

LIVING VALIANTLY

Parent Newsletter from the Counseling Department

Winter 2015

Grief Through the Holidays

by Kelsey MacIntyre, VCHS Counselor

As we approach the busy, bustling holiday season, it's important to remember that not everyone anticipates this time of year with exuberance and delight. Besides the sometimes stressful rush of holiday shopping and figuring out what dishes to bring to each party, the holiday season can also be mixed with trepidation and a sadness for those who have lost loved ones they once shared these memories and traditions with. This can make it a very lonely season.

In the immediate moments after a loved one has passed we pour on the love, cards, flowers, food, gifts and sympathy. Although this can be helpful, most of us just hop right back into our own lives and forget about the pain that our friends might still be feeling in the weeks, months and years that follow. This is the time they need us most. Those big holidays, birthdays, anniversaries and special (possibly private) days that were once shared with lost loved ones are the days often forgotten by everyone else. This is when the pain and loneliness can really start to set in.

I spent a weekend this past summer at a hospice grief camp for kids who have lost loved ones. We played games, created memorials, took pictures, painted, sculpted, danced, wrote poetry, told stories, laughed, cried, and remembered. It was such an eye opening experience for me to see these kids, ages 6-17, processing so much more than I've ever experienced. The loss of parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends; taking their own lives, being taken by cancer, car accidents, domestic violence, you name it. What I learned in that short weekend was that most of those kids just wanted someone to LISTEN. Not to judge, not to push, not to cheer them up, not to force them to talk, grieve, cry, laugh or anything in between, but someone to meet them where they were and listen. Some wanted to talk, some didn't. Some kids were happy finally having fun moments with other kids who understood, and didn't treat them differently as a result of their loss.

I think it's hard for most of us to know what to say or what to do in the aftermath of death. We don't want to hurt or offend our loved ones by bringing up a painful subject or talking about the person they/we lost. However, the majority of what I've heard from those suffering through loss is the desire for someone to just ask how they are doing or talk about their loved one.

The reality is that they are already thinking about that person. Those memories do not just disappear. So my advice as you enter this holiday season is to look for those opportunities to connect. Don't ignore the issue for the sake of your friend. Ask how they are doing, let them know you are thinking about them and their loss during this time. It's okay to acknowledge death. If they don't want to talk about it, that's fine, but at least give them the opportunity to tell you that they don't, rather than assuming or deciding that for them. Otherwise you might miss out on a great chance to connect and show a friend you care.

"Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted" - Matthew 5:4



In This Issue

- Grief Through the Holidays
- Growing your child's Mind
- Doodling Kindness
- Resources



Growing your Child's Brain

by Teisha Parchment, VCMS Counselor

If you ask most parents what they want for their child, they would say that they want their child to live a happy, healthy, balanced, meaningful and productive life. When it comes to school, they want their child to learn and have a love for learning. But we know that like all human beings, somewhere along the way every child will stumble across obstacles, will have setbacks and feelings of self-doubt. Every child will at some point take a class that feels overwhelming, and feel that it's almost impossible to achieve a good grade. Undoubtedly, he or she will study really hard and put a lot of effort into preparing for a test, yet receive a low score. So how do we encourage and support students through challenging times?

One way is to begin by paying attention to the beliefs that you (the parent), the student and his or her teachers have about learning. Ask yourself, how does your child feel about school? How does your child feel about him or herself and his or her capacity to learn? How do you feel about your child's potential to learn? If your child has a learning difference, does he or she know about the gifts that come with that difference? Or does your child only know about the challenges? What messages has he or she heard from others about who he or she is as a student?

According to Stanford University Psychologist Carol Dweck, we either have a fixed mindset or a growth mindset about learning. A fixed mindset is believing that intelligence is static, that people are born intelligent and that they are naturally smart. A growth mindset is understanding that we can develop intelligence and learn new skills that lead to success. Skills are developed, and failing can be used as a building block for success. Many students have personal beliefs about themselves and their ability to learn based on past experiences of successes and failures. So, how can you cheerlead a growth mindset? How can you support your child in understanding that setbacks are a natural part of learning? And how do you do it when your child is in a traditional school setting? Here are five tips to developing a growth mindset.

- 1. Develop hope and resilience.** Acknowledge and validate that the experience is difficult. Then help your child to develop hope and think differently about learning. Help your child to understand that stumbling blocks are indeed a part of learning. Talk with him or her about a challenge you've had and share how you overcame that challenge.
- 2. Turn mountains into molehills.** Break challenging goals or skill development (test taking, organization, time management, etc.) into small achievable goals. Celebrate every achievement, no matter how small. Small successes lead to greater skill achievement.
- 3. Praise effort.** It is exciting to know when your child does well and earns a good grade. But instead of responding by telling your child how smart he or she is, try praising the effort and highlighting a skill that he or she used or developed to accomplish that achievement.
- 4. Challenge ideas about a fixed mindset.** Whenever your child has a setback or you hear them make statements that reflect a fixed mindset, such as, "I am just not smart," counter it with ideas and statements that will help him or her understand that we are all born to learn. He or she can instead ask, "What else can I try?" Let your child know that the brain is like a muscle, and it's strengthened by thinking through obstacles. We may learn differently, but we each have the capacity to learn and develop skills.
- 5. Create a team of cheerleaders.** Sometimes when we are in the trenches and focused on challenges, we have to remind ourselves to never lose sight of strengths and small accomplishments. Collaborate with teachers and tutors to get an understanding of skills your child has mastered and skills that need development. Seek opportunities to cheerlead the student and each other.

“A smile is the beginning of peace.” (Mother Teresa)

“Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.” (Mark Twain)

“The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart.” (Helen Keller)



Doodling Kindness

by Sue Yockey, VCES Counselor

A few months ago, I had a dream. I was at an educational conference and chosen as one of the participants to doodle while listening to the speaker. I felt excited yet hesitant to the uncertainty of the objective of the task. Nonetheless, I am obedient, so I began to doodle. Looking at my artistic drawing, I saw swirls, lines and areas colored in. The lighting grew dark, and I heard a request for the doodles. Someone came by and swooped mine up into the deck of doodles, just like a magician who had just stuck the chosen card into the pile to later disclose its identity to the audience. The meaning of the doodles would soon be revealed as the masterpieces were promenaded to the podium.

All were shown. Each was as different as a unique flower garden, with its many colored blooms and fragrances. Yet there was one noticeable similarity that was pointed out to us: Each one had the word, gesture or feeling of kindness. As the speaker expressed this surprise revelation to the audience, we all began to visualize kindness right before our eyes. Was it an illusion or had we really doodled it? Like a magician, the speaker never revealed the truth. We were left with the illusion, or the truth, whichever it may be. I woke up.

The dream got me thinking. What would happen if in all our interactions we “doodled kindness”? Doodling is defined as drawing something without thinking about it. I played with this definition and the information I received from attending a webinar entitled “Kindness Matters – Transform Your School Culture in One Week.” The basis of this webinar was to provide a tool that engages the school community in creating a school culture that is built on acceptance, tolerance, unity and respect. The tool is *The Great Kindness Challenge*, which is one week devoted to performing as many acts of kindness as possible. It is a bullying prevention tool that I believe could create a climate where doodling kindness happens instinctively. I define doodling kindness as a kind reflex to another’s interaction. Simply put, it is kindness as a natural response.

Here are some ways I have seen our school community doodling kindness since I have been looking for acts of kindness. A big sister carried her brother’s backpack in front while her own was on her back. A student said to a teacher, “You can see my light because of your light.” A teacher said to a parent, “I want what’s best for your child so it’s worth the extra time.” A student said to another student, “I am sorry. I forgive you.” The student who received the sincere apology smiled a doodle of kindness I will remember forever.

The Great Kindness Challenge is set for January 26 – 30, 2015. However, the timing of it can be individualized if this week does not work. Here is the website with more information: <http://www.greatkindnesschallenge.org>. I would love to see not only our students involved in this but also our families. Early Learning, Elementary, Middle, and High School are already registered. Just think of what could be created with just one week devoted to kindness! What would the world be like if everyone doodled kindness?

Resources

Tips and Guides

- [Getting through the Holidays \(PDF\)](#) from [The Dougy Center](#)
- [Helping Students Understand Grief \(PDF\)](#)

Books

- “Mindset : The Psychology of Success,” by Carol Dweck, PhD
- “Building Resilience in Children and Teens: Giving Kids Roots & Wings,” by Kenneth R. Ginsburg
- [Books on Grief \(PDF list\)](#)

Video

- [You Can Learn Anything](#)

Contact Us

VCES Counselor
Sue Yockey
503-718-6519
syockey@valleycatholic.org

VCMS Counselor
Teisha Parchment
503-718-6503
tparchment@valleycatholic.org

VCHS Counselor
Kelsey MacIntyre
503-520-4701
kmacintyre@valleycatholic.org