

## **“Compliance is the wrong goal... we need connection and compassion”: Guy Stephens & Chantelle Hyde from the Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint**

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Transcribed by Julie-Ann Lee

[Intro music: Jazzy synth pop music]

**Anne:** Welcome to *Noncompliant: A neurodiversity podcast*. I'm your host, Anne Borden King. Today we're talking about the use of isolation rooms or seclusion rooms, and restraints on students with disabilities. I have two guests: Guy Stephens and Chantelle Hyde.

**Guy Stephens** is the founder and Executive Director of the [Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint](#), a non-profit organization he started in 2019. AASR is a community of over 20,000 parents, self-advocates, teachers, school administrators, paraprofessionals, attorneys, related service providers and others working together to inform changes in policy and practice; to reduce and eliminate the use of punitive discipline and outdated behavioral management approaches; and end the school-to-prison pipeline.

The vision of the Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint is safer schools for students, teachers and staff.

**Chantelle Hyde** is the lead Canadian Volunteer with the Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint. With the support of her husband Sheldon, Chantelle became an active advocate in New Brunswick and now nationally against restraint and seclusion after learning that their daughter was being locked in a room at school. Chantelle has been getting the word out across Canada, most recently being [featured on W5](#), an investigative series on Canada's CTV news in their investigative report on seclusion and restraint in schools.

Chantelle and I connected a couple of years ago around the issue of human rights in Canadian schools and seclusion rooms and restraint. We've now reconnected post-pandemic and launched the **Canadian Coalition Against Seclusion and Restraint in Schools** founded in early 2023 and for now you can find our group on [Facebook](#).

I'm so glad to have Chantelle and Guy on the podcast. Welcome!

**Chantelle:** Thanks Anne!

**Guy:** Thanks! Great to be here.

**Anne:** Guy, let's start by talking about the Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint. How did you come to found the organization?

**Guy:** Well, I came to start the organization really because of a personal experience. I have a neurodivergent son, who unfortunately experienced restraint and seclusion in school. Honestly, the first time I heard the words 'restraint and seclusion' in the context of a school I was a little bit surprised. I would never have imagined that kids, especially kids with disabilities, might sometimes be physically restrained and secluded in schools.

I started the organization about four years ago and it was really after learning what had happened to my son and seeing the trauma that it caused to him and really ultimately caused a lot of trauma for our entire family. After it happened to him, he and I were talking one day about what had happened and I made clear to him that, it should not have happened to him. He should not have been treated the way he was treated, and I made a promise to my son, and one quite frankly that kind of changed my life in ways that were unexpected. The promise was I was going to do anything in my power to make sure this never happened to him again or other kids like him.

And that then led to a lot of research trying to understand who this was happening to, why it was happening and what we could be doing differently. I just could not believe that here in 20...well, at the time it was 2018, that this was the best that could be done. That, putting kids into small padded, or plywood rooms when they were having a hard time...or holding kids down to the ground when they were dysregulated was really even an acceptable practice, much less a preferred practice.

That's really what led to the start of the organization is personal experience, and from there I began to connect with people really from all over the world. When we started the Alliance, it was me, it was then me and a few parents, and then me and a few parents and a few educators. now we have over 20,000 people that are part of our community across the world, I mean whether it be Canada, Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom. Of course I'm located in the United States, but this is not a problem that seems to be limited to one area or the other. It's kind of an archaic practice that is really harmful and unfortunately still happens in many areas around the world.

**Anne:** Guy, I'd like to ask you a little bit more about the beginnings because it sounds like what you're describing is really grass-roots kind of thing. You created this conduit where parents could find each other. What was it like in the beginning as people were coming together from

different places around the world and building this kind of momentum for change?

**Guy:** It was kind of an unexpected journey in a lot of ways. When I started the Alliance, it really began because I was doing a lot of research. I was trying to understand those key questions of kind of, the who and the impact and all of those things and what I found was, it wasn't easy to find information. I came across a few groups online and other places that had seemed to have existed at some point in time, but many of those seemed to have gone away or become kind of inactive.

When I first started the group, I think the initial purpose was really to share information. I wanted people that were going through things like this to know that they weren't alone; but more than that I wanted them to know that they could influence change. I started very early after what had happened to my son, and began working in our local school district advocating for a change in policy, a change in practice. It was not easy, but we ultimately were successful to get the district to change their policy, change their practice, bring in new training to move away from things like restraint and seclusion.

And the year that I began this work, our school district... which was a fairly small school district, we had probably 14,000 kids, that school district over the course of a year had about 750 restraints and over 500 seclusions. What I later learned was that my little school district in Maryland which was probably 14 out of 23 school districts in terms of size, they most often used seclusion out of all the other districts in the state. You begin to find that there's things that you just don't expect to find.

But as the organization grew, I think the mission grew. Initially, it was connecting with people. It was helping people so they didn't feel alone, they didn't feel like they were powerless to bring about change and as we grew, we grew into what our mission is which is 'how do we change policies... laws, around the world?' It's not just about changing policy and law here in the US. It's about changing law and policy wherever we can, whether it be at a school district level, a state or provincial level, or federal level. I look at things like restraint and seclusion and my thought is that we should have federal law, whether we're in Canada or the United States or elsewhere, because in my mind this is a civil rights issue.

If you look at the individuals that are most often restrained and secluded, here in the US, 80% of the restraints are kids with disabilities and 77% of seclusions, and of course Black and Brown children are more likely to be restrained and secluded as well. That kind of data we find repeated elsewhere. It's often very young, disabled Black and Brown kids, kids with a trauma history and it's absolutely a civil rights issue. Our rights shouldn't vary from province to province or state to state.

Our mission kind of grew into advocating for legislative and policy change, doing a lot of work

around education. To me, it's not enough to say 'don't do these things, these things are bad, these things are harmful' but what we really need is to just focus on what can we do instead.

So the momentum began to grow. And when I started this, I was a dad that had a full time job. I had been at my job for almost 25 years. I worked in the environmental field. I was not looking for something to fill my time. I was not looking for another job. But the Alliance quickly grew into a second full time job for me, and one that I put a lot of my heart and time into because I felt so passionate about what was happening.

The outcome for kids who are being restrained, secluded, suspended, expelled, subjected to corporal punishment, we know we have kids that are kind of getting led down that school-to-prison pipeline, and the outcome for many kids is really poor outcomes that we're seeing.

Ultimately, about a year ago, I ended up leaving my previous job and focusing on this more full time. But, of course, I had to figure out 'how do I pay my mortgage at the same time?' because that's important. But the organization has grown and we've been doing work around training, around events, looking for partnerships that allow us to help influence change and it's really grown.

I mean this has been four years but, even looking around the world right now--maybe it's because I live in the bubble I live in--but I've met so many amazing, passionate, dedicated people that are out there right now trying to bring about change. People like you, Anne, and people like Chantelle, and to me there's some really positive signs out there right now in terms of what we're seeing around some of these issues. That when people come together, people that sometimes individually feel powerless, but when they come together we really do have a tremendous power to influence change.

It really has been a surprising journey for me. This was never something that I had kind of intended, but when it happened to my son I was like this is really bad and as I dug into it deeper and realized how many kids this was happening to, what the outcomes were, I kind of felt like: this is something I've got to do. I've got to try to make a change here and that's the hope- that's the hope in doing work like this.

**Anne:** That's incredible. I mean, it really was just individuals coming together and really a lot of accomplishments in a very short period of time. I want to talk in a moment about the accomplishments as well as some of the strategy for people that are listening, but I think first, let's back it up for a minute, and I think we should define for listeners what a seclusion room is. I'll ask you Guy, what is the AASRs definition of a seclusion room?

[10:10]

**Guy:** Yeah, and I like how you phrase that because you need to have a definition and unfortunately in many countries, whether it be Canada, the United States or otherwise, you don't have a set definition. You might find the words are defined on a provincial level or on a state level and that's problematic because if you don't have a definition that's consistent, sometimes different practices end up happening that fall under that.

When we're talking about seclusion or isolation...generally what we mean by **seclusion** is a child is put in a room or area against their will and they're prohibited from leaving. But, let's talk about what that looks like. It may be a small closet-sized room across from a special education room, it might look like a padded room, it's built into a classroom, it might look like just kind of an empty area of some sort. And what often happens is a kid who is having a difficult time and is beginning to escalate is not only *not* effectively de-escalated but sometimes the staff actually are inadvertently escalating them.

The individual may be physically dragged to a seclusion room. They might be physically restrained and carried into a seclusion room, and when they're put into that room the door is shut, they are in there by themselves. There might be an observation window. There might be staff outside the door holding it shut. There tend to be different laws in different areas in terms of what you may or may not do. Typically though, staff are at least required to keep eyes on the individual but it's done under the idea that 'well, here's a dysregulated child, what are we going to do? We're going to put them in this empty room and they're going to somehow magically regulate themselves.'

And the truth is, there's nothing calming, there's nothing therapeutic about being put into a room by yourself against your will. In fact, it's terrifying. I mean, kids get into rooms like that and they scream and they scratch and they bang and they try to get out, and what you sometimes see is that goes on for 15, 20 minutes. Kids have gotten all sorts of injuries and banging their heads on the wall and things like that, but what might happen is in that 20 minutes or so the kid *seems* to quiet down a little bit, they kind of slide against the back wall, their head goes down.

What I'll tell you that you're seeing there is not a kid who's reflecting on what they've done or calming down...but it's a kid whose brain is actually going into kind of a shutdown phase. It's a protective phase that our brain will go into when we feel so overwhelmed and helpless. In fact, some kids even go into dissociative states.

Seclusion, again, is putting a child in a room or an area against their will and not letting them leave. Now, sometimes things happen that I would still consider seclusion but others try to get around what the rules might be wherever they are. They go 'well, if they're not alone, it's not seclusion, so somebody might say, well, I'm going to stand in the doorway and block the child

from leaving.’ To me, that’s still seclusion. If you’re putting a child in a room, against their will, you’re not letting them leave, that’s seclusion. If your only function in standing in that doorway is to not let someone leave, that’s seclusion. If you stand in front of a doorway some sort of pads or mats, that’s still seclusion. If you’re in the room with the kid and you’re not talking to the kid, trying to help them or trying to help them regulate through co-regulation, that could be seclusion as well.

So when it comes to restraint we’re talking about some kind of hold. We talk about **physical restraint**, holding the person in a way that prevents them from moving on their own. It could be a seated position, it can be a standing position. You no doubt have heard about floor restraints, like a **supine** restraint which is a floor restraint where someone’s face up; or **prone** restraints which is a face-down restraint.

And of course prone restraints get a lot of attention most notably because people have died in prone restraints, often with their last words being something along the lines of “I can’t breathe”, because those floor restraints, especially when you look at the age difference here, most of the kids being restrained and secluded, they’re 5, 6, 7, 8 years old. They’re not almost adults. They’re often very young kids, and when a young child goes in a fight or flight mode, that adult might also have that same experience. When you have a much larger adult holding a child down, you can end up with what they call **positional asphyxia** which is when the child can’t breathe.

And unfortunately, hundreds of kids across the world have died being physically restrained in places like schools. So these things can be quite dangerous.

And, of course there’s other forms of restraint like **mechanical restraint** where you might be using some sort of device. We’ve seen stories about kids being literally duct-taped to trees, or to desks; people misusing equipment that has a legitimate purpose like a Rifton chair which is designed for positional support and should be prescribed to someone, but kids being strapped to these chairs just to prevent them from moving.

There’s a lot of different terms out there that are important to be familiar with, but at the end of the day these are what I would say are outdated crisis management approaches that are not only outdated, but they’re dangerous, and there are better things we can and should do to avoid crisis situations in the first place.

**Anne:** Yeah, I think that people are often surprised to learn that the average victim of that kind of prone restraint and seclusion rooms is actually quite young. I think people tend to think of it as being used on older students, but it really is 5, 6, and 7 year old kids, based on what your organization has found. They are the primary victims, is that right?

**Guy:** Absolutely. And, again, kids with a trauma history. There was a famous study done a couple decades ago called the ACEs study, which was the **Adverse Childhood Experiences study**. And they correlated the existence of some of these adverse childhood experiences as adverse trauma, and behavior and changes that occur in the brain, and of course, what happens is when a kid experiences trauma, it actually changes their brain and then those changes that occur in the brain really create a situation that kids are more likely to not feel safe. Kids that don't feel safe are more likely to be hypervigilant and a hypervigilant kid is one that kind of feels like they're always on alert... always waiting for something to happen. As a result you'll often see stress-related behavior from kids that have a trauma history.

And then on top of that, they're often getting restrained, secluded, suspended, expelled, even here in the US and in other places subjected to corporal punishment. Which of course further traumatizes kids and increases the likelihood that a child is probably going to have more distress, more hypervigilance, more behaviors of concern.

**Anne:** Right. This idea of the trauma and how the trauma then affects future behavior, and impacts the child emotionally, this is common-sense I think to most people, and to most certainly to parents. I'm just wondering, what is it in the schools? Because we know restraint and seclusion are so incredibly common. I know here in Canada there was a report from Edmonton, Alberta in 2019 that seclusion rooms were used more than 700 times in one month, just in Edmonton, Alberta! It's incredibly common. What is it in the philosophy of these schools or classrooms that kind of normalizes this thing that obviously doesn't make sense to anyone outside of that world?

**Guy:** Well, there's a couple things, I think, that come into play here. First of all, if you were to look at a number of school districts in a given area, you might find that some use restraint and seclusion quite a bit, some don't use them at all. You might wonder what the difference is.

What I'll say is that the least likely difference is the kids. It's not a matter of the kids that make it different. It's often a matter of the adult mindset. It's often a matter of training and culture. If you are in a school that has a very punitive culture, if you're in a school that the tools that are commonly used are restraint-seclusion-suspension-expulsion, you're going to find higher numbers of these things happening. It's often related to the training. Here, we have a lot of schools that are required to get crisis management training, and crisis management training in-and-of itself is not a bad thing, but what often happens is people become very focused on the physical interventions. And there's a lot that should happen before you even contemplate getting into a physical intervention...before you contemplate a physical restraint or a seclusion, and unfortunately and in some areas those things don't really happen.

Here in the US we don't have federal law, but we have federal guidance, and our federal guidance says that restraint and seclusion should not be used unless it's a crisis situation, you've tried all else you can try, and it's necessary to prevent **imminent serious physical harm**.

Now, imminent serious physical harm has actually a legal definition. I'm going to paraphrase it, but it's essentially a life-or-death situation. What our federal guidance says is that you should not restrain or seclude unless it's a potentially life-threatening situation.

However, the truth of the matter is that more often than not, kids are restrained and secluded for non-compliance, for disrespect, for minor behaviors, for power struggles.

[20:03]

**Guy:** You should never be in a situation where you go from, 'oh, failure to do a worksheet' to a situation where a kid's being restrained, but that happens. You should never go from a situation where a child is standing up and refuses to sit down and suddenly he's drug off to a seclusion room, but that happens. My son was once restrained for splashing water – not an imminent serious physical harm. But the mindset is very often people think that these are appropriate interventions for any unsafe behaviour, and they're not.

The reason I think that guidance was as strong as it was, is because the people that wrote that guidance realized that restraint and seclusion are harmful. When you restrain and seclude a child, you have the potential of significant trauma, injury and even death. In my mind, and I don't think this is a far leap, the use of a physical restraint is the use of potentially deadly force.

So my question to you is: when do we use potentially deadly force on a 5-year-old? I can't imagine a lot of scenarios where that should be the case, but it happens.

To your question 'why has it happened? Why does it happen like that?' Well, culture and training has a bit to do with it. I also think – and this is a bigger problem and something that you and I could probably talk for hours about, but a lot of the approaches in many schools across the world are heavily based around behaviourism. Behaviourism is kind of the science of behaviour that came out of the last century. It was the last century... 100 years ago. Back in the 1930s, 1950s, work on things like operant conditioning, B.F. Skinner. A lot of the behavioural approaches that are still prevalent in our schools today are very rooted in behavioural approaches.

A lot of these approaches are very steeped in rewards and consequences. They look at a behaviour and they don't care much about what's below the behaviour. In fact I had a behaviourist once tell me, "I don't care why they're doing it, I just want to change their behaviour."

**Anne:** Yup.

**Guy:** *Why* is important. It's not enough to just to say, we want to change it. What I would say to you is a lot of the approaches that were taken in schools around behaviour are failing not only the kids, but also the teachers and staff. Yet, for some reason we continue doing the same

thing....and furthermore the behavioural approach, the reward and consequences...a lot of these kids have had tons of consequences. It's not an incentive that's going to help them to meet the expectation.

If a child has a hard time reading, what do we do? We think about what kind of reading intervention would be appropriate to help them learn the skills needed to read. What we don't do is say to the kid, 'well here's a book and here's a bag of Skittles. If you read the book, you get the Skittles.' We don't just offer them an arbitrary reward and say that 'if you could do this' – because *if* they could read, they would read, and behavior is no different. Many of the things we see in terms of behaviour, it has a lot of roots. Not all behaviour is a matter of choice. Not all behaviour is volitional, but kids often have an issue where they don't have the skills – they don't have the abilities that meet the expectations and yet what we're doing is holding the carrot or stick in front of them and saying, 'well, do it!' That's not where the focus needs to be.

The focus needs to be 'how do we identify where they're having a hard time? How do we help them develop the skills? How do we understand what their history is and why they might be very sensitive to certain situations? Do they have trauma? Do they have a situation in their background that might lead them to feel a certain way?' I would say behavioural approaches are one of the things that's failing, really significantly, that leads the situations then when adults get into power struggles with the kids.

**Anne:** Yeah, I think that it definitely is a belief system and also about authority, right? There's a whole belief system that's part and parcel of many schools, but like you said, it depends on the school and it depends on the environment. There are schools and environments that don't use that radical behaviourist approach that aren't using seclusion and restraint.

We know that it's possible and the big question that I get when I talk about this topic all the time is that people want to know, 'well, what are we going to do instead?' because there's this sense that the last resort has become the first resort, that somehow this is the only thing that we can do.

I'd like to open that conversation up really for all of us to talk about what are some the alternatives that people do have and that people are using that work in terms of the best practices to avoid using any seclusion, or using restraint?

**Guy:** It's not even a matter of alternatives. I mean, that's kind of where I started too: 'what do you do instead?' There is a lot that really has to be thought about here. At the Alliance, we often talk about 'what is the alternative' more broadly, and on a broad level, it's trauma-sensitive, trauma-informed approaches. It's understanding the impact of trauma on individuals. There's a tremendous intersection, I believe, between trauma and disability. Many individuals with disabilities experience trauma. Trauma is a significant factor in some of the behavior that

people see. They're like 'why, I don't understand that behavior?' Well, is there something beneath it.

We talk about kind of neuroscience-aligned approaches as well. I'm a really big believer that a little bit of brain science goes a long way. In fact, I would go so far to say that when you begin to have a little bit of understanding of how the brain works--I'm not talking about you becoming a neurologist, I'm talking about you just having a foundational understanding of how the brain develops, simple things like our brain develops from back to front and from bottom to top. Well, what does that mean in terms of development? It means the last part of the brain to fully develop is the prefrontal cortex. That prefrontal cortex is our decision-making or rational part of our brain.

So, kids are not miniature adults with miniature brains. They're actually quite different from us. When you understand the impact that trauma has on the brain, it's a game changer. When you understand what happens to somebody who is in the middle of a fight-or-flight response, you understand that their prefrontal cortex essentially goes offline and they're not really able to respond to your logical, rational requests you might make. They need help regulating. They need help, through things like co-regulation.

And we're also really big believers in the idea of relationship-driven approaches, so working with kids trying to build relationships and of course we hear the push back of 'well, we don't have time to have relationships with 30 kids'. I agree, you probably don't, but you probably have one or two kids in your classroom that if you don't build a relationship, are really going to have a tough time and it would be really smart of you to invest in that.

I think the final thing I would say is that it's about moving to *collaborating with* or *doing things with* people as opposed to doing things *to* people or doing things *for* people. A lot of [autism] programs, as you mentioned, are very compliance-based, and I know no parent that tells me, 'oh when my kid grows up, I want him to be compliant'.

**Anne:** Yeah.

**Guy:** Compliance is not the goal, but in many of our schools and many of our other settings, compliance becomes the goal, and that's the wrong goal. We need connection. We need compassion. We need better approaches to help kids who are having a difficult time.

**Anne:** Chantelle, I know that your involvement in this cause started because of a personal experience that your family had, and I'm wondering if you could share with the listeners what that experience was like and how it's changed your approach and kind of powered your activism here in Canada?

**Chantelle:** Definitely. If I can go a little bit further back than her restraint and seclusion issue, I think it kind of lays a base for where I think, like Guy said, we don't always necessarily want to talk about alternatives. What are all of the things we should be doing beforehand? Well, a big part of that in Canada is the lack of supports that we see for our children, [my family] went from Ontario to British Columbia, then out here to New Brunswick just essentially chasing appropriate levels of funding and services for Lily and I definitely would say that that whole long road and the lack of support that we saw, it all had a lot to do with why she ended up in the situation that she did as well.

If children aren't being supported with, let's just say Occupational Therapy help, there's so many environmental factors that are being missed, a lot of the relationship-building that could be helped by that person as well. There's a lot of sensory issues that could be missed, that all of these things are affecting the child all day long and that's what was happening to my daughter. She wasn't receiving any kind of support in any of those areas. There was no Occupational Therapist involved, they kind of walked in and out, looking for the fires that they could put out and not actually offering her any real occupational therapy support at all.

And I found out recently in New Brunswick that the school system will even tell you that you can't make use of a private occupational therapist if you want your child to see the in-school occupational therapist. They feel that it's doubling services, but the children aren't receiving occupational therapy help in the schools, so essentially parents are being told just to leave their child flailing. And Lily was really in that mode to begin with coming to New Brunswick. She hadn't received a lot of support. She started here in grade 2, and then we ended up at the only English school in a small town who literally said to me we hadn't ever experienced a child like Lily before.

[30:05]

**Chantelle:** And they really were telling me they didn't know what to do, so I was a parent trying to figure this out myself. She is autistic and has an intellectual disability as well and at the time I didn't know what was happening at school. I was really just flailing looking for appropriate services and so my MLA [Member of Parliament] actually met with each of the ministers of Education, Social Development and Health about my daughter specifically, and literally nobody was willing to do anything to help her and so he told me essentially I didn't have another choice but to go on the news, crying...the ugly cry on TV. It was not a good time and telling people essentially that I felt if I didn't get the support that Lily needed, I was going to lose her within a year or two and that's really where we were at.

And it just happened that newscast aired on June 30 so school was over, and another parent from the school saw that newscast and contacted me on Facebook, and... it's really hard for me to tell this without getting emotional...but she described for me the situation that she had seen back in April.

So, this had been months before school ended that she was at school delivering cupcakes and saw Lily [deep breath] screaming a tormented scream, slamming her hands on the inside of a window of a door of the workroom where she worked every day, essentially. And again seclusion rooms don't always necessarily have to be a small dedicated space--it can be anybody's office, it can be any classroom. For Lily it was her little classroom...and there was a person--an E.A. I assume-- who was holding the door with the full force of their bodyweight.

And that mother was so disturbed, she looked down to her son who was walking with her and she said to him, "does this happen all the time?" And he said "Yes, that's Lily's room."

And, that's really, really hard to swallow as a parent. I can honestly say that my base trust in people as a whole was rocked to the core. You assume that when you send your child off to school, that they're going to be safe in the very least, and not that they are going to be traumatized by the people who are supposed to be taking care of them.

Again like I said, there's so many reasons behind it. In New Brunswick and across Canada it's systemic failure to a mass degree. I mean, children are not being supported the way that they need to when they have disabilities and I just had no idea about that until Lily was diagnosed. And literally after she was diagnosed, within 24 hours I was having a panic attack, just going online and reading about what that situation is....

**Anne:** Yeah.

**Chantelle:** ... in Canada for children with autism. It's very scary. The restraint and seclusion issue, I can tell you, from the information that I've been reading, in Canada it's most certainly as Guy said marginalized children, but in Canada very specifically students with autism between 6 and 11 years old, and that there are instances that they are being secluded for up to 3 hours at a time. I mean I cannot even...My daughter, I was told, this happened at least 3 times through our human rights complaint process for up to 10 minutes at a time. That is shocking and horrifying to me. I can't imagine if your child was being held in a room like that for up to 3 hours, what that does to a child, because my child shut down completely on that--that total shutdown mode that Guy mentioned. Her brain went into that mode for, I'm going to say about 7 months.

**Anne:** Wow.

**Chantelle:** It was very scary. She wouldn't even let us speak to her, so yeah, it's very traumatizing. There's no question. There's no question.

Since then I met Guy early on, thankfully, I think early on when I first launched my human rights complaint and I think he and I were both pretty shocked to see that the Human Rights Commission chose not to even investigate. They didn't even speak to that mother witness. They essentially said that because the school system said that it was 'for her or for someone else's

safety' that it was not unreasonable to lock Lily in a room. I believe the school system just knew at this point that if they can say that it was for someone's safety...that simple. And that's very scary.

And I believe Anne, that you've spoken with the [Ontario] Human Rights Commissioner in Ontario and found out they seem to be operating a lot along the same lines.

**Anne:** Yeah, and there's a sense of betrayal when you think you can go to an authority, especially a Human Rights authority, because that's what we did at the organization I'm at, [Autistics for Autistics](#). We kept hearing from families about kids being put in restraint or put in seclusion and so we had a meeting with the Ontario Human Rights Commission [in 2019] and we said, 'look, this problem is happening, we know you do investigations, can you investigate this?' And we just got ghosted, and *really* ghosted, because I'm a really perseverating person [laughing]...

**Chantelle:** Mm-hmm.

**Anne:** ... to try to get the conversation going. I felt a bit naïve. I...I didn't understand at first why they weren't picking up the ball on this, it's really one of the top human rights concerns and children's rights concerns in our entire province. And it took me some time to realize the relationships between the power structures and that we have to go beyond, or outside of these authorities.

However, policymakers sometimes will make policy, we saw that in Alberta when their former NDP government...there was a very bad instance of seclusion that was covered in the media, and they banned seclusion rooms. And then a new government took over and they rescinded the ban, so you realize that you can try to work with human rights entities, you can try to work with policymakers, but the other piece of it is the education to just create an environment where it's just not acceptable and there aren't excuses for why it's happening.

There's a huge education component as well which I think is really amazing about what you've been doing, because you've been going to the media and that seems like one of the most important pieces in this is to kind of draw back the curtain on what's actually happening. Because even when you tell people in conversation that it's happening, I don't think it really sinks in for them until you have something like a media story or like the [Bartlett Report](#) which is a report about restraint and seclusion in Canada that came out in 2020.

I'm wondering what your thoughts are about that report?

**Chantelle:** First of all, I think the timing of it was extensively unfortunate.

**Anne:** Mm-hmm.

**Chantelle:** Because I feel like for the [sigh]... it paints a really good and shocking picture of just how little this situation is actually known in Canada even by our ministries of education. They don't have any numbers on how much this is happening. There's no proof of any of this [restraint and seclusion] *working*, for one. But there's plenty of information out there that I know Guy could go more into that about how restraint and seclusion do *not* work.

But there's no accountability, there's just the guidelines... and the wording of everything is so ambiguous that nobody can really be held accountable because it's not really clear when anyone should or shouldn't be doing, and at what point in time. When you say 'imminent serious physical harm', do people even know what that definition is? Do we have the same definition as the U.S. as far as that goes and that it should be a risk of death? I don't know. But, I know that it's certainly not taken that way in the system that it should be a risk of death before restraint or seclusion should happen.

The numbers are shocking and I know that you quickly mentioned part of this report doesn't get into necessarily the numbers between provinces so much as the lack of numbers in the provinces.

**Anne:** Yeah.

**Chantelle:** But that Alberta report definitely does talk about it, they actually did an audit on how many seclusion rooms were in just the Edmonton school district and there were 129 schools that had 179 individual spaces considered to be seclusion rooms in one school district, and that like you said, more than 700 uses of the spaces in the first 3 weeks of the school year when they were required to keep numbers.

How much is this really happening in Canada, if that's the case in one school district? I know that in New Brunswick there were no numbers being kept. I think there's a chance they might be kept as of a short while ago, in September. There is a standing committee...and it was blatantly obvious and they admitted that they had no numbers at the Ministry level even though they were supposed to in their own guidelines be keeping those numbers, .

[40:03]

**Chantelle:** It's just everything is very willy-nilly across Canada as far as regulations whether there are mandates or just guidelines, it's almost like they're just kind of suggesting that 'you follow these rules, but you do your own thing'.

**Anne:** Right.

**Chantelle:** That's almost about the impression you come out of this with.

**Anne:** Yeah, I mean there's a barrier, right. It seems like Canada has all the right lingo about inclusion and--I'm thinking about Atlantic Canada right now--there's a lot of inclusion mandates, right? But what does inclusion really mean if these kids are experiencing violence

everyday in their classroom? Like, it doesn't mean anything.

**Chantelle:** They're not measuring how many children are just flat out staying home at this point. I mean the number of children with disabilities being homeschooled in New Brunswick is probably astronomical right now--a lot of parents who started out fighting [for inclusion] in the school system, it's amazing. And like I said it's really shocking outside of the school system if you talk to people about this. Or they just don't even believe that this is happening in Canada. But then you talk to anybody in the school system and it's almost like it's just par for the course.

I have friends who are EAs in the school system, and they say, 'oh, I just try to stay away from that kind of thing. Or even people who have left the education system completely, because they just can't believe that this is happening and it's traumatizing them. And there's the other part of this, we're not just traumatizing the children who are being restrained and secluded, I mean the children at my daughter's school were listening to these catastrophic situations over walkie-talkies, watching teachers frantically running out of the classrooms down hallways in order to go restrain and seclude kids. And the kids knew that that's what they were going to do. Like, the kids were experiencing PTSD symptoms the moment that the walkie-talkies went off...

**Anne:** Yeah.

**Chantelle:** It was, I mean it's really a scary situation.

**Guy:** I wanted to address a little bit of the safety myth, because we often hear this idea that 'well, restraints and seclusion are necessary to keep everybody safe' and 'what else are we supposed to do?' right? And the truth of the matter is that any time you're talking about using a physical restraint or seclusion, the most risk comes in the time that you go hands on with the kids. If the kid is having a difficult time, anything you can do to avoid getting to a situation where you're physically restraining them or trying to drag them to an isolation room... because the greatest point of risk is the moment you go hands on.

And there's science behind that which is that when you go hands on with the kid, they will likely go into a fight-or-flight response mode. Their pre-frontal cortex, their thinking part of their brain kind of begins to shut down, they're reacting and responding from their amygdala --a part of their brain that's kind of their defence centre, and the same happens to adults. That's why these things are so dangerous because as the child is dysregulated, as the child is in a fight-or-flight response mode, the adult is likely also to enter that fight or flight response mode. And there is a myth around safety. It's absolutely not safer and in fact anything you do to avoid it is necessary.

When we talked earlier about the growth of our community, one of the things that I'm really proud of is the fact that our community is really diverse. We've got parents of kids that have been restrained and secluded, we have self-advocates, we have a lot of autistic self-advocates who have themselves been restrained and secluded, but we also have a lot of teachers, para-

professionals, administrators, related service providers... all sorts of other folks, and the idea is how do we bring people together that are aligned in the idea that we can do better?

I don't know if you're familiar with **Dr. Ross Greene**, but Dr. Ross Greene has an approach working with kids called the Collaborative & Proactive Solutions approach [and a] very simple philosophy, that is kind of the idea that **kids do well if they can**. And that sounds like a simple thing, but very often in our schools the idea is often prevail that kids do well if they *want* to, which is why we often throw a lot of rewards and consequences at them, because we think it's a matter of motivation. When in fact, often it's a matter of ability, or experience.

But I also believe to that end that teachers and staff do well if they can, and one of the things we really need to focus on changing is kind of not only hearts and minds but the mindset around 'what are the better alternatives'.

If you're an educator and this is what you've been doing and you can't imagine another solution because you've been doing this for 20 years, you just don't...there's nothing else that exists for you. There's no other solution if you can't imagine it.

I can tell you though that there are other solutions. There are effective ways and there are interventions that can be used, whether it's something like Ross Greene's Collaborative & Proactive Solutions. In Canada, one of my favorite approaches is an approach called Self-Reg, and that was developed by **Dr. Stuart Shanker** who wrote a great book called Self-Reg and a couple of others. They were in a group called the MEHRIT Centre which is out of Peterborough, I believe.

There's some great work that's being done out there that focuses on trying to understand 'why do these things happen, how do we avoid them from happening, how do we better support, not only the kids but the teachers and staff', because I honestly believe that you can reduce and eliminate restraint and seclusion and create safer classrooms for the kids, the teachers and the staff. The changes that need to be made are beneficial to everyone. The problem is that many people don't see that.

Many people are kind of living with an outdated mindset that there are no other choices and that's just simply not true.

**Chantelle:** To accompany the CTV W5 story that we did, I put a lot of that information together with Ross Greene, **Mona Delahooke**, **Lori Desautels**, the MEHRIT Centre, there's a lot of really great resources on a page on the Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraints website. it's <https://endseclusion.org/resources/change/> and you'll find a lot of really great stuff there.

**Anne:** Amazing. Amazing. Yeah, there are solutions and there are better ways, and we're working here in Canada and you've been working in the US. Guy, I know you've had a lot of success as well in a really short period of time. You've accomplished a lot in terms of getting record-keeping, getting regulation, and getting bans on seclusion, and regulation around

restraint. Could we talk a little bit about AASR and what you've accomplished in the past few years?

**Guy:** Sure. I'm really proud of the work that we've done through the Alliance, but it is been an effort from really a large community of people that are, coming forward to bring about change.

**Anne:** Mm-hmm.

**Guy:** We've been very involved in legislative efforts both on a state level, a local level and a federal level, and I can give you some examples. I mean even right now; on Monday I testified in Washington state to the Washington State Senate about a bill that would eliminate the use of seclusion or isolation as they refer to it there. We have been involved in many different states in supporting legislative efforts last year in my home state of Maryland, we were able to get a complete ban on the use of seclusion in our public schools, so several other states have done similar things and are working in that direction.

At the moment we have been talking to representatives in Vermont, in Oregon and in Washington state. In Texas there's some activity and in a number of other states... Idaho.

We're always happy to get involved in the support efforts but these efforts start with individuals. It's easy for us to feel like we don't have a lot of power to change things but just to give some examples, the efforts that are going on right now in Vermont it was actually an educator. An educator came forward and said, 'oh my gosh we're using prone restraint on children in schools. This does not seem right to me.' They began going to the board of education and sharing their opinion. They reached out to us and we began to help them to amplify that... talking to elected officials, having conversations with members of the board of education.

This often can happen **because a few people care**, a few people come forward to do something, and we've got similar groups of really amazing advocates that have come together across different states that begin to work to bring about change.

To me it's a big accomplishment to be able to see changes in laws and policies, but again that's not enough. In fact, you've got to be careful because laws and policies can have unintended consequences. The bigger part of this equation is how do we get to people the better things they can and should be doing? And that's where we spend a lot of our time. One of the things that I'm really proud of that we do is every two weeks we do a live series. On our live series, much like your podcast we do a video podcast, it's live, we talk to experts, we talk to the parents, we talk to self-advocates, we talk to a lot of different people. The idea behind it is 'how do we bring people better ways of supporting people... better ways rather than relying on things like restraint and seclusion?' And those continue to reach a lot of people from around the globe and it's that shift that's really important.

It's the mindset... It's people realizing that there's other things that they can do. It's people understanding that there are far better choices. I'm really proud of that work. We've done a number of events. I go around the country and speak at conferences. In fact I'm hoping to come to Canada maybe in the summer to speak at an event there. This is how the change gets made. Change gets made by persistence and Anne I know you'll appreciate that, because that's what it takes.

[50:01]

**Guy:** It takes persistence. When I began this journey, I was kind of under the mindset of like, I'm not going away. If something frustrating happened, I'd figure out a way to put more pressure on the situation and again, in four years' time, and maybe it's just my view because I've been living in this world, in four years' time I'm seeing some really positive things happening.

And any time, even if it's at a school system level, if a board of education for a school system changes their policy, that's a number of kids that are at less risk than they were before. Of course if a state or province does it, it's helpful and of course we're going to keep pushing to get something done federally both in Canada and the United States because I think it's critical. But I think the real accomplishment of the Alliance is really connecting people, bringing this information to people and trying to advocate for change that ultimately--and I don't want to sound too grand about this--but the change that we're making in moving away from restraint, seclusion, suspension, expulsion, corporal punishment, the school-to-prison pipeline, this is something that has such a tremendous impact on the outcomes of kids' lives...and then I think a societal impact as well.

If we can move away from these punitive things that are being done to kids, and to trauma-inform and brain-aligned approaches, we're going to make the world a better place. There's a lot of work to be done out there, but this is critical work to not only improving the outcome for kids but creating a better world.

**Anne:** Absolutely. It's so inspiring to talk to both of you about the work that's being done in the US and Canada and I really appreciate your time and I'll put links on the podcast blog as well, so that people can learn more and get involved.

Thank you again so much for speaking with the podcast.

**Chantelle:** Thank you, Anne.

**Guy:** Thank you for the opportunity to share our voices and our stories.

**Anne:** I was speaking with Guy Stephens, Executive Director of the Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint, and Chantelle Hyde, the lead Canadian Volunteer with the Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint.

[Outro music: Jazzy synth pop music]

**Anne:** You're listening to Noncompliant, a neurodiversity podcast. I'm your host Anne Borden-King. Noncompliant is recorded at MCS Studios and transcribed by Julie-Ann Lee. This episode was engineered by Lucien Lozon. Thanks to our team and thanks for listening.