

Counselor Chat

A resource for Mann Parents, from your School Counselor,
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September 2009

The Gift of a Struggle

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The school year has started. For many students this is an exciting time as they eagerly shop for school supplies, clothes and the perfect backpack. Parents too may breathe a sigh of relief as the fall routine returns. For other students, returning to school can be stressful. Some students might be thinking, "Will I ever be able to keep up?", "Are those same kids going to pick on me?", "Will anyone play with me at recess or will I just be all alone?" As individual as our children are, their school experience can be just as unique.

School offers children many opportunities that go beyond academics. Each day they are learning about their physical, mental and social/emotional limits and strengths. They are making decisions about themselves in regards to their abilities to make and keep friends, learn new math concepts and endure new challenges. Each school year their world changes and the struggles can become more difficult. Math gets more complicated and so does friendship. A child that was once great at math is now struggling to learn long division. Long time friends move towards a new group, leaving old friends behind. A child, who was once a star soccer player, now gets bumped out of their position by the new kid.

Along with the opportunities come challenges. Challenges are a part of life, so much a part of life that they are all around us in the natural world. Take for example the caterpillar that becomes a butterfly. After time in the chrysalis, the butterfly begins to emerge. Struggling against the cramped walls of the chrysalis, the butterfly emerges with wrinkled and damp wings, unable to fly. If, at this point, we step in to help the struggling butterfly and gently touch their wings trying to straighten them, we actually harm the wings and take away the butterfly's ability to fly. Instead, the butterfly needs to experience the struggle. He needs to find his own strength, and in his own time straighten his wings and fly away.

Watching a butterfly struggle can be difficult. Watching our children struggle can be traumatic. Following are some thoughts that might help you as a parent, not step in to fix your child's struggle, but support them through whatever struggle may come their way.

Match their emotions: If your child is struggling with a subject, accept and recognize their struggle. Rather than glossing over the challenge by saying "oh, don't worry, you'll get better", or "come on it's not that big of a deal", match their emotions. Recognize and validate their struggle. "It must be hard to watch the other students catch on to math so easily", "It sounds like you're really having a hard time with reading this year". By "matching their emotions", we allow them the space to have their feelings. Our kids notice this and they feel valued because we have made space for them to be themselves and own their feelings.

Listen: Driving your kids to and from school or walking with them, hang up the cell phone and put away your mental to-do list. Make those few short minutes a time to listen to their dreams for their day...or perhaps their fears. When your child is done sharing ask "Is there anything else you want me to know?" And if your child shares a struggle, ask "Do you want help with this or did you just want me to listen?" As an adult, have you ever noticed that often times you just want someone to listen? No advice, no opinions, just listen. We often find solutions to our problems just by sharing our stories...our kids do that too! (If you take the letters of L.I.S.T.E.N and turn them around, they spell S.I.L.E.N.T.)

Be Mindful: Just like every other year, this year will go quickly too! Find moments to be "mindful" with your children. Being mindful is being present in the moment. All your focus and attention is on the present moment with no thought of what to make for dinner, what time is that presentation at

work, or did I pay the electrical bill? Our lives are busy with lots of interruptions. Close off the outside world and enjoy a bike ride, shooting hoops, or sharing a hobby. Connect, connect, connect and be in the moment. It will build your relationship with your child and open the door for them to trust you with their struggles.

Don't do for your Children what they can do for themselves: Have faith in your child's ability to solve their own problems. Offer a listening ear, ask if they want your help and be willing to step back when they don't. Before getting involved in your child's issues, ask yourself, "what is my motive?" Is it to save them from developmentally appropriate disappointment? Is it because you think you have all the answers and they won't be able to handle this? Is it because you are embarrassed and wonder what other parents and teachers will think? If so, talk to a trusted friend; ask for help in having courage to not do for your children what they can do for themselves.

Take Care of Yourself: Just like they say on the airplane...."If you are sitting next to a child, please first put on your oxygen mask and then assist your child". When's the last time you put on your oxygen mask? What do you do for fun? How do you connect with friends? What do you do to take care of yourself? Taking care of ourselves models this much needed life skill for our children.

All of us have had our own life challenges. And if we walked through those challenges, rather than around them, over them or under them, we came out stronger. Challenges are gifts. Watch in wonder as your child unwraps their struggle and strengthens his or her wings for having been through it.

News from the Counseling Office:

Lunch Time Groups for 4-6th grade students: I will once again be offering lunch time counseling groups for students in grades four thru six. This is a drop in group that will be available throughout the school year. Topics tend to be around friendships, making and keeping friends, how to resolve conflicts etc. Watch for permission slips in backpacks.

Other Available Groups: Changing Family Groups (Banana Splits) and Friendship Groups will begin after fall conferences. 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 will once again be visiting the Kindergarten and First Grade classrooms to talk about conflict and how to resolve friendship issues. Letters will be coming home telling more about this program.

Operation School Bell will be back: If you're struggling financially, Operation School Bell can help. OSB is a non-profit organization that provides new school clothes for students in need. If you're interested, please call me at 425.881.9696 or e-mail me at mmiller@lwsd.org

Resources for Parents:

Becoming the Parent You Want to Be with Positive Discipline: A seven session parenting class for Mann parents and parents throughout the district. This class has been offered the past two years and I'm hoping to offer it again. Be on the look out for further announcements!

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.