



December, 2019

*"If we can bring out children understanding, comfort, and hopefulness when they need this kind of support, then they are more likely to grow into adults who can find these resources within themselves later on."*

- Mr. Rogers

## St. Catherine's Counseling

### Letter to families

November and December are made for school counselors. People are naturally more joyful and accepting of their tender sides, open to the expression of how much they love family and friends, and especially grateful for even the smallest of gifts in their lives. It makes me cheery, no doubt, but it also makes me hopeful for the rest of the year. In what ways are we called to extraordinary gratitude even beyond these two months? How could this impact our lives? How could we teach our students and children that gratitude is not just a practice, but a virtue?

This holiday season, I encourage you and your family to practice gratitude. But even more so, I encourage you to commit to a greater practice that will penetrate your life as a parent, grandparent, worker, and human. Make gratitude a spiritual discipline in your home, and enjoy the peace it brings. By doing so, I hope that we can all help our students, as Thomas Merton put it, "come alive to the splendor that is all around us."

Kevin Ward, School Counselor · [kward@stcatherineschool.net](mailto:kward@stcatherineschool.net)

### What has the school counselor been up to?

#### Classroom Lessons

As you may have gathered from the Mr. Rogers quote above, I have been thinking a lot about the idea of resilience lately, (and not just whether or not Tom Hanks can pull off a good Fred Rogers on screen...). How we can create a community at St. Catherine's that welcomes healthy conflict, eager to see how it helps us grow? A community that belongs to each other also cares enough to be vulnerable with one another, committing to support one another through the awkward, uncomfortable moments that life naturally brings. School is a place where this happens every day, no matter how hard you may want to avoid it! There are many ways we can build resiliency, some of which may sound counterintuitive. In order to achieve outer order, we need to start with our inner selves. Getting in touch with our emotions is difficult. However, the more you listen to yourself, the more you find out about yourself, and the more you know how to recognize emotions in others. Practicing mindfulness helps tremendously.

All this being said, I have been incorporating as much mindfulness into the classroom as possible. Mindful art, mindful walking, and even mindful eating! The students have been responding even better than I imagined. After

mindful walking, one 5<sup>th</sup> grader made the comment that she feels, “content, like my mind is at peace.” I am not concerned if students do not connect to the practices right away. Mindfulness is not an easy exercise, it takes patience and practice. But I do believe in the fruits of mindfulness, and I do believe strongly that perseverance develops characters, which in turn develops hope.

## Accessing Outside Resources

This past month, I have had a few opportunities to support parents by pointing them towards mental health resources outside of St. Catherine’s. I have an updated list of counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists, and evaluators on my school counseling page on the St. Catherine’s website. You can find this page under the “Enrichments” tab. You do not have to have a mental health diagnosis to talk about mental health! Make it a normal part of your child’s day, checking in on how they are feeling and handling the stresses of their lives. And, if you find it necessary, do not be afraid to check out some of the resources on my page.

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of being honest with mental health. Often times, people want to keep mental illness to themselves to avoid the stigma. Sometimes, fear of failure, isolation, and rejection creep into people’s minds and take over, making it seem impossible to re-gain mental well-being. But I assure you, honesty brings about connection and support, not further isolation.

## What’s Upcoming in Mental Health?

Recently, I have been connecting with members in the Seattle community to try to broaden the conversation at St. Catherine’s on drugs and alcohol.

Prevention WINS is a local organization committed to this mission. Below are a couple of opportunities, open to the public, that were presented to me. Feel free to attend if you would like to learn more! See the invite below:

---

*Vaping: Key concepts, trends, & evidence*

Hosted by [Washington Poison Center](#)

Tuesday, December 3, 2019

6:30-8:00pm

Kirkland Library:

308 Kirkland Ave. Kirkland, WA 98033

No tobacco product (e-cigarettes/vapes, cigarettes, etc.) is safe.

Join the Washington Poison Center in taking a deep dive into vaping specifically, including the devices used, their contents, health effects, and current trends.

The presentation is tailored to a general community audience, and covers the basics.

[a link to the Facebook event](#)

(ctrl + click on link)

---

Additionally, the next NE Seattle Prevention WINS Coalition meeting is **January 14<sup>th</sup> at 9am**. The location is currently being worked out, but put this on your calendar if you are interested in learning more about this coalition.

And lastly...

This fall, Prevention WINS is conducting a survey of the NE Seattle community about perception and availability of alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs, and resources. Please consider helping them out by taking the anonymous survey. They are working to get 250 responses as early as possible, so analysis can take place in January and they could have data results in late February to help inform our work and share with the community. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/KIPRWI2019EN>

## Book Shout-out!

"Hey Warrior" by Karen Young

This book does an amazing job of breaking down what anxiety is for kids in kid-friendly language. Understanding the physical symptoms of anxiety is a powerful and fun tool in helping kids identify and tackle their anxiety. Think about it for a Christmas gift!

