



November, 2019

St. Catherine's Counseling

"True humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less."

- C.S. Lewis

Letter to families

I can't believe it is already November! Time has flown by, and I am feeling incredibly grateful to be a member of this community, (even after getting thrown into the dunk tank at the harvest festival!).

Community involvement has given me great energy and excitement over these first two months of working at St. Catherine's. Seeing and hearing families treat mental wellbeing with respect and enthusiasm is encouraging to see. I have been approached with many suggestions for social and emotional growth from parents, staff members, and especially the students themselves. I look forward to bringing many of the ideas to life throughout the year, according to where the needs of our student's exist. Thank you for being involved, and I encourage you to stay in contact with me as the year progresses. Nearing the second trimester, some things I am excited about include: mindfulness practices, anxiety education for our middle schoolers, peer pressure series for our 7th and 8th graders, and playing some guitar with the preschool class! Lots of possibilities lie ahead; I thank you all for supporting the mental health of our students here at St. Catherine's!

Kevin Ward, School Counselor · kward@stcatherineschool.net

What has the school counselor been up to?

Classroom Lessons

From last month's themes of "belonging," we are rolling right into the idea and practice of empathy. Students have been looking deeper into what it means to be an empathetic individual, and it begins by learning how to take the perspective of others. We have had some fun putting the phrase "walk in someone's shoes" into action. One of the lessons involved students examining the stories of fictional students on the back of paper shoes. Without showing judgment, (something we can all struggle with!), the students were challenged with the task of thinking what it would be like to be in that student's situation. Children are born with empathy, but like any other skill, it needs to be brought to life!





Throughout the year, the continuation of knowing self, understanding others, and building resiliency will continue on in the classrooms. Getting the students to think outside of themselves to connect with others is coupled with a strong confidence and knowledge of themselves. November will continue to see a lot of this and more!

Much of what we do in the classroom challenges the students get in touch with their emotions. Check out the end of the newsletter to see some tips to help your kids identify feelings.

Small Groups

Small groups are gaining traction! The 7th grade boys have been doing a fantastic job of mentoring the 1st grade boys in our sportsmanship group. Lunch groups for boys and girls have been getting started as well. As the needs of students continue to emerge, groups will continue to develop.

Individual Counseling

I truly enjoy each part of my job, but getting to hang out with students in personalized setting is ultimately one of the main reasons why I decided to become a school counselor. Thus far, I have a handful of students whom I meet with once a week, every week. These are calendar appointments separate from the drop-ins that every student is always invited to partake in. My role here at St. Catherine's cannot support a calendar full of individual appointments, but please continue to encourage your child to come check in with me every now and then. As your child expands his or her ability to express empathy, they will also need the skills to know

what's going on in their minds, without being overtaken by it. This is a strong step towards the growth of emotional intelligence,

What's Upcoming in Mental Health?

November 21st is:



Here are some ways you can observe it:

How to Nurture Empathy in Your Child:

1. *Encourage imagination:* Cognitive empathy – the ability to accurately understand and interpret what someone else might be thinking – draws from our imagination and emotional intelligence.
2. *Recognize the emotion in others.* Reading emotions can be tough! But if we don't learn how to do this, we may be risking relationships. No one likes to be met with a stone face when they tell you how excited or sad they are.
3. *Stick with the emotion.* Each emotion has a gift attached to it. Be strong and steady as your child works through their emotion, (I can see how sad you are right now). This will give them the strength and time to find the right words.
4. *Tune into your own feelings.* Children learn best from modeling. Not to mention, adults can benefit from mindfulness themselves. The better you get in touch with yourself, the better you can be there for your child in an empathetic way.
5. *"Can you help me understand?"* Empathy can still exist if you don't have the answers! Sometimes, kids have ideas that seem connected to no meaning whatsoever. Nonetheless, we can still show empathy by trying to understand and showing that what they are feeling has meaning.
6. *Don't always try to fix it!* Encouragement and validation will ultimately empower children the most.
7. *Expand emotional vocabulary.* Offer new words to go along with what your child might be feeling, and this will eventually give them more words to express themselves. For

example: If they are feeling angry, they might also be feeling frustrated, anxious, exhausted, or annoyed.

8. *Encourage self-control.* Try something like this: "I know you are feeling angry, but it is difficult for me to understand when you are yelling. Could you sit beside me, breath with me, and talk? I would like to understand." And...
9. *Remember:* Your child's mind is open to growth. You are allowed to make mistakes and still teach your child how to become an empathetic individual! In doing so, they will see that empathy, kindness, and compassion are central to well-being and growth.