

COUNSELOR CONNECTION

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And we're off and running...

Greetings everyone for another weekly edition of our counseling newsletter. We are hopeful that the structure of the new trimester has helped create a more solid routine for your students, and for your whole family. This is a week of trial and error, but we are hopeful that whatever kinks you may have experienced this week will be resolved by next week, and we will be good to for the duration of the trimester. We wanted to share some information in this week's newsletter about our attendance/participation policy as well as our new Counselor "Office Hours." We've also included some ideas for conversation starters at home. Lastly, we wanted to share some basic information about a counseling strategy known as DBT (short for Dialectical Behavioral Therapy). Keep us posted if you need any counseling support and/or you have any ideas for features in our weekly newsletter. As always, we wish you well and hope everyone is safe, healthy and comfortable at home!

A reminder about Attendance:

Hopefully, by now your student(s) completed their first week of required learning. We are expecting students to engage in office hours, to complete assignments and to be an active participant in their learning. Attendance and participation are being monitored by teachers and recorded on Fridays. For those students who are not engaging, someone from the school will be making contact to check in. **We want to know if there are barriers for your students to access online learning.** Please reach out to us if you find you are needing

Sources of Strength:

Two of our Counselors, Mr. Brown and Ms. Dash, are the coordinators for a lunch group at school called Sources of Strength. *Sources of Strength is a national organization that is a best practice youth suicide prevention project designed to harness the power of peer social networks to change unhealthy norms and culture, ultimately preventing suicide, bullying, and substance abuse. The mission of Sources of Strength is to prevent suicide by increasing help seeking behaviors and promoting connections between peers and caring adults. Sources of Strength moves beyond a singular focus on risk factors by utilizing an upstream approach for youth suicide prevention. This upstream model strengthens multiple sources of support (protective factors) around young individuals so that when times get hard they have strengths to rely on.* (www.sourcesofstrength.org)



We thought we would make mention of this group in our newsletter because it might be a good conversation starter to talk with your student about what gives them strength. We encourage you to look at the pieces of this wheel, which is at the core of the program, and share out what gives each of your family members strength, especially in light of our current situation.

Our group is still meeting weekly, online via Zoom, on Wednesdays at 2pm. If your student has never participated in the group before but is interested, feel free to let either of the Coordinators know!

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)

Our counseling team is committed to sharing ways to support you and your children during this challenging time. One of the programs I teach at IMS and use in my work with students is ***DBT Skills in Schools: Skills Training for Emotional Problem Solving for Adolescents***. This program was developed by UW professors and psychologists Elizabeth Dexter-Mazza, PhD., her husband James Mazza, PhD. and their team. You can catch the Mazza's live streaming lessons on YouTube Live with their children, search DBT Student Life Skills to Survive/Thrive in crisis and quarantine.

One of the many coping skills they teach is Distress Tolerance and Crisis Survival Skills. Now more than ever people may experience emotional challenges or react in ways that seem uncharacteristic. We know that pain is part of life and cannot always be avoided. If we cannot deal with our pain, we may act impulsively. When we act impulsively, we might end up hurting ourselves, people we care about and not get what we wanted or needed.

One of the skills to manage distress is Distract with Wise Mind (acronym) ACCEPTS:

Activities: *Do Something*, call, email or visit a friend; watch a favorite movie or TV show; play video games; write in a journal; clean your room; go for a walk or run; exercised intensely; read a book; listen to music, go online and download music or apps; play a game with yourself or others.

Contributing: *Contribute to (or do something nice) for someone*. Help a friend or sibling with homework; make something nice for someone else; give away things you don't need; surprise someone with a big hug, a note, or a favor; volunteer.

Comparisons: *Compare yourself to those less fortunate*. Compare how you are feeling now to time when you were doing worse. Think about others who are coping the same as or less well than you.

Emotions: *Create different emotions*. Watch a funny TV show or emotional movie; listen to something soothing or to upbeat music; get active when you are sad; go online and search funny jokes or videos.

Pushing Away: *Push the painful situation out of your mind temporarily*. Leave the situation mentally by moving your attention and thoughts away; build an imaginary wall between you and the situation; put the pain in box and on a shelf for a while.

Thoughts: *Replace your thoughts*. Read; do word or number puzzles; count numbers, colors in a poster, tiles on a wall, or anything else; repeat words to a song in your mind.

Sensations: *intensify other sensations*. Hold or chew ice; listen to loud music; take a warm shower; squeeze a stress ball; do situ-ups or push-ups; pet your dog or cat. (*from DBT In Schools*)

These skills are intended to use in crisis (this qualifies) and need to be practiced so we can access them when needed. Parents can adopt and model and coach all of these. **Mr. Brown will be leading another DBT In Schools, Skills group on zoom beginning next beginning next Tuesday at 11-11:45.** Please email him if your student would like to join the group. (harry.brown@mercerislandschools.org;; MIYFS Counselor)

*Family conversation
starter:*

QUESTION:
When the world gets
back to normal,
what's the **FIRST**
thing you're going to
do?

Why???