# Helping Kids Become their Best Selves

- Understanding what's happening
  - Ongoing crisis and challenge of pandemic
  - People are feeling depleted, skeptical and frustrated
  - Social Media can exacerbate the challenges
    - Decrease in empathy, easier to dehumanize others
- How to help: Strategies, Tools and Resources
  - Home
  - School
  - Community

Ongoing Crises

- Pandemic
- Polarization
- Uncertainty
- Well-being at risk
- Unseen burdens
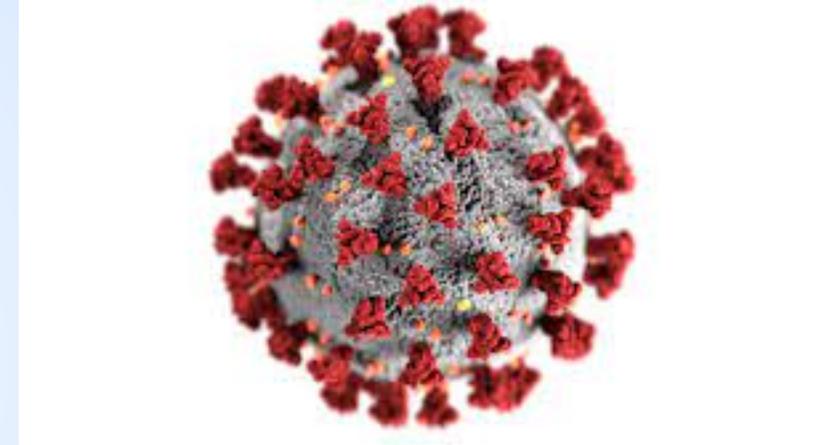
Many Ways to Respond

- Compassion and Grace
- Advocacy
- Posting our thoughts and feelings online
- Shutting down
- Anger, frustration and isolation
- Connecting with those around us

Williamson Co., TN, School Board Meeting /Matt Masters, Williamson Home Page

Seeking to Understand

- **Cannot expect our best behavior in our worst moments**

- Examine the bigger picture, start with context the context

- Tempting to "Monday Morning Quarterback"
  - The lure of "should have"
  - The hope of policies and rules to protect everyone
  - Can solve some problems and be helpful in some situations

- Best prevention includes contextual and individual factors
  - The opportunity to learn, grow and do better next time
  - Compassion and Curiosity

SEL and Mental Health Support at School

- WHY SEL for all students?
  - SEL instruction leads to improved academic performance and a reduction in problem behaviors for ALL students.
  - SEL instruction helps improve lifetime outcomes and is aligned with a growing demand for SEL competency from employers across business and other sectors.
  - Additional information: CASEL: What does the research say?
- HOW does SEL work in District 34?
  - Grounded in our Strategic Plan goals.
  - Programming arranged as a responsive, prevention-focused system.
  - Includes family and community partnerships and supports:

SEL and Mental Health Support at School

WHAT does the framework look like in District 34?

- Tier 1: All Students
  - Core curriculum: Second Step, Middle School Success Classes, additional resources;
  - Routines that promote connection and SEL development;
  - Universal framework for positive behavior support.
- Tier 2: Some Students that Need More
  - Targeted SEL skills/counseling groups;
  - Targeted check-in programs to support SEL growth;
  - Learning Labs to include SEL support.
- Tier 3: Targeted Students
  - Individual goal setting and counseling;
  - Home visits and wrap around community supports;
  - Individual Behavior Intervention Plans.

In-Person and Digital are Different

- The words we post "live" longer in other's minds than verbal words
- What we say online tends to be more harsh than we would say in-person
  - Empathy decreases in online interactions
  - Tendency to deny others' humanity
  - Become desensitized to people's concerns and suffering

Kids' Digital World

- Curated, carefully staged posts
- Words and attitudes that may not be part of your homelife
- Challenges

- Can be really stressful
  - Pressure to be available and relevant
  - FOMO
  - Pressure to participate
- Comparison is the thief of joy and peace
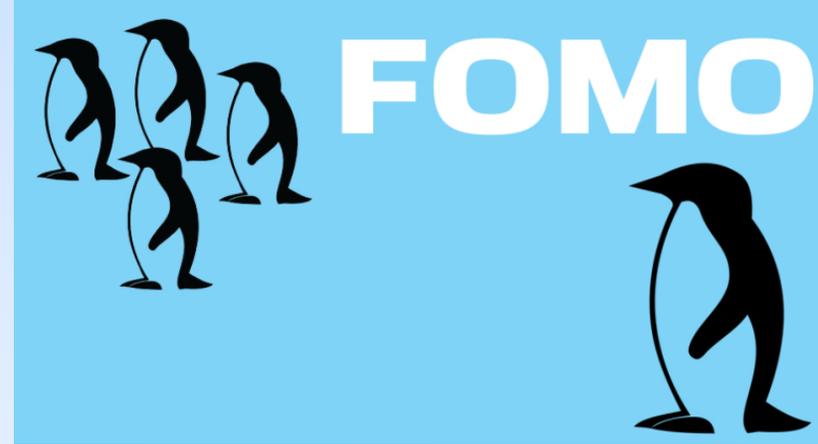
We Aren't Always At Our Best

- We get depleted—We can't give what we don't have
  - When we are exhausted, hungry, disappointed, fearful, confused…we usually don't have patience, kindness, grace, and generosity to share with ourselves or with others
  - It's also harder to see other people's perspectives and care for people we don't know
- We are immature—As children, we are still learning good behavior
  - We don't have strong self-awareness and self-management skills
  - As adolescents, we over value peer reactions and esteem and we underestimate the risk of behaviors
  - We are often very self-focused

How to Help

- We all want to be our best selves and help our kids be their best selves
    - Many partners—school, community, friends and family
- Put on your oxygen mask—as often as possible make sure you are well rested, well fed, you have downtime, support, and enjoyment in your schedule
- Increase compassion for yourself and others
    - Talk to yourself the way you would a friend
    - Talk to your kids the way you would a beloved and encourage them to speak to themselves with kindness
    - Just like me…
    - All kids are kids…all kids are "our kids"

Protect and Guard Your Attention

Inside each of us is a

Wolf of Love & Wolf of Hate

Which one wins?

The one you feed.

- Native American Proverb

- Neurons that fire together, wire together

- What we focus on grows

- Choose wholesome, kind, compassionate materials and thoughts

Check for Biases and Thinking Errors

- Life is complex and not really "solvable"
  - Just world hypothesis
  - Fundamental attribution error
  - All of nothing thinking
  - Jumping to conclusions
  - Slippery slope

Model Kind Online Behavior

Should I Post This?
Questions to ask yourself before making a post or comment online

How am I feeling right now?
Before making a post or a comment, it is always important to check how you are feeling in the moment. When we are angry, sad, or anxious, sometimes we end up doing or saying things that we don't mean. If you are experiencing any of those feelings, it might be best to wait until you are calm before you make a post.

Is this information I'm ok with *everyone* knowing?
When people follow you on social media, that means that you are allowing them access to the personal information you choose to share. They can see your pictures, videos, and read whatever you write about your thoughts, views, and opinions. Remember that whatever you choose to post, text, or put online always has the potential to be seen by those you didn't intend. Before you post, make sure that what you are saying or sharing is something you feel comfortable with everyone knowing.

Is this cyberbullying?
Is what you are posting or sharing going to be helpful or hurtful to you or other people? Are your comments trolling or bullying? Such hurtful behavior can have consequences both online and offline.

What would a parent say if they saw this post or comment?
Always think about what a parent or guardian might say if they were standing over your shoulder and saw what you were posting. If you feel like what you are sharing online would not be approved by a parent or an adult, then that's a clue that this may not be the best thing to post.

Is this something I might regret in the future?
Something to remember about commenting or posting online is that whatever you say can last forever, even if you attempt to delete it. Posts that you made when you were younger can be damaging to you when you get older or become an adult. When you are posting or sharing, ask yourself if you're OK with the comments, posts, or images following you into adulthood.

Is this the best way to communicate?
Some people use social media to express their feelings, attack people, or to resolve conflict. Communicating this way can be harmful and ineffective. If you are posting online about a conflict, think about whether this is a situation that you want everyone to be involved in. It might be best to find other ways to communicate to the person you might have a problem with.

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- Discuss and practice strategies
  - Wait before posting
  - Talk about what's happening, what you're reading and posting
  - Validate your child's struggles—it is hard to resist the pull to participate in online challenges, FOMO is not easy, it is hard to stop thinking about things people say about you in posts
  - Start with agreement if at all possible

Problem Solving at School

- Beginning with proactive strategies, and responding to challenges:

  - **Instruction** in empathy, problem solving, and conflict resolution across all grades;

  - SEL **check in's**;

  - Universal **data collection** on problem behaviors to strengthen expectations, supervision, and targeted instruction.

  - **Restorative practices**;

  - **Individual** behavior plans.
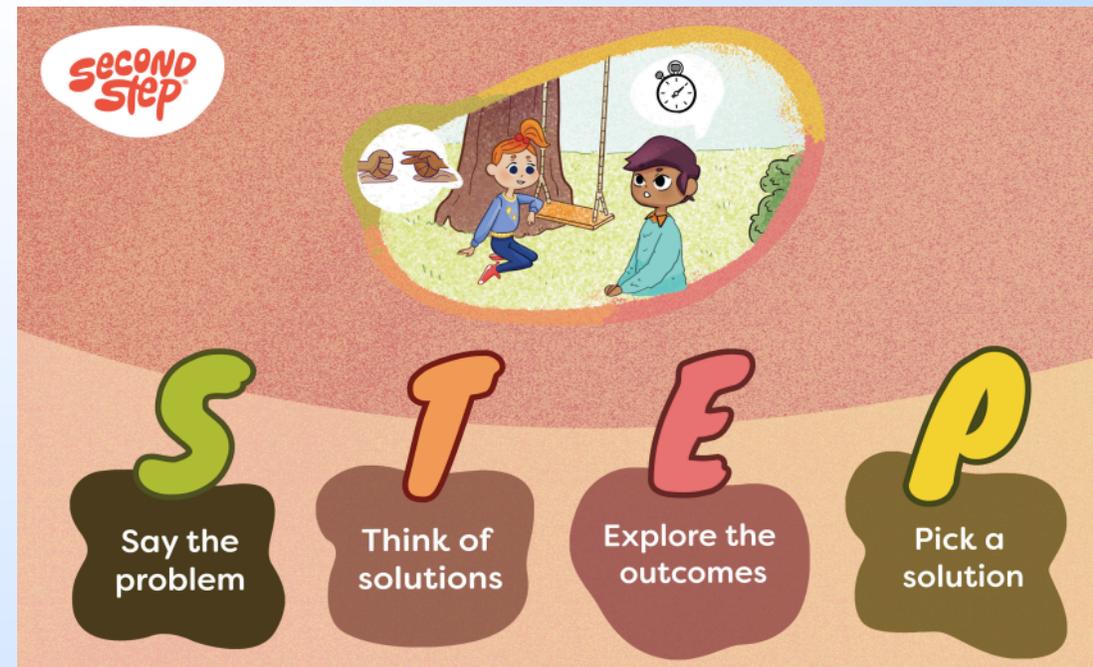
Community Resources

- **Mental Wellness**
  - Family Service Center: 847-251-7350
  - Jewish Child & Family Services: 855-ASK.JCFS
  - Youth Services of Glenview: 847-724-2620
  - Haven Youth & Family Services: 847-251-6630
  - Josselyn Center: 874-441-5600
- **Technology and Child Development**
  - Screenagers.com
  - Screensense.org
  - Healthychildren.org
    - Media Planning tool

Panel Discussion