

OPENHEARTED KIDS

YOUR COUNSELING COMMUNIQUE



Parent Advisory Committee

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As a part of it's framework, the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) advocates for the creation of advisory councils. These councils serve as stages for advocacy and collaboration among stakeholders. If you would like to learn more about FernLeaf's comprehensive school counseling program, and you would like to provide input about the counseling program specifically, please plan to attend our google meet on Wednesday, February 3rd starting at 6:00. Google code: FLCounseling



An Appreciation for the Children in Our Lives

In some ways it makes perfect sense to include within the inaugural counseling newsletter an appreciation I made at the beginning of my professional counseling journey:

“Children are as unfathomable as the distance of the stars. I sometimes pretend to understand children and the world they inhabit. Luminous orbs of mystery roam about me daily, and I comprehend almost nothing. Children are as multifaceted and as dazzling as full spectrum light. No child is like any other. Indeed, no child is the same one day unto the next. To begin to describe our children is to confine them, to freeze them in a distortion and disfigurement. Trying to apprehend their essence is, as some say, like trying to catch a moonbeam in your hand. Yet, to describe and to witness is also the beginning of understanding. Even beyond this, to witness is to adore. Witnessing is the beginning of awe, and our children are most certainly deserving of our awe.”

Over the next few days, I invite you to consider the children in your life. How do you see them? In what ways do you express gratitude?





Parenting During a Pandemic

There is much on your plate, and maybe you're searching for nuggets of wisdom that can help you navigate this storm. There are considerable challenges with supporting your kids with remote learning while also balancing work and family needs. The feeling of overwhelm has significant costs to your mental health and to your relationships. Perhaps you may have also experienced some unexpectedly sweet and cherished moments which caught you off guard. At times, you may even feel guilty for those moments. Or perhaps you've accidentally overlooked them altogether. You (we) have a lot to process.

I've been reluctant to offer much public advice during the pandemic mainly because I know that I don't often get it right myself. I would much rather work alongside families and tailor something that meets their needs. Nevertheless, there are some common strategies that have been making an impact. The main point is to remember that FL offers a flexible remote learning package. Really! So work with your kids' teacher or reach out to me to see what that's all about. Secondly, creating a daily rhythm (schedule) and post somewhere in your home. It can really help with predictability and comfort. Third, get your kids outside (even in the cold)! And lastly, use your schedule and alarms (on your phone or Alexa) to help your kids be as independent as possible.

As we move into the second half of the year, and if your family needs some extra emotional support during this time, please feel free to reach out. I think I have the coolest job on the planet. My only purpose here is to HELP support you! The easiest way to reach out is to email me at bryan.gillette@fernleafccs.org. Also, if your family is experiencing financial hardship, I can help connect you with community resources. No matter your needs, please remember that this is a judgement free zone!

4 Tips for Leaning into Life's Challenges

Ideas to explore for the Individual, the Family, and the Community

Recognize what is out of your control. It is so easy to become overwhelmed by situations life throws at us, and often times we surrender a lot of our precious energy to the things we cannot change. It's like beating our heads against a brick wall. The wall doesn't move, but our head hurts terribly. The pandemic gives us a grand opportunity to consider the actions and responsibilities that have a big impact - things like wearing masks, limiting physical interactions with others, etc. Also, during the pandemic we can be more conscious about how we spend our precious moments wishing that things were different - that schools were meeting in person, that we could eat dinner out again, and that we could hug our friends! Maybe recognize how you feel after indulging in those wishes. Also, recognize what happens when your kids dwell too much thinking about what they can't have. Do these wishful thoughts really help us, or do they make us feel worse? Don't beat yourself up when you notice yourself wishing that things were different, but also try not to spend too much time in that head space. Focus your energy on what you and your family can control. You can help your kids understand this concept by drawing out two lists: "things I can control" and "things I cannot control".

Practice showing up. We "show up" whenever we fully engage with what is happening in the present moment. It means that we are familiar with what is happening inside and outside of ourselves. Many of us are distracted by worrying about the future and dwell in regret or anger whenever we think about the past. Instead, we can work on choosing to be present with what is in the room with us right now. You may have noticed how hard you try to hold on to pleasant experiences while running away from unpleasant ones. What would happen if we didn't battle, and we just decided to approach whatever was happening? We might feel the pain, the anger, and the sadness. Emotions are energies in our bodies that need attention; they don't just go away. You might come to recognize that now is almost always the best time to face what you're feeling. Showing up also means that we take the time to soak in the moments when feel happy, loved, and content. Our brains are wired to notice danger, not positive emotions. So when something feels great, stop and spend 30 seconds or more to soak in those positive vibes. Let them soak into the ground of your being and nourish your roots! You can help your kids stay in the present moment by helping them label their feelings in real time. Sometimes you can do this by reading into the feelings behind their statements or by reading how they are holding their body. Whenever you take the moment to stay with them (no matter what), you are offering them the gift of love and courage.

Notice your relationship with your thoughts. While we all want to be reflective and thoughtful individuals, it's also important to recognize that the stories we tell ourselves about our worth, about other people, and about situations create pain we just don't need. It's possible to recognize your frantic mind, and prioritize connecting with your body, your breath, your emotions, and the people around you. It's OK to focus on these things - because this is the only way to put those nagging thoughts on the back burner - and to let the story in your head go in peace. You can help your loved ones recognize the power of thoughts by joining them in mindfulness-based activities or in physical activity. Art is also a traditional way to quiet the background noise in your head.

Finally, **connect with your values.** Humans surprisingly tolerate adversity with greater ease when we can put our lives in service of our highest ideals - serving others, creating beauty, and finding meaning. Somehow we are able to bypass our defenses and discomfort when we align with what most matters. Often times this alignment involves letting go of the stuff that is much less important. There are a number of free "values card sort" activities online that can help you identify and talk about your highest values.



Rights, Respect, and Responsibility

As a part of a comprehensive school counseling program, school counselors routinely deliver classroom lessons for every child at the school. All school counselors who follow American School Counseling Association's model teach social-emotional lessons related to empathy, emotional regulation, friendship, internet safety, bullying prevention, family constellations, human diversity topics, organizational skills, body safety, growth mindsets, and psychological flexibility. These lessons are typically supported either by a set curriculum or are pulled from a variety of sources – including the school counselor's direct experience working with young people.

At FernLeaf, the school counselor sometimes partners with our lead teachers to deliver lessons from the Rights, Respect, and Responsibility curriculum. We love this resource because of its scope and the solid science that supports it! The curriculum serves as a developmentally sensitive guide that begins in kindergarten and culminates in twelfth grade. Each lesson builds upon the others as it seeks to make sense of human relationships and the human body. Our earliest lessons offer students a basic framework for understanding the families which are represented in our community. These earliest lessons also give students the proper vocabulary for important body parts and introduce the concept of safe touch. Intermediate lessons move into friendship issues and human diversity. Finally, upper grade lessons culminate in understanding romantic relationships, setting boundaries, and reproduction.

I will always provide notifications to guardians before delivering classroom lessons related to reproduction and anatomy. This notification gives you the opportunity to frame the discussion prior to the lesson in a way that best suits your family. At the time of the notification parents will be able to opt out of the particular lesson by responding to my email notification. Also, I always welcome the opportunity to discuss the curriculum with you.