

COUNSELOR CONNECTION

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WE MADE IT!

They say it takes a village to raise a child and we could not agree more. We are so grateful that we get to play a role in your student's "village." We truly appreciate the ongoing collaboration we have with our families at Islander. In this last edition of our Counselor newsletter, we are asking for your continued partnership as we work together to try and help our students "lean into kindness" and work with their families over the summer to encourage increased awareness for how they talk to their peers, friends or otherwise. We've observed some concerning communication within peer groups this year and we are working to shine some light on what it means to be kind. We also provide some suggestions for how to help your child during summer with relaxed, but still present, boundaries. Middle School is not an especially easy time to navigate and we are hopeful that you can all take some time to sit back, relax, reflect and move forward. We wish you all the best for a wonderful summer!

LEAN INTO KINDNESS

As we head into summer, we are asking for parents to really lean in with their kids to discuss kindness and how kids in our community are treating each other. As a counseling team, we have seen a noticeable uptick in hurtful behavior and we have data that reflects this. In the Education Effectiveness Survey (EES) given to all IMS students this year (n=830), there was an 8% drop in students feeling like their peers are being respectful to others. Students are noticing this too.

Much of what is being reported to the counseling team (from teachers, parents and students) are hurtful dynamics happening within friend groups and/or on sports teams. These peer groups have a normalized banter that often focuses on known insecurities, including hurtful remarks about each other's bodies, race, or religion among other things. Many of the same students who are being reported to us as hurting others, are the same students coming into our offices expressing hurt feelings themselves. Even if you think your child is not involved, we encourage you to check in with them and aim for open dialogue around this important topic.

Here are some ways you can help with this over the summer:

- ✦ Periodically monitor your kid's devices, specifically text and social media.
- ✦ Have conversations about who your kids are following on social media and what kind of influence/impact these connections may have.
- ✦ Do the best you can to offer supervision and discuss anything you overhear that doesn't feel kind and/or appropriate.
- ✦ Have conversations about how your kids and their friends treat each other, in person and online.
- ✦ Have routines and ways for your kids to stay busy in structured ways.
- ✦ Set family norms around the way the family treats each other.
- ✦ Have family meetings to proactively air any concerns or things you've noticed.



Remember, these middle school years are full of learning opportunities. Missteps are chances to grow and do better the next time. We want our kids to think about how they are showing up in the world and to always strive for kindness.

A NOTE ABOUT TRANSITION FOR RISING 9th GRADERS

Starting high school is an exciting time for students, new classes, new opportunities and new friends! With all the excitement, transitions and the changes that come with them can feel overwhelming. If your rising 9th grader seems more tense or emotional this summer, remember that feelings around going to high school may be under the surface for them. They will likely benefit from your reassurance that you will be there for them no matter what their experience. Research shows that one of the most meaningful strategies for parents navigating this milestone is to empower their kids to self-advocate. That means supporting a child in learning to identify and communicate their needs to friends, teachers, counselors and learning specialists. Remember, there is strength in asking for help. Let your child know that if they find themselves struggling, whether it is for academic or social emotional reasons, they can ask for help (and so can you as a parent/guardian). Our shared goal is to help children feel good leaving middle school behind. Parents can help ensure a smooth transition into high school by listening to them, celebrating their advancement and providing support that respects their newfound independence. MIHS school based counselors and MIYFS counselors are excited to meet your students and are always available to help, so don't hesitate to reach out to them for support. We will miss our 8th graders, but we know that they are off to do bigger and better things with you by their side!

IDEAS FOR PARENTING THROUGHOUT THE SUMMER

Parenting adolescents involves a continual renegotiation of limits, boundaries and structure as they pass through this challenging and exciting developmental process. With the summer break comes the shift in the family structure that our middle schoolers have lived with for the last 10 months.

You can expect to hear requests for more freedom, later bedtimes and resistance to the structure you know your children need. If you haven't done so yet, we encourage you to consider taking the time to review your summertime expectations as a family. When you are clear on the family plan for bedtimes, sleepovers, required and optional activities, the next step is to share these with your middle schooler.

WEEKLY FAMILY MEETINGS offer the opportunity to outline your thoughts and to engage your child in being part of the planning. Before beginning your meeting have clarity on what items are **open for negotiation** and what items are **non-negotiables**. Be sure to blend the sharing of logistics/structure with planning for fun family activities.

Middle schoolers benefit from balance of supervised activities along with unstructured time to pursue their own interests, social interactions and simply having some down time. Summer is a great time to practice taking on more responsibility which could include earning money for activities like: baby-sitting, yard work, dog walking, chores around the house and neighborhood. To support teens in thinking beyond their naturally self-centered perspective you could also explore community service opportunities as a family.

Lastly, be sure you are modeling how you want your children to behave. When faced with a challenge, remain calm. If you find yourself reacting, or getting triggered, use your coping skills to get to calm. When everyone is ready, consider all the options and make a plan to work through the problem.

LOOKING AHEAD

- ◆ Back 2 School Day: August 23
- ◆ First Day of School: August 30

