

COUNSELOR CONNECTION

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MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

May brings us beautiful spring flowers, warmer weather and National Mental Health Awareness Month (MHA). According to the Mental Health America program, *“While 1 in 5 people will experience a mental illness during their lifetime, everyone faces challenges in life that can impact their mental health. In 2021, our theme of Tools 2 Thrive continues to provide individuals with information and coping strategies around common struggles that affect mental health - especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.”*

This year’s MHA theme is **Tools 2 Thrive**. In honor of this month, and in support of our students, our counseling team will be hosting two mental health themed seminars. On Wednesday, May 12th, we will be leading a webinar focused on **Coping Skills** for students. On the following Wednesday, May 19th, in conjunction with our Sources of Strength peer leaders, we will be offering a seminar titled **“We All Have Mental Health”** with a focus on how to stay mentally healthy, how to recognize if you are having a mental health concern and how to help a friend and/or get help for yourself. This seminar (or a self-paced activity) will be required for all 7th graders and open to all students. More information about the self-paced activity option will be forthcoming for students on Schoology.

In this edition of our newsletter, we will be highlighting some tips for talking to your student about their mental health and how to support them in helping themselves and/or their friends. If you are concerned about yourself or your child, feel free to reach out to someone on our team. Also, make note that the **[Mental Health Awareness website](#)**, offers a variety of mental health screenings for youth and adults, which may be an interesting touch point if you have concerns. We’ve also included some additional resources that we think may be useful to you. We wish you a wonderful month full of sunshine, good mental health and meaningful conversations at home. Take care and be well.



TIPS FOR TOUGH CONVERSATIONS

If you ask the average teen about mental health, chances are they don’t feel very confident about what they know or they aren’t really comfortable having a conversation about it. Research has shown that one in five young people experiencing psychological distress felt they didn’t have someone they could turn to in a crisis. Starting a conversation with your teen about mental health can be difficult, but by starting a conversation and showing your concern and willingness to support them, you’re giving your teen an opportunity to share what they’re going through. This can make all the difference. Here are some tips for having this important conversation:

- Try not to take it personally if your teen doesn’t want to talk to you about what’s going on, but don’t give up. Your interest shows them that you’re willing to talk about their mental health, or any problems or difficulties they’re going through, whenever they’re ready.
- Be genuine. Teens can see right through an adult who is “faking it.” If you’re feeling uncomfortable in a discussion with your teen, admit it. Say something like, *“This is hard for me to talk about, so I totally understand if it’s difficult for you too.”*
- Don’t trivialize their feelings. This is good advice for any conversation with your teen. Mental health challenges can occur at any age. Wondering what a young person has to be depressed or anxious about implies that their life experiences and emotions are less valid just because of their age.

ACT: HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD

Your student or a close friend of theirs might, at some point, find themselves in a hard place emotionally. At IMS, we teach students the acronym ACT, as a simple way for people to remember how to respond when someone opens up to you about suicidal thoughts. ACT stands for **Acknowledge, Care, Tell**.

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD SAVE A LIFE

How would you respond if your child told you their friend might be thinking about suicide?

Your child has learned to ACT (Acknowledge, Care, Tell) so they are prepared to get help for themselves or a friend. With students both in classrooms and learning virtually, the ACT message is more important than ever. Check in with your child to:

Acknowledge any concerns they may have about their own emotions or a friend's reactions.

Care: Show them how much you care by listening and taking their concerns seriously.

Tell: Make yourself available as a safe person they can tell about big problems.

MIYFS PARENTAL SUPPORT OPPORTUNITY

The COVID-19 pandemic has created new, well-documented challenges for Island students. However, it is clear that parents are also struggling. While students suffer with increased anxiety, depression, and isolation, parents are forced to cope not only with these issues themselves, but also with how to provide new levels of support for their children. Parents are facing emotional exhaustion, increased family discord, and concern about the impact of the pandemic on their child's development.

In support of Island parents, your MIYFS school-based counselors at IMS and MIHS are continuing MIYFS Parent Support meetings from **9:20 to 10am every Monday on Zoom**. Going forward, meetings will focus on emerging issues and concerns raised by parents. MIYFS counselors, Harry Brown, Chris Harnish and Ariel Schachter will share practical strategies for parents to utilize with their families. Email harry.brown@mercerislandschools.org for the zoom link and password.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND SCREENING TOOLS

- ◆ [Seattle Children's Good Growing webpage](#). Scroll down about halfway on this page for a great article titled, "Spotting Signs of a Mental Health Problem."
- ◆ [Seattle Children's Mental Health Hub](#)
- ◆ Here is a link to an attachment with more tips on how to talk to your teen. We referenced this handout in our recent Parent Edge "Signs of Suicide" (SOS) presentation: [ACTParentHandout2020.pdf](#)
- ◆ There is a brief screening tool from SOS for parents to take to determine if your child is showing signs of depression. The screening tool is for mental health education purposes and does not provide a diagnosis. However, this screening tool does help parents determine if a child's recent behaviors may be associated with a common, treatable mental health issue. Check it out here: <https://screening.mentalhealthscreening.org/sos>

