



September, 2020

"There are far better things ahead than what we leave behind"

- C.S. Lewis

St. Catherine Counseling

Letter to families

In the midst of a long journey, it's nice to stop every once in a while to see what you've learned. For instance, I have learned that every dog is a service dog during a worldwide pandemic, there is no limit on how many times you can rearrange your apartment in the name of mental health, I deeply miss ga-ga-ball, and lastly, (perhaps most importantly), you should never take an inflatable kayak through the Montlake Cut. But when life throws you curveballs, you don't frantically try to move backwards in hopes that you can put the pieces back together, (or out-paddle large boats). To quote C.S. Lewis, "There are far, (*far*) better things ahead than what we leave behind." But if this is true, why do human beings continually try to cover up their past instead of grow in the present? I think it is precisely because we are human.

Is there a better lesson to teach our students than this? That regardless of what happens, we can be human together, continually striving to accept what is true and learn that authenticity is always best. With this in mind, maybe our students have just embarked on their best school year yet. Maybe Zoom chats and Seesaw lessons are what will show our students their internal strength. Maybe we can all make it through the Montlake Cut with an inflatable kayak, because we realized that our paddle is reliable and the large waves won't deflate us. I can't wait for this year and all that it brings. Upward and onward to the best year yet!

Kevin Ward, School Counselor · kward@stcatherineschool.net

What has the school counselor been up to?

Classroom Lessons

The teachers and leaders at St. C's have gone above and beyond to keep students on a dependable schedule. I am in awe watching this all go down. But with a strong schedule in place, we can't forget to slow down and recognize what will help us keep up with a full schedule, (how do you fill yourself up?). For classroom lessons, I am planning to emphasize mindfulness and intrapersonal connection. Throughout the next month, (few

months? Hopefully not...), I am going to do my best to zero in on exactly these two things. I understand that many challenges have presented themselves in your homes throughout the last four months, (we're all human, right?!). No family is alone in this thinking. With this in mind, please do not hesitate to reach out with a concern and I will try to adapt them to a classroom lesson!

And lastly, I will continually emphasize to the students that they are never alone. Sometimes kids get tunnel vision, and think they have to trudge through hard times by themselves. But unlike this sign I saw at a trailhead this summer, our students are NEVER asked or forced to self-rescue. This is something I think we all need to emphasize every, single, day during COVID.



Small Groups

New office, same mindset! Moving up to the 6th grade classroom was strange at first, but I am starting to get the hang of it. One thing I know for sure: I have plenty of room for safe and healthy small groups when students return!

In the spring, I found that small groups were one of the most successful mental health interventions I could provide. My goal is to give every student an opportunity to be a part of a small group in some way, shape, or form. I like to form groups of students who are going through similar challenges, and this year I think that this can, (and should), be incredibly flexible.

Do you have a student who is worried about your stressful job, spending too much time in close proximity with their siblings, worried about their friendships, or wondering about the world at large? Groups can help a lot of kids, simply by showing them that they are not alone.

Individual Counseling

As always, (and maybe *more* now than before), I am open to individual check-ins. Please don't feel afraid to reach out if you think that your child might benefit from an individual check-in. At the very least, we can have a chat about what you are seeing in your child and how I might be able to help. I have told each class that I am available for drop-ins just like I would be if the school was open, but I know that the logistics are simply not as easy. I am available via phone, zoom, or email and will make something work if your student needs it.

Quick Note on confidentiality:

As always, the students at St. Catherine's have the same amount of confidentiality when they meet with me, (limited for children under 13, but highly beneficial for trust building and healthy expression). I will continually strive to have open communication with parents to make sure they know how and when I am communicating with their children. If you would like to know more about the ethical guidelines of online school counseling, you can check out this link from ASCA:

[ASCA on Confidentiality](#)

Outside of the ethical guidelines, providing an environment suitable for counseling can go a long way in allowing kids to feel safe and empowered to go to the counselor. A few tips:

- **Find a quiet, well-lit room with a closed door away from any distractions**
- **Use a computer as it is easier to connect and has a larger display**
- **Use headphones with a mic for clearer communication, to avoid outside noises, and increase privacy**
- **Prop up your device at eye-level to maximize comfort and minimize camera movement**
- **For increased privacy, download a white noise app and place it by your door (or buy a cheap white noise machine on Amazon)**

What's Up in Mental Health?

Resources for parents!

ADDitude is a great website with articles, tips, and encouragement for parents of kiddos who have ADHD. I have added the link to some webinars hosted by the website below. *Even if you aren't interested in some of these webinars, peruse the site and see what helps!* About 9.4% of kids have been diagnosed, but I see many kids struggle with a few symptoms on their own, and may benefit from some of these tips.

[ADDitude Webinars](#)

As an additional example from the website, here is a short article on sleep, which I know has not come easy for many of our students, (and school counselors...) since school started up again.

[Sleep: It's Complicated!](#)

My school counseling site on the St. Catherine's website will be periodically updated as well. Not as much as in the spring, but it will essentially act as the hub for some of my favorite resources during COVID.

[St. Catherine's School Counseling](#)

Mindfulness & Mood Apps:

These have been incredibly handy during this time. If your child is savvy with a phone or tablet and would like an easy way to get into mindfulness, think about buying a subscription to one of these apps. Once kids start

mindfulness, they tend to really love and crave it. We just need to find an attractive jumping off point. Here are my favorites:

- Headspace: <https://www.headspace.com/>
 - Daylio: <https://daylio.webflow.io/> (Mood tracker)
 - Calm: <https://www.calm.com/>
 - Medito: <https://meditofoundation.org/medito-app> (FREE!)
 - Abide: <https://abide.co/> (Bible & sleep meditation)
 - Hallow: <https://hallow.com/> (Catholic meditation)
 - Peace Out: <https://bedtime.fm/peaceout> (Bedtime stories!)
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As always, remember that it shows strength and courage to ask for help or advocate for the mental health of someone else. You can save these numbers to be prepared:

Crisis supports are available if your student is concerned for themselves or others. [Teen Link](#) can be reached daily from 6-10 PM at 1-866-833-6546; the following resources can be reached 24/7 365 days a year: [Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#): 800-273-8255 / Worried about someone on social media? [Support on Social Media - Lifeline](#); the [24-hr Crisis Line](#): 1-866-427-4747; and the [Crisis Text Line](#) can be reached via SMS 24/7— simply text “HEAL” to 741-741.

If you have any questions, concerns, or you think someone needs help, please reach out to me and we can discuss how and when to reach out.