

CPI *Unrestrained* Transcription
Episode 27: John Heiderscheidt
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Host: Terry Vittone

Terry: Hello and welcome to *Unrestrained*, the CPI podcast series. This is your host, Terry Vittone. Today I have the pleasure of talking to John Heiderscheidt. He is the director of safety and culture at school district U-46 in Elgin, Illinois. Hello and welcome, John.

John: Hello Terry.

Terry: John Heiderscheidt currently serves as the director of school safety and culture for school district U-46, headquartered in Elgin, Illinois. His purpose is to facilitate, promote, and help maintain a safe, secure, and nurturing school learning environment that is flexible in meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of each student. John is a retired police officer, and serves as a juvenile officer and school resource officer.

John has a bachelor's degree in psychology, and a master's degree in law enforcement and justice administration. He is a Master Level Certified Instructor for the Crisis Prevention Institute.

My first question is about the recent news item that I saw, about how your district has been able to cut out-of-school suspensions by 74% in the last eight years.

Now those are some really dramatic results, and I think it would be a good lead in to our interview to understand how your personal philosophy, and the school's policy regarding suspensions, has led to such dramatic and positive outcomes.

John: Yeah, and thanks for recognizing the work, and it's been an incredible amount of work. To give some frame of reference for the audience, we have five high schools, eight middle schools, and 40 elementary schools. The student population is about 41,000 students, and we're in the suburban area of Chicago, on the far western edge of the suburbs. Our school community is made up of 10 different municipalities.

The reason why I'm giving that frame is the city of Elgin is a city of just over 100,000 people, and the other communities surround that small city. So we do have some urban as well as suburban, as well as some I guess you would say upper-middle-class areas, as we get everything from one end of the spectrum of social economic status to the other.

Terry: This is maybe for people who aren't familiar with the geography of Illinois—to drive from Elgin to Chicago probably would take how long?

John: Depending on what time you drive.

Terry: Right, right.

John: Usually you're talking about, we're about 25 to 27 miles west of downtown Chicago.

Terry: All right, great.

John: So I started in 2006, which is a little over nine years ago. What we were seeing and experiencing in our communities was a high level of fights in our high schools. All five high schools,

even in our middle schools, there was an awful lot of physical aggression and fights happening. On our streets we were being riddled with gang incidents that were happening in our community.

Gang incidents did include some very tragic deaths, and those deaths included our students, and these were happening on the streets, and those people that were causing that to happen were also our students.

Terry: That has to really influence culture inside the school.

John: It certainly does, and any type of school culture is not mutually exclusive of the community, and what happens to a kid at home, on the streets, and in school is the same experience. So moving forward—

Terry: So you come into a culture where violence could erupt pretty much at any moment, and might be expected to?

John: And it was that same first year just a few months after I started here, we had a teacher that was attacked in a classroom by a student who had brought a knife to school, so you're exactly right on so these things were happening.

So we started to look at data, started to look at what was going on, started to look at our expulsion rates, started to look at how many kids were being arrested in schools, and finding out that we didn't have any real systems or process. We started taking a hard look at what was happening. That's what really led us to CPI, and managing our fights in our schools, and finding a different way to de-escalate behavior.

Terry: I see.

John: So we were finding that we were expelling 22 to 25 kids on average each school year for what was called, or classified as, staff assaults.

Terry: So your administration and yourself personally were so shocked by the level of violence that you said we have to find some way to redress this culture?

John: Well, I can say—so I was the new guy, and I'm not trying to say this is about anything about what I view or what I think of, but thinking as a police officer, and coming from that different environment, different suburban area, and coming here—that it was almost that the culture had led to being this is just the way it happens. It's always happened that way; we've always done it this way. It was one of those cultures of “this is our tradition; this is who we are.”

Terry: I see. In other words if there is a violent altercation that involves a staff or a student, this is our policy and we're not going to deviate from it?

John: Right. “Let's suspend them five days out of school; that will change them. Let's put them out 10 days.” And so the philosophy of that is—where are we putting the kids? We're putting them on the streets, and when you put more kids on the streets, what you're really doing is allowing them more opportunity to get involved with gangs, get involved with drugs, get pregnant, get whatever.

Out-of-school suspensions were built on a model of a time in life when, 30 years ago, we may have had parents at home during the school day. We don't have that anymore.

So it's really an effort to really look at it from a different perspective. Are there ways we can do business differently, and how do you start nudging a system to start looking at it differently?

So go back to the expulsion, we're expelling about 40 kids a year, and it may sound like a small number, but it's actually pretty dramatic.

Terry: It sounds like a lot, 40 students on the expulsion track.

John: Forty families, and you start looking at where they live, and that's concentrated in certain areas; that means something. So these exclusionary measures, this exclusionary process of discipline to try to change behavior simply doesn't work, and really simply put it's a pathway. You may have heard of the school to prison pipeline?

Terry: Right.

John: And the research tells us that it's, yes, it could be correlational, if not casuistic.

Terry: The kind of skills that a student's going to learn on the street when they're not in school are the skills that are going to, eventually, when they're caught, lead them to penitentiary, I would expect.

John: Yeah, because the legal system is going to get involved. So using CPI—I don't know if you want to talk about that yet, but—

Terry: Sure.

John: What we used—so we looked at our staff assaults and what our staff assaults essentially were. We were jumping in the middle of fights to break them up.

Terry: That had to lead to a lot of staff injuries and a lot of staff missing days as well.

John: A lot of staff injuries, a lot of staff missing days, more workmen's comp claims, more of all those things. But more importantly, what do kids see when staff intervenes in a fight? What kids see is actually staff fighting with kids. When we're just jumping in the middle by ourselves or intervening alone, we're just jumping in the middle of, your only real course is to start wrestling people away from each other. And violence begets violence, I think, anyway.

Terry: Right. Hands-on very rarely leads to the sort of reduction in violence that you hope it will.

John: And I must say this, because I think it's really important—if you're from the school perspective, anybody that works in a school by law, by board policy, must get involved in discipline situations. You don't have a choice; you must intervene.

Terry: I see.

John: So when I asked the question I said, "Well, if we must intervene, and we must, what's the training? How are we telling people to do this?" And our staff are doing exactly what we told them to do, stop the fight as fast as possible.

Terry: So how do you start introducing the concept of a nonviolent intervention into the Elgin district that you work in?

John: So our first nudge in was with our hallway supervisors, we call them dean's assistants here, and our secondary administrators. And so back in 2009, we really walked into this strategy and how to de-escalate the situation, and how to manage a fight.

Terry: Were you aware of these techniques from your career in law enforcement at all?

John: In the area of that [question] is when I worked in a village called Buffalo Grove. It's a northwestern suburb of Chicago, and in the school district I worked as a school resource officer and a juvenile officer. I was aware that in those school districts any person who was a special ed teacher, or an assistant teacher, they were required to go to this training every year. And asking more questions, that's CPI training. So our school district up in that area, that I worked with there, their special ed folks were trained every year. And so I had some knowledge.

And then there were some people I work with here that have also had knowledge of CPI. And so I researched the company, looked at the model, and I really believe that the model has a, as a police officer at the time, I believe it had a real good connection to even a use-of-force model for a police officer.

Terry: How so?

John: Well, so we had training called Verbal Judo. Yeah, and even that by itself would suggest that it's all about the fight. And so I look back at CPI now in the training that I've had from the global professionals that I've taken it from, and I really wish I would have had that training as a police officer when I was 21.

Terry: I see.

John: You'll look at things differently. You can say things that make a difference, your tone, volume, cadence—all the things that we know as Certified Instructors really that make a significant difference—and pull it all back to the COPING strategy [CPI's *COPING Model*SM]. Very unlikely you'll need to use restraints.

Terry: So a shift in orientation in how you see what you previously would have seen as the subject of your interest as a police officer, to a more supportive and directive orientation, just at the very outset of initial interaction with the individual?

John: Absolutely.

Terry: That's valuable. I think when I took the training I certainly came away with that after four days, and I was just amazed at my reorientation towards just conflict, and interaction in general.

John: Yeah, and so just based on that first question, how do we also reduce this by this significant number? We've done it slowly and methodically, but we haven't done it alone. It's been with our community partners; we've had agencies around us, social service agencies, youth agencies, and there's a couple reasons why I'm saying this. They've been integral to helping kids—small circles alternatives to school suspension programs—working in the area of actually bringing them to our suspension rooms, where [kids serve] the other in-school suspension, and doing training and prosocial behavior for kids, and choices and decision making.

Terry: So I see, so rather than this model of an out-of-school suspension that had at its core maybe this old, outmoded idea of the family with a caregiver that would be there for the child all day, which isn't the case anymore. You guys looked at that and said, "Let's bring the suspension into school, and when we put you into the suspension room, there are going to be some rules that are going to make you productive there, essentially."

John: Yeah, at least some form of training. And what does the word *discipline* mean, or what's the definition? I try to talk to folks. This is hard for folks to make this paradigm shift, but discipline doesn't mean to punish. Discipline means to teach or to mentor, or to bring along, and we look at it in a different way, and the difficult work is helping people with a paradigm shift.

Terry: I see. You find CPI training was a good method to get that paradigm shift to occur?

John: And that's the good, I thought. So I can say anything I want working in an agency and stand over in a corner and dangle and make noise, but when I have a professional organization that has an evidence-based practice and worldwide training—now that really brings substance to what we're doing.

Terry: Right. So when did you guys start training?

John: So 2009 is when I became an Instructor. We had another Instructor here that had previous experience from other school districts. We started initially training, and then we were lucky enough to have what was called the REMS grant back in the day (and it was Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools), so we were able to get 35 Instructors trained in that same year.

So we pushed out training—probably didn't do it in the organized and best way to do it. We just started pushing towards it. Since then we went from a small amount of people trained, and today sitting where we are right now, I'm down to 16 or—I'm sorry—down to 15 Certified Instructors for the district. We have probably 10, 5 to 10, days of training per year where people can sign up. Nothing's required, but people can sign up for training, and right now I can tell you that 48% or almost 50% of our staff have touched CPI training in the last three or four years.

Terry: That's great. It's great that this [training] contributed to this remarkable drop in out-of-school suspensions, by 74% in eight years. Would you say that those two are pretty closely linked?

John: I think there's a link. There's other things obviously. There's PBIS—that's a significant win for us. We're working really hard on community partners. But this substance of CPI, I believe and hopefully others understand this: that's your practice; this is your template. And all these other agencies and people will have different things they can bring to it, but you have your core of how we approach situations when they happen, how we view escalations and agitations, and how we move into those situations.

Terry: I see, but according to the article too, though, a lot of the reasons that this drop has been so precipitous in eight years is because of the rooms, the day rooms in school that the students in suspension come into. They're not allowed to put their head down; they're not (I believe in the article) to have any mobile device whatsoever. It's almost like they're encouraged to use the space and the time to actually do their schoolwork.

And it is seen as a chance—not, as you said, as a discipline, not as a punishment per se, but it's more as an opportunity for them to have a quiet space to get back on track with their studies.

John: Yeah, that's what we're working towards, and so when we talk about Streamwood High School in that article, that's our one school that I believe is doing it the best, and so we're not perfect in all places. But that's also the one school that in that area has the most community resources, that has really embedded them. So this place is called—not to advertise, I'm not doing that—but Hanover Township Youth and Family Services.

What their director did is brought their staff, and we trained them because we're on a contract basis with them, to bring them into our schools. But we've trained them in CPI.

So what they said is "Hey, we want to be on the same page with what you're doing." Streamwood High School is the only high school that all staff members, gen ed, special ed, teachers' assistants, people working in the hallways, are trained in CPI.

Terry: I see. Are you moving towards that as a goal for the other schools in the district?

John: Yeah, the model is definitely working. When we look at the—so to give you a comparison, Streamwood High School four years ago had more fights, had probably more gang issues (but definitely more fights because that's a tangible number I can put to it) than any of our other high schools with more kids than in the other places.

Terry: So it was a cultural thing at work there for sure?

John: Yeah, so they had more fights by percentage, and how you measure that is you measure that by saying, "Okay, you have this many fights or occurrences, or out-of-school suspensions for fights, and you have this much population." And you just basically get a percentage rate.

Terry: I see.

John: Streamwood High School four years ago had the most fights, had the most problems. After they did the training in CPI, the dean's assistants there, the core of five really embraced CPI practices when they're every day workings with kids. And the principal was fully embedded in the leadership of that, and so was the administrative team. We had staff there that weren't interested.

Terry: That sometimes can happen.

John: Yeah, but ultimately this school embraced it and moved forward with it, and today they have the least amount of fights.

Terry: Well, that says a lot for the effectiveness of the training, and how much the administrators and the deans have embraced it. That's a success story.

I've heard there's a new law, an Illinois law coming into effect this September, that's going to require schools to further reduce the use of punitive and exclusionary disciplinary measures, unless a student poses a threat to the school safety. Has it been a long time coming, and what's the feeling among the staff about this? Do you see hope in this kind of a thing, in legislative activity?

John: Absolutely. The law came from a group of students in Chicago. They had their own coalition, if you will, and they were trying to approach legislators about these five-day, 10-day put kids on the streets, and I'm speaking from my terms. I'm not speaking for them, but that's what I read out of the intent of the law, if you will. And in Illinois we have school districts doing much different things in different places.

So about three or four years ago we saw that the law was waiting, and it was proposed, and it's gone through some revisions. We needed to prepare ourselves for that, because really what it says is to reduce, you said it very clearly, but it is to reduce the exclusionary measures to keep kids in school.

Terry: Do you know the name of that bill?

John: We refer to it as a Public Act 456.

Terry: Public Act 456, okay, good. That will be good to include in the data that we include with the written stuff for the podcast, so people can look it up and maybe advocate for it as it goes through the process.

One of your quotes regarding CPI training says, "CPI improves staff de-escalation skills. Improved overall safety has become ingrained in our training."

Can you speak about, because you're involved in culture and there so much time, can you talk about how and why CPI has become ingrained in certain U-46 schools? Why has it made such an impact?

John: So it's the ingrained piece. So I have a unique opportunity to have about 45 minutes a year where I go to each school, and at a staff meeting, have what is called safety training. So in the safety training, I have learned over the years that staff really doesn't—generally speaking, and this isn't researched too with school safety—they really don't have any way to manage these situations.

Colleges don't have this in their curriculum. People basically manage discipline of agitated or escalated students the way they were probably managed in their homes.

Terry: Right. There isn't any formalized curriculum in a college that, or when they come [to work in a school], that addresses that.

John: And so I learned over time that I referred to this as “managing by accident.” We have so many different staff members from so many different perspectives and family environments. They're all doing it differently, which is not good.

Terry: No, it's managing by accident. “By accident” has rather an ironic ring to it, but there's certainly nothing funny about managing that kind of behavior in an accidental, and not a deliberative way.

John: So, nicely done! So when I looked at it, this safety training that I'm having, I focused mostly on lockdown of what the police do, and what fire departments do, and all those kinds of things.

And I learned as we started training in CPI that I have these 45 minutes and I could use a scenario of a frustrated student, and a student that is in a rage and yelling and says, "I hate you! Get away from me, and I'm going to hurt somebody! Leave me alone!" And then use that scenario to have staff do, like think pair-share, and in a very quick amount of time have them have their own discussion about the way they would manage it. Have them report out, and then have a group discussion on evidence-based practices and how to manage it, which is CPI.

And so what I've changed my training to is really all scenario-based situations. A fight's happening. What do you do? Have people think about it, have people talk to their colleagues without saying it

out loud, and then have a group discussion. And then what I've done is then I take all of CPI and put it on the board and they put it on a PowerPoint presentation, and here's first you use proxemics, posture, then use your CPI *Supportive Stance*SM, clear the audience.

I'm actually to the point after about three or four years now of staffs repeating this back to me, you know, repeating this back to us in these trainings, and then colleagues are hearing colleagues say the same things.

Terry: And that would be a good example of it becoming ingrained in the schools, when people start repeating the terminology back during the training, and to other people. Then they're internalizing it to the point where it can become very useful in a moment.

John: And so ingraining it, leadership believes in it. You've got to have the belief from the top, and you can sprinkle it into places where people can see "okay, there is a use." They'll get introduced to it, and then after three or four years they just then repeat it back to you. Then they attend this thing called the CPI full-day training, and they're hearing the same things again.

And you've got to find those ways in your organization to keep repeating it and replicating it, keep repeating it, replicating it. Not to say we're perfect, we're still riddled with issues, but we're getting better.

Terry: You've said that CPI training has led to improved student outcomes, because of increasing direct instruction time—for instance test scores, student grades, graduation rates. Can you talk about how CPI training is linked to these outcomes?

John: So, well, number one [is] keeping kids in school. You have more opportunity for kids to learn; those are very important strategies. The second one is if we can reduce the amount of times kids create behavior infractions. That's one thing. But behavior infractions, [according to] some research that I've seen, are linked to staff feelings of unsafety.

And when you think about it in this regard, and no matter what setting you are in, hospital, mental health facility, whatever that might be, the research says that if we feel unsafe as staff members, we're going to tend to have clients that are going to be involved in more behavior stuff.

And so if I can improve staff confidence in those situations, we'll not only be able to manage the situations better, but I would believe—I don't have any evidence to this—but I believe that staff would have a better confidence level of dealing with those situations.

Terry: Certainly it is intuitive to believe that that training would provide confidence that one would know how to de-escalate a situation successfully, and stand a much better chance. I mean, look at our Decision-Making Matrix—part of our enhanced program that says, "What are my best chances of us both going home safe today?" That's the kind of a decision that breeds a sort of confidence if your outcomes start improving.

What percentage of staff at U-46 has been through CPI training?

John: It's a difficult number to keep tracking because in our organization we have a bit of a turnover rate, and some among them, when they turn over, they come back! But the best we've done in making sure we sort out those who have left us is to maintain a chart of those in the organization. Long answer, short question, right, is we're at 48%, as of last month, of all employees that have touched CPI training the last three years.

Terry: That's pretty good, and for such a large staff especially. What was the number again? How big are you guys?

John: So we're a staff of about 5,000 employees.

Terry: Yes, that's pretty good. And you report the first year of CPI implementation that assaults on staff dropped by as much as 90%, because of a specific strategy about how to break up fights.

John: Yes.

Terry: What is that strategy? That's a remarkable outcome.

John: So with the deans and the administrators of the secondary schools, this was their first wave into this. When we did the body of research on why we're expelling kids, we found at most times it's because we're jumping in the middle of fights and trying to break them up by "taking them down," and those are actually the words our staff would say. And I'm not being critical; I am not being critical of anybody. I'm saying those were the actual words we said.

Terry: We hear it a lot.

John: And that's what—when you don't train your staff on how to do it, you're doing it by accident. So that's the words they use and the thinking. So when we said, "Here's the strategy; here's CPI; here's what you can do differently; here's a strategy for breaking up fights—call for help first; wait for your help; don't intervene alone," that was the change.

Terry: And so just by those simple steps, you dropped assaults on staff because largely they knew to follow that protocol before they jumped in and physically put hands on anyone.

John: Right, and mind you if you're working with the school district that's a large school district, or small, sometimes [for] staff to make that change, isn't a fun, great thing.

Terry: Speak to that.

John: So I'm not suggesting that people embrace that change.

Terry: In other words, there are resisters; there's a cultural and organizational resistance. We've heard this sometimes from other prior police officers who come in and say, "Sometimes we meet resistance. This lovey-dovey stuff is not going to be effective." But once people start to realize that they are safe for themselves, and that it does work, that there's almost an "Aha!" moment that you see among staff that could almost be a bit contagious in a good way.

John: And in that first year [there] was not that "Aha!" moment.

Terry: I see. [laughs]

John: Maybe for some, but so we still occasionally have, and we're people and it's a people business, so occasionally once in a while we'll still have—and fortunately or unfortunately kids videotape everything—so once in a while we'll see a staff member that's jumping in the middle of a fight.

It's important that we don't criticize. It's important that we debrief with the COPING strategy with our staff members the correct way. And we follow that to help improve their practice.

Terry: How rigorously do you guys debrief?

John: In schools, we're terrible at it.

Terry: Is that right?

John: At least here we're terrible at it. We're a large organization. We're like probably every other school district and every other place right now, short-staffed and trying to do too much. It's something that we keep nudging towards, and we're getting better at, but we're certainly not doing it like we should.

Something we did, and this is just a thought, as far as the COPING strategy, something we did three years ago is any student that received an out-of-school suspension was then required to do a re-entry plan.

Terry: And what would be the components of a re-entry plan?

John: The COPING strategy.

Terry: I see. Okay.

John: So what we did is we created a form. I think we've shared that on our Yammer, on our accounts, when there's other people passing forms around, and CPI endorsed the materials.

And we use the same COPING strategies, so the administrator that put the student out, if you will, out-of-school suspended, when they come back the next day and there's a conversation, there's the COPING strategy: "Hey, what's your level of anxiety about the situation, 1 to 10?" The client gives us that information; they work with the COPING strategy to try to negotiate change and give back some power to the situation. That didn't come about without resistance either.

Terry: I'm sure.

John: But now as of last year it became school board policy.

Terry: Oh excellent, excellent. So it must be, in order to be the best policy, there must be enough change in the mindset there about the effectiveness of instituting the *COPING Model*SM as a re-entry method.

John: I believe it's another contributing factor [to] why we're reducing recidivism with out-of-school suspensions, and how we're reducing it totally.

Terry: It's such a big district. How do you partner with local law enforcement to quell violence?

John: So we have school resource officers from four different municipalities in our schools. I have the pleasure, really, of overseeing that program, as it correlates to everything else we do in discipline and safety. And so we have four different police departments: Elgin, the city, we have seven officers; Streamwood with three; Bartlett, two; and South Elgin, the community of, we have two.

They're all on our secondary schools. And the Public Act 456, this new law that doesn't take effect until September—I'm trying not to brag so please don't think it's that way.

Terry: That won't come off that way.

John: But the law comes and it says that you must have an agreement with the law enforcement officers that are working in your schools. You must have an MOU, or a contract. You should have information-sharing agreements; you should have all those things. We have had that in place since 2008, and we update that on a regular basis.

Terry: So you are way ahead of the state mandate, way ahead?

John: Yeah, and I feel like we're way behind it.

Terry: Explain.

John: So in Buffalo Grove we had done those things in the 90s. So in 2006 starting here, we had none, actually we had such little communication between our police departments and the school district. We had such little sharing of community events that we would have a shooting with students involved over the weekend on Saturday, and on Monday morning we didn't have any information in the school district, nor did the school resource officer.

Terry: So it's almost as if it didn't happen. [laughter]

John: And it's like, "Hey guys, what if we have retaliation? You've got to be telling us stuff." And what we found out is, yeah, we really didn't have anything happening.

And great people doing great work—there was a really clear realization and they already had the realization that they had the need. Really the school district didn't have a process for them to make it happen. So we had to make it happen for them, and it has really benefited us on getting a better understanding of what goes on in the community with our kids.

Terry: That's great. I was talking to one of our staff here, Bob Rettmann, about that you had attended another CPI pilot program for something called *Trauma-Informed Care*, and that you were able to use the skills that you learned there to keep a student in class that you otherwise would have suspended. This happened in the very first week after you'd taken this class, because you understood the student's behavior better. Do you remember that story; do you remember that occasion?

John: Not specifically, but the one that sticks out in my mind, and the story I repeatedly tell after having some training with our principals about *Trauma-Informed Care*, is I focus on the small things—I focus on using the term from *Trauma-Informed Care* that I learned from our course, the beta course, was "What's happening?" versus "What's wrong with you?"

Terry: Right, right.

John: And one of our principals in our elementary schools, she told the story of what happened. So you had a third grader that came back to school—the third grader had been out of school for a couple of days, and we didn't know why; the teacher didn't know why; the family didn't share; the

parents didn't share the why. And when the student came back to school, the teacher visibly saw that something was wrong with the student.

And within a very short amount of time the student started being very aggressive, yelling. Kids were starting to make fun of him because he was yelling, he was picking up chairs, he was becoming fairly, I would hate to say violent for a third grader, but his physical aggression was becoming very strong.

Terry: Like he was acting out and obviously something was deeply troubling the boy.

John: So the teacher called for the principal, the principal came up in the room, and the principal said to the young man, "Hey, what's happening? What's happening?" And called him by name.

Terry: And that I'm sure made him stop, and have to relate, then. And how did he reply?

John: It was a melting moment for him, and I don't know what was going on in the young man's head, but he did. The principal said he melted. She saw some Tension Reduction, and the young man left the room with her.

Terry: Wow, that is dramatic.

John: There's two points, two more points to this to tell the story even more clearly, because if she would have walked in the room and said, "Hey, what's wrong with you? What's wrong with you; why are you doing this?" where do you think the boy would have ended up?

Terry: Probably restraints, seclusion.

John: Probably in our police department.

Terry: As a third grader.

John: As a third grader.

Terry: Wow.

John: Because it would have got worse, right?

Terry: Right. Or escalated, I'm sure it would have. Yeah, that's provocative what you just said, intended to putting a nickel in a kid at that point, right?

John: Yeah and guess what happened? Guess what we learned?

Terry: He was hungry or angry or tired or—

John: Even worse—so he came to school, and yes, his family lives in poverty, but where he was over those last days that he wasn't in school was attending his favorite cousin's funeral because a cousin who lived in Chicago was shot in the back three times in gang violence and killed.

Terry: So he comes in with that sort of grief and loss, and wants to act out.

John: And that's trauma-informed care; that's acute level two, if not level three level of trauma. And so just simple phrases like "Hey, what's happening?" helped that young man de-escalate with someone who—I don't know that the relationship between the principal and the young man was that strong—but certainly her actions de-escalated the situation almost instantly.

Terry: That's great, and her willingness to ask a question, and wait for an answer, it almost seems like a basic thing. Instead of asking, "What's wrong?" asking, "What's happening?" is a much smoother way. It doesn't put someone on the spot so much as give them the latitude to answer as they will, or at least to be heard.

John: Just to be heard.

Terry: Yeah, yeah. Beyond our core curriculum of *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*® training and your knowledge of *Trauma-Informed Care*, have you guys used any other advanced courses?

John: So I've attended the verbal escalations skills . . . what's that course? Verbal interventions.

Terry: Enhanced verbal skills? [*Enhancing Verbal Skills: Applications of Life Space Crisis Intervention*™]

John: Enhanced verbal skills. I found it very useful because I apply it in my annual safety training. There's a couple really good things that you can show people that help them understand how to communicate with people. That's been very helpful. I use bits of the trauma-informed care piece during that training too, just keep embedding it somehow in some way anytime I have contact with people.

Terry: I see. With a staff of 5,000 and 48% trained, how often do you guys provide refresher training?

John: So we provide—last year our school district moved to professional development days, as a district and then as professionals. So the difference is that the district has days where we can ask people to come to training, and then in the professional days, teachers can really elect to do something with their teams, with their groups, go attend something, and so there's 10 days per year where I have that opportunity.

So I know that's probably something that—I don't know if that makes sense to other organizations—but what we've done with CPI in the 15 Instructors that we have, we schedule training so people can attend whenever and however they wish.

So to be very direct with the question, we don't track our refreshers very well.

Terry: I see. But certainly staff knows that it is available to them if they'd like to make the time to attend it?

John: Yes.

Terry: All right.

John: And next year what we're doing is we're going to move all of our refreshers to the Bullying Behaviors model.

Terry: I see. And why's that, because you think you're going to get more results out of that focus?

John: Yes, absolutely, and the focus—so I've learned over the years that bullying is a significant thing. Bullying does lead to the retribution thinking of people, and it has a connection to violence.

So what I found in the Bullying Behaviors refresher is that it gives adults an understanding of what the behavior looks like, for the bully, the target, and a bystander, and then intervention steps. What I have found is that we have this expectation that every staff member should know what to do, and they don't, and if we—go ahead, I'm sorry.

Terry: I wonder where you think that expectation comes from. It seems like, how would you know the best way to intervene in a bullying situation unless you had curriculum and some best practice information about that?

John: Well, you're a teacher, aren't you? Aren't you supposed to know everything?

Terry: Right, right. I guess it's good that we're drilling down more into what is necessary as a teacher these days, and so certainly we see these in things like SEL programs in understanding bullying and so forth. So as an evolution of what a teacher's role is, and what expertise is needed, it's a positive thing, I think.

John: Yeah, yeah, I think so. "You're a police officer. Aren't you supposed to know?" Or, "Hey Terry, you work for CPI. Don't you know that?" And it becomes a social thing that, no, it's not really there.

Terry: Right, now I know you've been working with us a while. It would be great if you could describe how and why you access our Instructor Services, and how that support has affected your ability to teach the program, and any operational impact it might have had on your organization.

John: Sure. Over the years, with Milwaukee being close to my location, I've had a great experience. Anytime I call CPI I get excellent service. Anything I want, I get, within reason of course, and it's been extremely helpful. Folks like Randy Boardman and others have come down and they've audited our classes; they've audited my classes and, really, it's improved my teaching.

And it's actually improved our resources. We had a—and I forgot his name, terribly; he's actually involved with the school up in CPI. He's involved with the school programs, but he came down and audited a full day, and he was listening as we were talking to teachers about setting limits, and how to do that, and he, in fact we had conversations of "Hey, we could use more tools."

And the next year at Conference they passed out a tool that was setting limits and how our staff can avoid power struggles.

Terry: Was that Jeff Schill by any chance?

John: Yes! Yes, sorry, and now I use this form in every training that I do.

Terry: Oh, that's great.

John: And advocating that, "Hey staff, just take a look at one of these things, and if one of them works, it might work for you and make your day just a little bit better, and the students' day a little bit better."

I started sponsoring classes here at U-46, where other people can come. Usually that's in June. Your staff sets all that up, makes all that happen. The resources and videos are improving, improving, improving. It makes training a lot easier for us to manage that, and there are 15 Certified Instructors. It's just been endless. You truly are what you say you are as far as being CPI and being helpful to other people.

Terry: Thank you, thank you very much. How would you recommend other school administrators, someone in your position for instance, would go about seeking funding for behavioral intervention training, as to when they talk to their budgetary decision makers? It's been suggested that one of the things you do is that you go out and seek press, and you get press, and then you take that in front of your board and say, "Here's why we need to keep doing this."

John: Yeah, it's not quite that tricky. [laughter] It feels like it was tricky. First thing I would do if there was a fellow administrator out there that wanted some ideas, I would suggest you first look at your data.

Terry: Okay, great.

John: Look at your expulsions; look at your out-of-school suspensions. Find out from people where your pain spots are, and start small.

Terry: That's good advice.

John: Yeah, I don't know that I would go 35 Instructors in the first throw, because I think we did it—I did it poorly, and I wasn't able to manage the magnitude of what I was getting myself into.

Terry: I see. So now that you look back on it, what would you optimally start with?

John: For my size, I would have started with five fellow Instructors, and I would have worked every month with them, and met with them on a more frequent basis to support them and support their training to be more consistent, and so that everything [fit to] size and scale, but you've got to know what you're going after.

Terry: Right, good point, good point.

John: Because if you don't then you're just saying it's a good idea to be a good idea, and that's not true.

Terry: That leads to my next question, of something being just a good idea. So what would you say, rather than something being that, what are some of the most lasting differences that CPI training has made in the lives there for your staff and students? What's really stuck since you brought it in?

John: I believe that staff has an understanding that whatever I do at this point is going to escalate or de-escalate the situation.

Terry: I see, a mindfulness in the moment that they are in an—why am I forgetting this?—ah, that they're in an Integrated Experience.

John: Yes.

Terry: And that, that is one of the key self-awarenesses that this training brings.

John: And one of the things I focus on—if you're moving towards this, you need to have like a sprinkle of safety training for all staff that you can do in half an hour to 45 minutes, that embeds. This has really been successful for me, because when I started doing this more and more, I can't keep up with the amount of people that want CPI training now.

Terry: Is that right?

John: Yeah.

Terry: So people are actually seeking it out?

John: Yeah, I don't have enough Instructors for Tuesday. We have 60 to 70 people signed up, and I have three Instructors. I'd like to keep the class at 20.

Terry: Is it an enthusiasm to get trained because of people talking up the program in the district?

John: I don't know. I don't know the answer to that directly, but I would say that more and more people are looking for strategies on how to manage, and I believe the best advertisement is word of mouth.

Terry: Absolutely, there's nothing like testimony from a peer to sway you.

John: "Hey, this helped me." So I would say if you're thinking about doing this, nudge it, nudge it slowly. Get leadership support before you even start doing that by saying, "Here's our pain spots; this is why we need to do this. We're expelling kids for this, or we have these out-of-school suspensions, or reporting this many fights here." Because if you get administrative support to do it small, and you can show results, that's going to lead to something else.

Terry: Excellent, excellent.

John: Now when you mention the media thing, I want to touch back on that a little bit. I am very media friendly; I enjoy being the point person for safety, and talking to the media. I believe the media is our friend, and I believe they want to tell a story. So I did this accidentally, but the media were interested in how we possibly make school safer, and how we do those things. So I simply invited them to come to training.

Terry: Ah, great.

John: Come to the training, come see for yourself, write your own story, interview us, see what you say, and write about it. And one of the first media stories was me picking up a chair and standing in front of a group of social workers, trying to differentiate what an Acting-Out Person is versus what Release is.

Terry: That seems like a pretty dramatic example. How did they react to that? Did they see the conceptual difference pretty quickly?

John: Yeah, so here's me in the front page of—not front page, but in the article holding a chair prepared to throw it at somebody, but the differentiation we really struggled with in the beginning was what an Acting-Out Person was, and what Release was, and the emotional outburst. So big

dramatic example was I pick up a chair and I throw it in the corner where nobody is standing, and I did that purposefully, where I look at the corner and make sure nobody's there.

And then I throw it and then I pick up the chair, and I go at somebody and I'm ready to throw it at them, and the reason for the big dramatic show was it was really difficult for staff to define that an Acting-Out Person, of a physical acting-out episode, threat of harm to yourself or others was more of this [Acting-Out Person], than it was of this [Release].

And sometimes our emotional outbursts, we can manage those differently and be able to get the Tension Reduction a little bit sooner.

Terry: Personally, what are the cues that you look for to differentiate the two?

John: Say that again.

Terry: What are the cues that you would look for to differentiate between violence being imminent, the chair being, in other words, thrown in a corner [versus] being thrown at a person?

John: So one of the things I've used, if a student throws a chair in a corner and it appears that, yes, they're damaging that chair, they're damaging property, but do you need to "take them down"? I don't use those words, but do you need to use physical restraints at this time? Do you need to then go—the student is now standing there huffing and puffing, and very angry and probably still yelling. They threw the chair. Do you need to go over there now and put them in a two-person restraint?

And usually the correct answer to the question from staff is "Well, no, I don't think I would do that," and then we talk about the risks of restraints, and if the answer is no, then where would you put them in the *Verbal Escalation Continuum*SM? And then this would be Release, because Intimidation is this, and well, this is Release. And trying to draw the levels so they have an anchor, if you will.

Terry: Because those can be, especially when a situation is in play, those can fluctuate, those seeming differences between release and acting out.

John: And really the only default for the real true knowledge of the staff member, at least in my humble opinion, would be: Do you need to go put on restraints? Do you need a team response? Do you need those things? And if you do, well then I trust your instincts, and we have to trust.

Terry: Now John, as a director of school safety and culture, I've got to ask you, are there elements that make up your dream school culture? And if there's something that isn't there, what would be the most important thing to add, and what could you maybe live the most without?

John: The dream culture is when we're keeping kids in school that are safe to be in school, that we're responding appropriately, and with the right resources, when we have threatening situations, when kids really show that they're unsafe to be in school, and having those resources available to us, from either outside partners or if they would fund schools the right way we would have those mental health resources available to us, and also the staff to do that.

In the interim, I keep giving staff the strategies that they need, that they *need*, not that we think they need, but *they* need to help them have a practice on how to move into these situations.

Terry: I see. And who's your biggest inspiration in your professional life, John?

John: Wow, that's a tough one. Do you know that my mind went to Randy Boardman right away?

Terry: Is that right?

John: My mind went directly to Randy, as we've had so many conversations about how to do this in a school. And he's had the experience as a principal to actually do these steps and take these actions, and to really have the attitude of teaching and helping come alongside staff to learn a practice that's probably different than they've had before.

Terry: Wow, that's great. That's great. Well, I know that he'll appreciate that, and it is a degree of participation that has got to seem unique.

Are there any last thoughts, John, that you'd like to add about our training, or what's happening in U-46 that other school districts you think would be good to know?

John: Terry, what I just thought of and might be very important to know, when we initially started training in CPI, we did not have time to do restraint training, and so—go ahead.

Terry: You just worked with the verbal part of the course; they didn't do the physicals.

John: So by accident it ended up being the smartest thing that I think we've done.

Terry: And that's because people didn't have the alternative skills to take—I'm not going to say take people down, but to physically restrain?

John: Well, if you give someone a tool, they're going to use a tool, and then the other thing that we reflect on (and here's a plug for our chapter meetings), in one of our chapter meetings here in the Midwest region, we had really a great discussion. Frederick Bryant at his organization, he said that at his—and he works at probably one of the most difficult mental health organizations for clients that are at the end of the rope, as far as resources.

And he said in his organization they're actually following that strategy too, where they're going to only have a core group of responders, if you will, each shift that would respond to do the *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*® [physical interventions], if it was required as a last resort. But in training everybody in it, they're not doing that anymore. And what it did turn out for us is that looking back, if I would have focused on restraints, or at least trained in restraints, it's always the last thing you do, right?

Terry: Well, it's supposed to be our last resort, always.

John: Well, then at the last day at the end of the training, it's usually one of the last things you do in training, right? And if people only take 10% away of training, what are they going to take away?

Terry: Well, that's something that we emphasize here all the time, that this is *nonviolent* crisis intervention. Hands-on is only meant to be the last resort. And that the nonphysicals are really the crux of *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*® [training]. We keep trying to emphasize that, but you're right. People will refer to us as the take-down class, and then that causes a lot of gnashing of teeth around here, I gotta tell you.

John: Yeah, and I remember that being back in my other careers, that's kind of what it was known as. And so just by accident of time, of contracts, and you only have this many hours to train, well

then we can only do this much, and so we're going to have to peel this out; we're not going to be able to do this.

So next school year, what we're going to be doing is having each principal develop a team, and assign a team, and then we're going to go train that team in the use of *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*® [training].

Terry: I see. So a more dedicated staff, a smaller staff with maybe more retention and expertise than if you're doing a more general and large training?

John: Right, so the training day stands alone. It won't be restraints, and if you're part of that core at your school, we would go at Certified Instructors and then have a two- to three-hour session at another time. Reflect back on our lessons, and reflect back on all the—I don't have it quite clear in my mind on every step, but we'd have some reflection. We'd put some *Verbal Escalation Continuum*™ on the board, and then train on restraints, really focusing on last resort.

Terry: Sounds good.

John: So I don't—there's lots of school districts that get caught up on doing the training for two days, or a day and a half, or the 12 hours, and we do it in one day. We focus on the lessons that are about verbals and nonverbals and the de-escalation techniques, and then we don't, we do personal safety, but we don't do the restraints.

Terry: Well, John, we certainly wish you continued success with the program. We're definitely delighted you joined us today on the podcast. Thank you very much.

John: Thanks for the opportunity, great talking to you.

Terry: My guest today on *Unrestrained* has been John Heiderscheidt. John is a director of safety and culture at school district U-46 in Elgin. Thank you very much, John.

John: Thank you, Terry.