



insidetrack[®]

THE PCRR FRAMEWORK

**A healing-centered engagement
framework for student
persistence and completion**





Trauma and toxic stress can impede students on their journey to degree completion

Stress and adversity have a profound impact on a student's ability to learn and thrive. Whether it's the result of basic needs insecurity, major trauma or common life stressors, many learners navigate experiences that challenge their sense of physical, emotional and/or psychological safety. For instance, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), a staggering 90% of adults report experiencing at least one traumatic event in their lifetime, and this exposure can impair brain development — affecting the decision-making skills and cognitive resilience necessary to persist.

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Further, when students don't feel safe — or aren't sure how to access the support they need — these [challenges often lead to stopping out](#). Trauma and stress can decrease motivation and strain relationships with student supporters as well — both of which are critical factors for long-term success. To turn the tide, student support professionals must look beyond academics to meet learners with compassion, understanding and healing-centered practices.

Healing-centered engagement fuels resilience and increases retention

Resilience — the process of adapting well in the face of adversity — is not a standalone cure to trauma, but it's a powerful tool when paired with holistic coaching. Strong relationships with a caring student supporter can help learners grow in self-confidence, manage emotions and maintain a positive view of themselves. By utilizing trauma-informed care to help individuals reframe their responses to adverse events, student supporters can promote the resilience required for long-term success. This proactive approach ensures that students feel seen and heard while helping institutions retain their learners through graduation.



*The term **healing-centered engagement** expands how we think about responses to trauma and offers a more holistic approach to fostering wellbeing.*

- Dr. Shawn Ginwright

Healing-centered engagement, a strategy introduced by [Dr. Shawn Ginwright](#), builds on the foundation of trauma-informed care: "The term *healing-centered engagement* expands how we think about responses to trauma and offers a more holistic approach to fostering wellbeing," he explains. While trauma-informed approaches ask, *What happened to you?*, healing-centered engagement asks, *What's right with you?* This shifts the focus from individual injury to collective wellbeing, emphasizing strength and hope over deficit or damage. By embedding these strategies into relationship-building, student supporters empower learners to process their experiences and move toward growth.

To put these principles into practice, InsideTrack utilizes the PCRR framework — Protect, Connect, Respect, Redirect.

This simple, adaptable approach helps supporters meet learners where they are and guide them toward the safety and connection required to stay on the path to graduation.



The PCRR framework: A healing-centered engagement approach to student support

The PCRR framework — Protect, Connect, Respect, Redirect — offers a healing-centered model for student support. Complimentary to InsideTrack’s [holistic coaching approach](#), PCRR equips student supporters with tools to help learners feel safe, seen and validated — ultimately fueling resilience and growth.



PROTECT

Creating a safe environment is the first step in building trust. To help learners feel protected:

- **Familiarize yourself with each learner’s educational journey and unique identities** — both visible and invisible.
- **Create a brave space** where students of all backgrounds feel comfortable learning, sharing and growing.
- **Reduce ambiguity** by clearly communicating next steps.
- **Respect physical and emotional needs** by using content warnings, being aware of personal space, avoiding retraumatizing language and allowing focus aids.
- **Engage in self-protection** through regular self-care practices to prevent burnout and sustain impact.



CONNECT

Building a genuine connection helps students feel like they belong — a major factor in persistence. To strengthen connections:

- **Clarify your role** early and often to establish expectations and build psychological safety.
- **Remember and intentionally use learners’ names and stories** to reinforce connection and trust.
- **Make eye contact when appropriate**, while understanding some learners may avoid eye contact due to past trauma.
- **Be mindful of tone and body language**, both of which can either reinforce or disrupt feelings of safety.
- **Incorporate humor and levity** when appropriate, as laughter can help reduce the brain’s traumatic stress response.
- **Design all meeting spaces intentionally**, offering visual escapes from direct eye contact and maintaining clear bodily visibility.



RESPECT

Respect is at the heart of building empowering relationships with learners. To engage respectfully:

- **Create space for learners to lead**, recognizing and valuing their expertise and lived experiences.
- **Promote “voice and choice”** by offering options for how and when students engage to ensure they feel in control.
- **Honor identity** by using preferred pronouns, nicknames and titles to validate each student’s background.
- **Practice cultural humility and mindful curiosity**, approaching each interaction with openness and respect.
- **Encourage peer-to-peer connection** when appropriate, helping to create community and shared growth.



REDIRECT

Redirection helps learners stay engaged, build confidence and strengthen self-efficacy. To harness the power of redirection:

- **Share anxiety-reducing practices** with students to engage the prefrontal cortex and reduce knee-jerk reactions.
- **Demonstrate the power of visualization.** For example, ask students to “Picture yourself earning your degree. How does that feel?” as a way to keep them focused on their goals.
- **Teach the power of “yet”** to fuel a growth mindset. For example, reframe “I’m not good at math” into “I’m not good at math yet.”
- **Reinforce strengths and past successes** while celebrating resilience to bolster perseverance.
- **Offer specific, targeted feedback** to empower learners and reinforce positive behaviors.

The PCRR framework in action

The PCRR framework is most effective when all four elements work together to support learners through any challenge. Here's how a coaching conversation can utilize these principles to encourage student resilience and persistence.



THE POWER OF COACHING CONVERSATIONS

When Marcus arrived at his coaching session, he was visibly overwhelmed by the pressure of midterms. As a first-generation student balancing a full course load with a part-time job, a recent shift in his work schedule had left him with a drastic reduction in study time. His coach, Sarah, immediately put the PCRR framework into practice to help him find his footing.

She began by creating a safe, brave space where Marcus felt **protected**, clearly stating that the session was a place to talk through his stress and worries without judgment. She reduced his anxiety by clarifying that they'd work together to map out his next steps.

However, Marcus was still breathing quickly, so Sarah asked if he'd be open to a mindful breathing exercise. This settled Marcus significantly, and Sarah humanized the interaction by reminding him of his goal: becoming the first in his family to graduate. She reinforced their **connection** by telling him that she was firmly in his corner to help him get there.

Next, they needed to tackle his study schedule. Instead of telling Marcus what to do, Sarah used open-ended questions to allow him to take the lead. She promoted "voice and choice" by asking how he preferred to tackle his calendar, **respecting** his expertise in his own life and schedule. Marcus came up with strategies for fitting studying into his work breaks and even made an appointment at the campus tutoring center.

Once Marcus was visibly calm, Sarah **redirected** by helping him visualize his goal. She asked him to picture how he would feel receiving his degree, which kept him motivated toward his long-term goals while managing his stress and understanding the "why" behind making time to study for his midterms.

By the end of the session, Marcus felt more grounded and had a clear plan to stay enrolled and move toward completion.

Building resilience for graduation and beyond

By utilizing the PCRR framework, student supporters can offer the critical wraparound care needed to help students overcome barriers and reach their educational and career goals. When we meet learners where they are with respect and empathy, we build the trust necessary for them to stay in school, graduate and develop resilience that will serve them throughout the rest of their lives.

Learn more about how our holistic, evidence-based coaching approach helps students persist and complete.

[EXPLORE RETENTION COACHING >](#)