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<u>**Professional Development Courses – Fall 2025**</u>

<u>**Tricked, Trapped, and Targeted: Understanding Sextortion and Extortion**</u>

Course Summary:

Tricked, Trapped, and Targeted: Understanding Sextortion and Extortion is a timely and critical professional development course designed to equip educators, counselors, and caregivers with the knowledge and tools to recognize, prevent, and respond to online exploitation of youth. The course explores the psychological tactics used by perpetrators to manipulate and coerce victims, the digital platforms most commonly involved, and the warning signs of grooming and exploitation. Participants will examine real-world cases, learn about the legal implications, and gain practical strategies for educating students, supporting victims, and fostering digital resilience. The goal is to empower adults to better protect children and teens from being tricked, trapped, or targeted in an increasingly connected world.

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<u>**Book Talk: *The Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt**</u>

In *The Anxious Generation*, social psychologist Jonathan Haidt explores the alarming rise in anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges among today's youth—especially since the early 2010s. Drawing on extensive research, the shift from a "play-based childhood" to a "phone-based childhood" is a key driver of the mental health crisis plaguing students today.

Young people, especially girls, have become increasingly anxious and fragile due to:

- **Overexposure to smartphones and social media**
- **Excessive screen time and online comparison culture**
- **Disrupted sleep and social development**

Alarming Trends:

- Rates of depression, anxiety, and self-harm have **doubled or tripled** since 2010.
- Girls, in particular, face unique harms from **social media-based social comparison and cyberbullying**.
- Boys are more likely to struggle with **video game addiction, attention issues, and motivational decline**.

Implications for Educators:

- Students today may arrive in classrooms with **underdeveloped social-emotional and executive functioning skills**.
- Educators are encountering increased **mental health challenges, attention issues, and emotional dysregulation**.
- Schools are now essential in helping students re-learn **offline social skills, self-regulation, and digital boundaries**.

This will be a 3-part course:

Part 1: Understanding the Crisis – What Changed and Why

Chapters Covered: Introduction through Chapter 4

Part 2: The Four Great Untruths and the Decline of Resilience

Chapters Covered: Chapters 5 through 8

Part 3: Solutions – Restoring Healthy Development - Chapters Covered: Chapters 9 through the Conclusion

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From Scroll to Struggle: Exploring the Mental Health Crisis Regarding Social Media and Youth is a professional development course designed to equip educators with a deeper understanding of how social media is impacting the emotional well-being and mental health of today's students. Drawing from current research in psychology, neuroscience, and education, this course explores the links between screen time, social comparison, digital validation, and rising levels of anxiety, depression, and loneliness among youth.

Participants will examine the unique vulnerabilities of the adolescent brain environments, identify warning signs of mental health struggles related to online activity, and explore the role that schools and educators can play in building digital resilience. Practical strategies for supporting students, fostering healthy tech habits, and engaging families in conversations about online life will also be discussed.

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Rewired: The Brain, Dopamine, Gaming, and the Digital Age

Course Summary:
This professional development course explores the powerful impact of digital technology on the developing brain, with a focus on dopamine-driven behaviors. Educators will gain insight into how constant access to screens, social media, and digital stimulation is "rewiring" students' brains—altering attention spans, motivation, emotional regulation, and learning capacity. The course delves into the science of dopamine, explaining how apps and games are designed to exploit reward pathways, and how this affects classroom behavior and mental health. Through engaging research, real-world examples, participants will leave with a clearer understanding of how to support students in a tech-saturated world.

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Brains Under Construction : Understanding the Teenage Brain

Course Summary:
This professional development course offers educators a deep dive into adolescent brain development through the lens of Dr. David Walsh's groundbreaking book, *Why Do They Act That Way?*. Participants will explore how neurological changes during adolescence impact behavior, decision-making, emotional regulation, and risk-taking. The course will break down brain science, helping teachers build empathy, manage challenging behaviors, and foster stronger connections with their students. Participants will walk away with a renewed understanding of why teens behave the way they do—and how to effectively teach and reach them.

Key Topics Include:

- The science of the adolescent brain
- Emotional and behavioral changes in middle and high school students
- The role of dopamine, risk, and reward
- Impacts of stress, sleep, and technology
- Practical classroom strategies for connection, structure, and support

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Think, Plan, Do: The Power of Executive Function Skills

Executive Function Skills: What They Are, Why They Are Needed, and How Kids Are Losing Them to Screens

Course Summary:

This professional development course provides educators with a comprehensive understanding of executive function (EF) skills—cognitive abilities such as working memory, emotional regulation, flexible thinking, and impulse control—that are essential for learning, behavior, and overall success in school and life. Participants will explore how these skills develop throughout childhood and adolescence, and why they are foundational for academic achievement, self-regulation, and social-emotional well-being.

The course delves into the rising concerns around screen time and digital media, examining how excessive and unstructured use of technology can interfere with the development and practice of EF skills. Through evidence-based research, real-world examples, and interactive discussion, educators will learn how digital distractions affect attention, planning, task persistence, and emotional resilience.