

Counselor Chat

A resource for Mann Parents, from your School Counselor,
Melanie Miller, M.Ed. mmiller@lwsd.org or 881-9696

December 2009

Feeling a bit Stressed?

Just hear those sleigh bells ring a ling a ling, ding, ding ding a ling too.....and now it's time to buy the gifts, bake the cookies, send the cards, buy the groceries, buy more gifts, wrap them, start cooking the meals, RSVP for one party, plan the other party, hang the lights, buy more gifts, wrap more gifts.

With the holidays approaching, the continued down swing of the economy and the looming insecurity of jobs, perhaps you're feeling a "bit"stressed. And as we feel this stress it seeps down through our families and our children feel it too. Our world has become increasingly complex and busy. As we go to the grocery store we have more choices than ever. Our computers link us to the world, but give us shorter deadlines and more information to sort through. I used to think that this hectic pace would pass. That the advances of technology would slow down and we could go back to our old fashioned ways of connecting face to face, or even voice to voice rather than text messages and e-mails. But, that isn't going to happen, so I guess it's time to accept what is and create ways to slow down.....

Linda Lantieri, author of Building Emotional Intelligence, Techniques to Cultivate Inner Strength in Children, calls this slowing down as being in the moment or having "mindfulness". When is the last time that you sat with your child and enjoyed what you were doing with her? When did you connect and seem to get lost in the moment playing or talking with this wonderful person. This is being "mindful" and this is what slows down our lives. When we're not mindful, we're thinking about yesterday or we're planning for next week. Yesterday is gone, we can't change what happened. Next week is a long ways off and certainly we can plan... but then again, it could all change. All we have right now is this very moment.

Ever notice how your children can be completely in the moment? When playing with toys or hanging out with friends, they are so consumed in the very moment. If your children are young enough to still do imaginary play, their play takes their whole body, mind and feelings. They are lost in whatever they are doing.

How often do I interact with my kids, play, or answer their questions, while I'm creating my own "to do" list in my head?

Linda Lantieri reminds me that our world is moving quickly and it isn't going to slow down. What I need to do as a parent is practice being mindful and build in times in my day where I take a break, relax and stop. And as our children grow up in the age of instant messaging and instant meals where are they going to learn to slow down and be mindful? They come into this world completely in the moment, without any concept of yesterday or tomorrow. As they grow they learn the value of time and they learn how to fill it with play dates, toddler groups, sports teams, errand running and more. They watch as we rush from place to place, manage talking on two phones at once, and while sending a message on our blackberries. And how do our children learn the pace at which to live? They learn it from us. We are their first role models and guides. Tobin Hart in his book, The Secret Spiritual World of Children, wrote "Mostly we teach by who we are and how we live. Our own development and that of our children are intertwined-we grow together. "So, how are you and your children growing? Some stress in our lives is good, it motivates us, but too much stress and the brain shuts down, we stop learning. Too much stress and we don't sleep well, we become anxious. Our muscles tense up, we have headaches, back aches and sore necks. This on-going and sometimes chronic muscle tension restricts digestion and decreases energy. (Lantieri, 2008) Americans consume five billion tranquilizers every year in an effort to control their stress. (D. Wayne 1998). It is estimated that one out of five nine to seventeen year olds has a diagnosable mental disorder (D. Shafer, 1996) We often mistake the symptoms of unmanaged stress in our children as inappropriate behavior that needs to be stopped. (Lantieri, 2008) The research is daunting, so what can be done? A lot can be done to support our children in reducing unhealthy stress and this work can begin at home.

*Give yourself permission to do less, and to do it imperfectly. Allow your children this permission too!

*Celebrate mistakes. Mistakes are a wonderful opportunity to learn. Create a home were mistakes are permissible and an opportunity for children and adults to continue learning. Each night at the dinner table, ask everyone to share a mistake they made and what they learned from it. Teach children how to repair their mistakes.

*Plan moments in your day when you can take a break; breathe deeply, meditate, relax from your head to your toes. Lantieri's book, Building Emotional Intelligence comes with a CD that will walk you and your child through calming exercises. Take time each day to do these exercises with your children.

*Stay in the moment, be mindful. I imagine having a pretend camera. Stop and take photos of your moments. Commit them to memory.

*Teach and use problem solving. Children can reduce their stress when they feel confident to handle the "kid" situations that come their way. Guide them through the challenges now so that as they grow and their issues get bigger, they will be able to handle them. Problem solving creates resilient kids. They can look within themselves to find the answers to navigate life.

*Ask for help. What are you doing for your family that they could do for themselves? Divide up the holiday to-do list. Each member of your family can contribute.

*Are your kids really begging to do each of the activities that you have them signed up for? Or, have you signed them up because you want them to have every possible opportunity? Perhaps you feel a need to keep them busy?

*Use encouragement rather than praise. Encouragement looks at the process, it recognizes the struggle, and it recognizes the learning. Praise recognizes the end result; it encourages "doing" and doing it perfectly so others will notice. It puts pressure on our children and teaches them that our love is conditional on their performance. Encouragement can sound like: "Tell me about your drawing", "Look at what you have accomplished! Last week you really struggled with your math and now you've got it!", "Thank you for your help this morning, it made my job much easier".

*Give yourself permission to not be "super parent". As your children watch you schedule your day, decorate the house, deal with the decisions of life, what do you want them to learn? They are watching your every move and making decisions about themselves, the world, and how to move within their world.

*Step outside of yourself and provide for someone else. This is the season of giving so donate your time, or a gift to a worthy cause. Salvations Army has 1/3 more families and individuals in need than it did last year. Create opportunities for gratitude and remind yourself that life isn't so bad!

Happy Holidays to everyone, and may they be "mindful"

News from the Counseling Office:

Winter coats available at Redmond Junior High! This Sunday, Dec 20th, RJH will open the building from noon to 1:00 so families can come into the band room and select **free** coats. They have a variety of sizes. If anyone needs a coat before then, please stop by the RJH counseling office (Student Services) and pick out coats before 2:30 PM. **RJH hopes to provide many Redmond families with winter coats!**

Available Counseling Groups: Changing Family Groups (Banana Splits) and Friendship Groups are forming. If your child could benefit from participating in a group, please contact me at 425.881.9696 or mmiller@verizon.net

Kelso the Problem Solving Frog: Kelso is now visiting the First Grade classrooms to talk about conflict and how to resolve friendship issues.

Resources for Parents:

Positive Discipline Parenting Class at Rockwell Elementary!!! Feeling challenged by your kids' power struggles, whining, attitude, homework not getting done, sibling conflicts or something else. Come learn some common sense solutions with a parenting class based on Positive Discipline. Positive Discipline is for parents who are looking for long-term parenting skills that will encourage their children to think for themselves, become more responsible and have a greater respect for themselves and others. Open to parents living within Lake Washington School District. **Class begins January 27th.** Cost: \$100/person, \$125/couple.

To register, contact Annie Kurz, LMFT and Parent Educator at akurz@integrationcounseling.com or 425.373.0808.

Are you a parent of a child with special needs? Lake Washington PTSA has a monthly parent meeting for all parents of children with special needs. Meetings often include an informative and worthwhile speaker. For more information go to: <http://www.lwsd.org/Parents/Special-Education/Pages/default.aspx> or e-mail Chairperson, Beth Angelo at 4Bangelo3@verizon.net

Parenting Class calendar: Visit www.pasadler.org/calendar.pdf for a complete listing of parenting classes throughout the Puget Sound Area. Calendar provided by the Puget Sound Adlerian Society.