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## JAY-Z Says We Need More Therapists in Our Schools and He's Absolutely Right

POSTED JAN. 31, 2018 IN [BETTER CONVERSATION](#)



Jeff Baker is a mental health counselor who specializes in trauma therapy for children and adolescents who have experienced school, community and domestic violence. [FULL PROFILE →](#)

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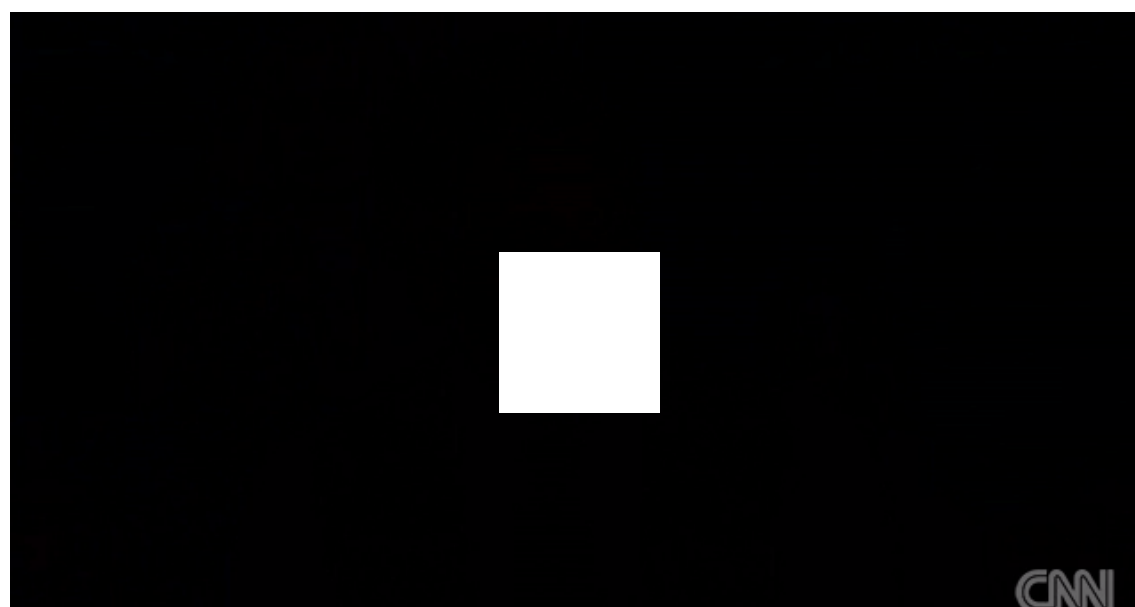
JAY-Z was the inaugural guest on CNN's new weekly "The Van Jones Show." During the 40-minute [interview](#), JAY-Z appeared deeply introspective, and even courageously vulnerable, reflecting a transformation that he credits to therapy, which has helped him to unlearn a lifetime of internalized toxic masculinity.

Asked how he overcame the pervasive cultural stigma of therapy in Black communities, he responded, “You grow, and you realize the ridiculousness of the stigma attached to it. It’s like, what? You’re just talking to someone about your problems, you know? And I think...it should actually be in our schools.”

I perked up and rewound the clip a couple of times just to hear him say that again and again.

I immediately thought back to my first job as a therapist, working in schools, and remembered how even few educators and mental-health professionals understood the nature of my work. School-based therapy is just not on most people’s radar, and school mental health always seems to fall on the periphery of discussions about education and mental health.

JAY-Z, however, not only named a plethora of reasons why schools need therapists, but he also touched on some scientific reasons why stress takes an inordinate toll on children’s mental health.



“You know, children have the *most* going on,” he continues. “Their mind is not fully developed...[then they’re] teenagers, and [they’re] drinking and doing damage to their brain...All these things are happening to you, and you don’t have the language to navigate it.”

### **CLEARLY, JAY-Z HAS DONE HIS HOMEWORK**

Study after study shows that children’s developing brains are highly malleable, for better or worse.

While this malleability allows children to learn and develop neural networks more quickly than adults, their pliable brain architecture is also more likely to incur indelible damage from chronic stress and trauma.

Until the prefrontal cortex—the brain region responsible for executive functioning and emotional regulation—fully develops around age 25, kids have a limited capacity to self-regulate emotions. They also struggle more than adults to process distress rationally and verbally, and they're more prone to acting out instead.

As JAY-Z went on to mention, children's underdeveloped cognition also has implications for their level of social-emotional awareness, unfortunately making high rates of bullying seem inevitable unless the adults around them model empathy.

"How can you know [that] when a guy's bullying you, all you have to do is say, 'Man, are you OK?'," he asked.

Just imagine if every student in America could attend a school with a therapist tasked solely with the work of teaching them about emotional and social awareness, in the midst of bullying, or any other form of adversity. How much more empathetic would our society be?

## WHY HE'S RIGHT

From firsthand experience, I can attest that school-based therapists *everywhere* would agree with every single one of JAY-Z's points about why therapists belong in schools. I can think of a few more good reasons to add to that list, too:

### **School-based therapy is accessible and convenient.**

Nearly all communities have neighborhood schools, and children spend the majority of their time there; so school-based therapy makes services convenient, both for students and working families. Not to mention, almost all school-based therapy programs offer free individual, group and family therapy.

### **School-based therapy increases students' academic motivation.**

Mental-health concerns often lie at the root of school problems. But school-based therapy offers a wraparound support system that situates treatment within a specific learning context and school community. Issues with teachers or other students, for example, can be resolved on site. As a result, student engagement usually improves, while teacher burnout decreases.

### **School-based therapy offers an inclusive and safe space.**

Students from marginalized communities and underrepresented backgrounds are more likely to experience bullying, and therapy can serve as a place to talk through these stressors, as well as any other identity-development issues. For LGBTQ+ students, in particular, the fact that school-based therapy is confidential and does not require parental consent is a big draw.

School-based therapy also has the potential to buffer minoritized students from the school-to-prison pipeline, since LGBTQ+ students and students of color, among other marginalized groups, are frequently criminalized for defending themselves against bias-related bullying.

**School-based therapy eradicates mental health stigma.**

Schools play an important role in creating a stigma-free society. School-based therapy does just that by promoting therapy as a pathway for wellness, not a medical service that pathologizes students with illness.

School-based therapists are also keen on dissociating themselves from disciplinarians, and most schools advertise therapy as a voluntary program. Granted with the autonomy to start or stop therapy at any time, students feel no shame about giving it a try. Many of the students I worked even recommended therapy to their family and friends after the experience!

On behalf of all the educators and mental health professionals doing this work, we thank you for putting some respect on our profession, JAY-Z! We hope others jump on the bandwagon soon.

PHOTO AND VIDEO COURTESY OF CNN.

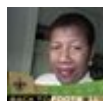
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**Jon Glover** · Secretary at Caddo Parish Public Schools

Therapy in schools leads to what particularly? You get to talk with someone about your life and the environment alike and you come out knowing what that you didn't already know? We heard Jay Z speak to the brain of a child; I wonder does he think about that when he is echoing that rap that he has made millions off of? When we fed our children with despair continuously do you think that what we see to day is a product of same? We can't say eat slop all the while espousing that it's steak because it's not. Slop is slop and steak is steak. We have had too many who think themselves the keepe... [See More](#)

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**Tony Nylander** · Coach at Teaneck High School



No one has a rebuttal for that I guess 😊

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**Jacquilin Porter**

Where should we begin?

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**SoonEe AhLee** · Oak Park, Illinois

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**Ruth Garcia** · President Elect 2016 at PSCA - The Pennsylvania School Counselors Association

Jeff,

Let me start by thanking you for writing this article sharing Jay-Z concerns on this most important need that is often overlooked and underfunded. School counselors are the first in line to provide services to our students. I agree with the importance of addressing the needs of our students. And also that providing therapy in schools helps provide a much needed service and increases the percentage of follow through with our students receiving treatment.

Yet, this treatment is not free. It is covered by insurance. Parental consent is required for students to be seen. Students can decide ... [See More](#)

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**Jeff Baker** · Equity & Inclusion Fellow at Harvard Graduate School of Education

Hi Ruth, thank you for your responding, introducing yourself, and inviting me to continue this conversation with you! I really appreciate and commend your passion for this work, and I'm also thrilled to see that you're based in Philadelphia. When I was a school-based therapist, I worked at a Center City charter school, which had a community-school partnership with UPenn, as well as other graduate schools in the area. The services we provided were free, and we worked under a full-time therapist and a Director of Family Therapy Services, both staffed by the school. Of course, most public school ... [See More](#)

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**Steve McMahon** · Owner-Operator at Intervention Support Service

Please take the time to look into the professional development training that I offer. I would love to expand our services to other regions of the country.. We have been able to support and encourage growth within the context of "conflict management"

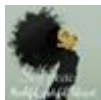
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**Jeff Baker** · Equity & Inclusion Fellow at Harvard Graduate School of Education

Steve McMahon You can reach me at [jeb9466@mail.harvard.edu](mailto:jeb9466@mail.harvard.edu).

Like · Reply · 7w



**Tina Silas**

We need prayer back in school and parent's and administration who aren't afraid of compromised rules/regulations. There are some things you follow in regards to educational instructions and policies however when it come to guidance and order. Prayer, a community village and safety is key. Protect our kids!

Like · Reply · 3 · 8w · Edited



**Annette Harris**

When was prayer in public schools?

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**Tony Nylander** · Coach at Teaneck High School

Against the law , there are private schools....

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**Greg Dockery**

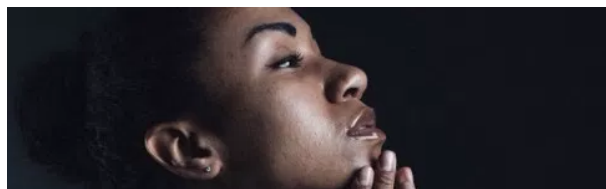
Whose prayer are you going to pray then?

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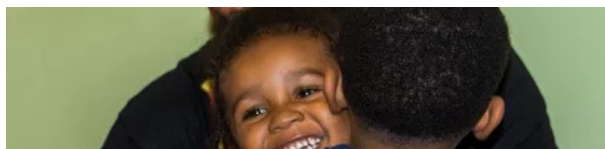
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