



June, 2021

"Be happy in the moment – that's enough.
Each moment is all we need, not more."

- Mother Teresa

St. Cat's Counseling

Letter to Families

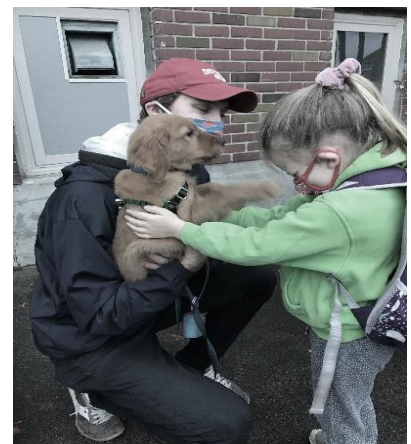
Snack time rocks, doesn't it? The glorious 10-minute break to step outside and eat some Oreos, (or maybe carrots are your style). But this year, it has taken on a whole new meaning for me as a counselor, as I suspect it has for many others. Since the return to in-person school, snack time has provided the first glimpse of the day of the kids' faces – smiles, scowls and all - without a mask. Rid the assumptions of what is going on under those masks, we get to see with clarity the genuine expressions coming from each student. Pretty handy for a counselor.

Self-expression under a mask is... clunky. We look at each other's eyes and listen for tone, but it's awkward nonetheless. Slowly, it can become easy to care less about relating to one another, because it is simply too awkward. But this year, through what I can only amount to tremendous love, this community chose to remain in that awkwardness with imperfect authenticity. We were asked to remain in this space, not run from it.

We've been told that kids took a step back this year, and it is quite likely they have. But what's to say we need – or want – to get back to where we were? Jesus tells us to "remain in my love," a choice to belong and show belonging. I think that this idea of remaining involves the exact moments that this year offered; the awkward, uncomfortable situations that have power to heal anything that feels broken.

If you feel stuck, tired, or weary this summer, have no fear: the most powerful resource you have for your kids is you, exactly as you are. Healthy, supportive relationships can be the strongest protection against adverse childhood experiences and one of the strongest resources for recovery. If you choose to remain in love, you are exactly where you need to be. Have fun, find adventure, and focus on relationships this summer. I can't wait to see you all in the fall.

Kevin Ward, School Counselor • kward@stcatherineschool.net



What has the school counselor been up to?

Thanks to everyone in this community for continuing to reach out and advocate for their children's mental health despite my busier schedule. It's been a year... I am grateful I have one more chance to reach out to you all headed into summertime with updates!

Office Visits

When the year began and I found out I would be taking over the old 6th grade classroom, I thought surely I would feel out of place. The room is just too big for one person! Turns out, the large space for counseling is just what this year needed. The amount of visits to my office increased greatly this year. In part, this was because of the skill depletion we saw with COVID isolation, but also because having a counselor in the school is becoming more normative for the students, which is great to see. From my observations throughout the year, I thought I would write down a few takeaways that can be applied at home this summer:



- Validate feelings without trying to fix them.



- Find a self-check tool, whether it's a journal, mood meter, number scale, or the coveted duck scale, find a way to recognize where you are physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually each day.
- Gather together a bundle of healthy, go-to distractions, strong enough to take your mind elsewhere. Students generally believe video games check this box completely, and although video games serve a purpose, they can't serve every purpose. Be wary of this!
- Find perspective. Helps kids see how helpful it is to get out of our own way! Find adventure, talk to new people!

The ever-popular duck scale.
Which duck are you right now? Physically, mentally, emotionally?

Classroom Lessons

Since COVID struck kids most deeply at the relationship level, I decided to make interpersonal effectiveness and relationship skills the focus of my 3rd trimester lessons. And what better way to do this than by playing games! As best you can, seek out opportunities to allow your kids to interact with others this summer!



Left - Survivor: St. Catherine's, 5th grade tribes competing in a blindfold challenge.

Above - 1st graders rockin' a game of "Switch!"

What's Up in Mental Health?

If you are struggling to find mental health resources in the city, you are NOT alone! Mental health resources are more in demand these days, but you can still put your name on waiting lists, and check in periodically for new resources. NAMI Seattle, Seattle Children's, and Psychology Today are good places to start (click on the links):

- [NAMI Seattle COVID Resources](#)
- [Seattle Children's Odessa Brown Clinic](#)
 - [Psychology Today: Seattle](#)

Looking for video game alternatives?

Podcasts for kids, (that adults will like too!):

- 1) **"America's National Parks Podcast"** – Narrated by a mother and father on the road with their kids, traveling from park to park. Great stories!
- 2) **"What if World"** – Mr. Eric takes questions from kids and spins them into funny stories, entertaining for kids and adults
- 3) **"Wow in the World"** – From NPR, well done, funny dialogue for kids
- 4) **"Smash Boom Best"** – Fun pod that brings in a new debate each episode featuring such debates as bats vs owls & invisibility vs flying.
- 5) **"The Past and the Curious"** – History's unknown and untold stories!

Get out and about! (click on titles to follow link):

- **Local Adventures** – All sorts of activities still going on in Seattle. Get out there and have fun!
- **Social Skills Groups** – Social skills groups, summer camps, and coaching all available. Awesome services perfect for helping kiddos through COVID.
- **Games to Grow** – Uses the power of classic games such as Dungeons and Dragons, Minecraft, and Magic for therapeutic, educational, and community growth. Super cool non-profit available to us in the Seattle area.
- **School of Rock** - Find a new hobby, a new passion to keep you motivated, confident, and happy.

Books for the Brain!

- **Quiet Power: The Secret Strengths of Introverted Kids by Susan Cain** - it wasn't only extroverted kids who struggled with this pandemic!
- **Mikey and the Dragons by Jocko Willink** - Picture book to help empower your kids to overcome fears!

- o **Adventuring Together: How to Create Connections and Make Lasting Memories with Your Kids by Greta Eskridge - Comes recommended!**
Bonding through adventure. Perfect summer read for parents.

[St. Catherine's School Counseling](#) – My page on the school site that has many more resources.

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.



Never lookin' back, always movin' forward. Thanks for reading, have a happy and healthy summer!