

# COUNSELOR CONNECTION

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## TIS' THE SEASON TO BE GRATEFUL

It's hard to believe that the last time we put together a newsletter, the school year had not even begun and we were wild with anticipation. Well, here we are 12 weeks later with one whole trimester under our belts. Some might say it's been a bumpy ride but, it sure feels good to be back! With the season of gratitude upon us, we wanted to pause for a moment to honor how fortunate we feel to be back for in person learning, and working with our students face to face. We would be remiss if we did not acknowledge that we are all dealing with some repercussions from the last year, but we are working hard and learning new and improved ways for reaching and supporting our students. In this edition of our Counselor newsletter, we wanted to highlight the benefits of having a gratitude practice. We also wanted to provide some strategies and ideas for how to destress and stay calm. Last, but certainly not least, we wanted to share some ideas for how to set realistic goals with your student for the upcoming trimester. Our team has been busy, but as always, we are here for you and your students. Please don't ever hesitate to reach out with any questions or concerns. Please know that we are grateful for our partnership with you all and proud of our ongoing collaboration. We wish you all the best this holiday season. Be safe and stay healthy.



## IDEAS TO EXPERIENCE GRATITUDE

During this time of year we typically slow down and think about things that we are grateful for in our lives. Research shows that those who practice gratitude show significantly higher levels of happiness and psychological well-being. Gratitude and mental health in teens go hand in hand. Here are some ideas/reminders for ways to practice gratitude in our lives:



- ✦ Give thanks. Express it out loud or in writing. It helps to recognize the positives in life.
- ✦ Try a [gratitude journal](#). Regular reflection is known to help us focus on the positive rather than the negative.
- ✦ Volunteer. Giving back gives people a sense of meaning and it feels good to make a difference in the lives of others.
- ✦ Celebrate mistakes and growth. Gratitude isn't about documenting perfection. Gratitude can be most impactful when things don't go as planned or when things are especially difficult, but when we stop to reflect on how far we've come.

Gratitude isn't a "fix all" but it can be helpful to give us focused time to pause, reflect and recognize the good in our lives.

## A NOTE ABOUT STRESS

Checking in on our emotions and reactions can be helpful for noticing when stress becomes difficult to manage. As our students finish their first trimester back to school, some have shared that it can sometimes be difficult to notice when they are becoming stressed. Some say they only become aware of stress after it has begun to negatively impact their experiences, perceptions, and decision making. A successful approach students have used to track their stress level this trimester is paying attention to how and where stress shows up in the body. For some, stress feels like an upset stomach, for others a headache. Once they are more aware of feelings that signal increasing stress, students are in a better position to communicate that they are stressed and access resources to lower it. The website [HeadSpace.com](#) has a free 3-minute body scan meditation that aims to help listeners take a few minutes to scan where in their body stress is showing up, and makes space to acknowledge it with self-compassion.

## GETTING TO CALM

With this long weekend ahead, we have the opportunity to slow down and take time reflect on the past trimester and to prepare for the remainder of the year. One of the challenges our students have repeatedly shared with us is that they are stressed about school achievement and having enough time to get everything they need to do completed.

Stress can have a negative impact on our physical and mental health and so we are hoping you will take some time this weekend to encourage your family to tryout some practical **COPING MECHANISMS** to support your student in **GETTING TO CALM**.



Here are some ideas from [Erika's Lighthouse](#).

- ✦ **Engage in physical activities**—helps increase endorphins, which in turn can improve mood.
- ✦ **Getting a good night's sleep**—when tired, you are less able to handle stress.
- ✦ **Talking to a trusted friend or adult**—being able to talk to someone about stressful situations is one of the most important coping mechanisms; it allows you to get things off your chest, identify and talk about your emotions, and problem solve with another person.
- ✦ **Listening to calming music**—helps you relax and takes your mind off things.
- ✦ **Practicing yoga and meditation**—helps you become more peaceful. Studies show that meditation may help relieve the symptoms of depression.
- ✦ **Taking a bath**—helps your mind and your body relax.
- ✦ **Reading a book**—takes your mind off the stressful situation.
- ✦ **Journaling**—helps you verbalize your emotions and provides an opportunity to problem solve.
- ✦ **Laughing**—helps diffuse the stressful situation by looking at it from a more positive perspective.
- ✦ **Spending time with friends**—helps take your mind off the stressful situation and can provide an opportunity to talk about it. Use video chats if you can't see them in person.
- ✦ **Punching a pillow**—a good way to get rid of the tension and frustration caused by stressful situations.

## REFLECTION AND GOAL SETTING

*"My goal is not to be better than anyone else, but to be better than I used to be."* -Wayne Dyer

As the 1st trimester comes to an end, this can be a great time to guide your student to reflect on the 1st trimester; what do they think they did well and what are one or two things they want to improve on for 2nd trimester. Reminding and reinforcing that learning is a progression and that setting goals is part of the process is important when guiding your student to reflect on the 1st trimester. SMART Goals (**use our SMART GOAL WORKSHEET**) is a great tool to use with your student, especially focusing on measurable and achievable goals. If your student is having a difficult time choosing a goal, we have provided a few suggestions to help guide you/them.



### Ideas for Goals:

- I will check in with all of my teachers once a week through Schoology or in-person.
- I will take the opportunity for my teachers to give me feedback. I will review their feedback, revise and resubmit an assignment to show my growth in my learning
- I will ask at least one question every day.
- I will review Schoology every day and write down my assignments in a planner each day

The process of creating goals provides moments of connection between parent/guardian and child, and can open the door to meaningful conversations about how your student is feeling about school.

**We wish you the best for a wonderful Thanksgiving and a successful second trimester!**