way in hidden rooms that pointed loudly I'm worthless."*

*Helena "When I went to that school, they took away all of my confidence that my mom took years to instill in me."*

*Jino "I want to go back to school but I'm afraid the same thing might happen again, and I won't wake up."*

6. What are some of the emotional and social challenges that students like these might encounter in returning to a school after such an incident? What might be done to create safety and confidence to support their return?
7. How would you feel if you were a student witnessing or hearing the restraint or seclusion of a peer? How might your own attitudes and emotional well being be affected?

## Hidden Rooms and Paper Covered Window

1. What does it mean that restraint and seclusion most often happen in rooms in basements, closets or with paper covered windows?
2. Consider Helena's description of the 'seclusion' room at her school. What is your reaction to hearing that conditions like this exist in public schools?

*"I spent thirty-five consecutive days in ... what used to be a storage room under the weight room in the basement of my school. It was concrete and there was two metal doors that were padlocked from the outside"*

3. How typical is it that information about behavior incidents is openly shared with parents, or that parents and students are engaged as partners in behavior support plans? If is not typical, what are the implications? Consider the following quotes from the film:

*Carolyn (Jino's mother): "If you have to give a warning, like twenty-four hour prior notice to go and observe the classroom, that's not a good sign because a good, healthy environment that has emotional structure, a parent will be welcome for participation and involvement."*

*Wil (Andre's father): "It gets communicated to us as "Andre was aggressive," without any detail in terms of what led to the aggression, what were the environmental things going on at the time, what did Andre do before that, what was going on in the classroom, what were other kids doing? All that sort of information is really, really valuable, but it's impossible for a parent to do anything about it unless you have that information on hand. So, to me, the flow of information back to families is a crucial piece to trying to get rid of this kind of intervention."*

4. Jino reflected on how students in his class entered through the back of the school where other kids couldn't see them. What is being communicated to students with disabilities, their peers – and teachers, when we design environments that hide them away from the general population?

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