HEART-CENTERED CONNECTIONS

Seven Essential Skills *for* Helping Neurodiverse *and* Marginalized Children Thrive

Heart-Centered Connections is a powerful, research-informed guide for those who serve children who are too often misunderstood, marginalized, or labeled "difficult"—including neurodiverse learners, students with learning differences, and those impacted by trauma.

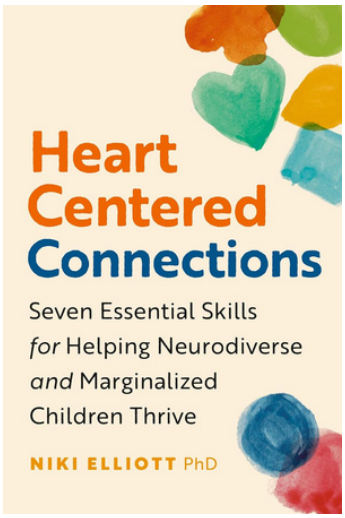
This book is for the educator, parent, or professional who refuses to give up on the child who has been left out or left behind, and who is ready to transform both outcomes and relationships.

Grounded in decades of research with over 1,000 child-serving professionals (teachers, school leaders, social workers, caregivers), Dr. Elliott introduces a transformative framework built on seven essential pillars: Self-Awareness, Interpersonal Awareness, Neuroinclusive Spaces, Activated Genius, Engaged Learning, Mindful Communication, and Heart-Centered Repair.

At the core is a powerful truth: children mirror the emotional and regulatory states of the adults around them. Lasting change begins not with controlling behavior, but with connection.

Inside, you'll discover how to:
- Remain grounded, even in the face of challenging behavior
- Build trust and connection with children who resist or withdraw
- Design environments that honor neurodiversity and unlock potential
- Foster joy, agency, and confidence in every learner
- See behavior through a new lens rooted in dignity, choice, and understanding
- Support students in building nervous system awareness so learning becomes possible

More than a set of strategies, this is a foundational shift in how we see children—and ourselves.



"This framework fundamentally changed how I understand neurodiverse and marginalized children—not as problems to be managed, but as communicators shaped by the nervous systems and environments around them. *Heart-Centered Connections* helped me see how adult regulation, power, and presence either widen or close pathways to belonging." **— Dr. Cassandra Ziskind, Director II Student Services. Carmel Unified School District**

"Dr. Niki offers the reader a captivating blend of storytelling, research, and practical tools that showcase the impact we can all make through connection. The book truly brings the *Heart-Centered Connections* framework to life, and I have witnessed the ripple effect of this valuable and effective framework within our organization. Reading it inspires a sense of hope that we all have the potential to reconnect with ourselves and, through that, transform our connections with others." **— Sarah Machat, Vice President of Organizational Quality & Impact, St. Anne's Family Services**

"This book shares that truth with wisdom and practicality. It helps us see behavior through a compassionate, nervous-system-informed lens and equips adults with tangible strategies to respond with steadiness instead of reactivity. It is thoughtful, grounded, and urgently needed in today's schools. " **— Veronica Craft, School Counselor, Carmel Unified School District**

"This work helped me recognize how my own thoughts and physical sensations influence the way I respond to children, especially during stressful situations. *Heart-Centered Connections* offers practical, embodied skills that every educator should learn." **— Tanu Glover, SDC K-2 (Education Specialist) Noble Elementary, Berryessa Union School District.**

"Our work with *Heart-Centered Connections* has provided a powerful neuroscience-based foundation for building systems that intentionally foster student belonging and connection. Heart-Centered Connections provides both the why and the how for creating schools where every student feels seen, valued, and ready to learn." **— Deann Ragsdale, Deputy Superintendent, La Mesa-Spring Valley School District**

"Science, heart and practical. These are the words that immediately come to mind when I think about *Heart Centered Connections.* This book helped me better understand my own needs and reminded me of something both simple and profound explained by Dr. Niki: anything that truly works for children also works for adults. " **— Jasmine LeFlore, MSE - Advanced Technology Manager, Collins Aerospace**

"Dr. Niki Elliott's wisdom is deeply transformative. Drawing from educational neuroscience, neurodiversity, trauma-informed practice, and social-emotional learning, she offers insights that foster emotional resilience, honor the full humanity of neurodiverse youth and the adults who support them, and strengthen the connections that hold communities together." **— Ebony T. Perry-Retana, Multimedia Artist + Certified Holistic Wellness Practitioner**

"*Heart Centered Connections* has transformed the way I approach teaching – from setting clear, humane expectations, to bringing green, growing things into the classroom, to designing transparent agendas that offer students multiple ways to demonstrate learning. " **— Emily Coalson Stamets, Storyteller and Teaching Artist, CA State Thespian Board**



Dr. Niki Elliott has taught students of all ages for more than 30 years. She is a staunch advocate for students whose lived experiences include learning disabilities, mental health diagnoses, foster care placement, and racialized marginalization. As a sought-after educator, keynote speaker, retreat facilitator, and curriculum developer, Dr. Elliott's unique approach to integrating applied educational neuroscience with mind-body nervous system wellness has supported thousands of child-serving professionals and parents around the world. Dr. Elliott delivers her teachings through the *Heart-Centered Connections* curriculum, which offers professional certificates through the University of San Diego, where she serves as Director for the Center for Embodied Equity and Neurodiversity. She holds a doctorate in education from UCLA in addition to certifications in yoga, mindfulness meditation, and clinical breathwork. She is a native of Southern California, where she resides with her family.

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