

WMS Counselors' Corner

May 7, 2020

Mary Morrissey, School Counselor
Megan Tucker, LICSW, School Social Worker

May is [Mental Health Awareness Month](#). Everyone can improve their mental health and increase resiliency regardless of the situations they are dealing with. We wanted to share some ways to 'train your brain' to be more optimistic and learn ways to cope during this time, or any time of increased stress. We believe that these tools – even those that may need to be adapted for the short term because of COVID-19 and social distancing – will be more useful than ever. Remember, you are not alone, we are all in this together.

Don't let social distance
lead to emotional distance.
Reach out, open up, let people in.
We may not be able to be
with each other right now,
but we can still
be there for
each other.

LORI DESCHENE



How to Be More Optimistic

If you tend toward mostly pessimistic thinking, you can get better at seeing what's good. Here are some things to try:

- Notice good things as they happen. At the end of the day, take 10 minutes to run through your day and come up with things that you're grateful for. Write them down in a journal or keep track using a motivational app on your phone or tablet.
- Train your mind to believe you can make good things happen in your life. Get in a habit of telling yourself specific things you can do to succeed. For example: "If I study, I can get a better grade." "If I practice, I'll perform well at the audition." "If I go on that volunteer trip, I'll meet new friends."
- Don't blame yourself when things go wrong. What does your inner voice say when things don't go as planned? Instead of thinking, "I failed that math test because I'm terrible at math," tell yourself: "I failed that test because I didn't study enough. I won't let that happen next time!" Instead of saying, "Grace broke up with me because I'm such a loser," think: "Now I know why people say breakups are so painful, but hanging out with my friends will help me feel better again."
- When something good happens, give yourself credit. Think of what you did to make a good outcome possible. Did you prepare for the test? Practice with dedication? Think of the strengths you used and how they helped you succeed.
- Remind yourself that setbacks are temporary. As soon as something goes wrong, remind yourself that it will pass — and come up with a plan for making that happen. For example: "My SAT results aren't what I hoped, but I can study more and take the test again."
- Notice how other people talk about themselves. Are friends and family members optimistic or pessimistic? For example, does your dad say, "I burned the hot dogs, I'm just a terrible cook!?" Or does he say: "I burned the hot dogs because I got distracted watching the dog chase a squirrel around the backyard!?"
- Optimism is a thinking style that can be learned, which means that pessimism can be unlearned! It can take a little while, so don't feel discouraged. Becoming more aware of the two styles can gradually help you start noticing more ways to be optimistic. Just keep telling yourself, "I can be more optimistic and I'm going to keep practicing!"

Minding Your Mind is dedicated to ending stigma and destructive behaviors associated with mental health issues. Here are some Healthy Coping Skills to utilize when experiencing emotional distress.

HEALTHY COPING SKILLS

MINDING YOUR MIND
WWW.MINDINGYOURMIND.ORG

Directions: Review these different types of healthy coping skills. Circle or highlight the coping skills you would use or want to try.

<p>Emotional Release</p> <p>Let out your feelings in a healthy way! Try these when you feel overwhelmed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Write about your feelings and/or what you are experiencing• Let yourself cry• Watch something funny and let yourself laugh• Talk to a mental health professional• Talk to a friend or trusted adult <p>TIP: Expressing and releasing our feelings can be challenging sometimes. Sharing your emotions with a trusted adult can be helpful.</p>	<p>Self-Compassion</p> <p>Being kind and generous to yourself helps combat shame, guilt, and worry.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Speak kindly to yourself, quiet negative self-talk• Remind yourself that everyone makes mistakes• Use positive thoughts to improve your mood• Give yourself positive affirmations <p>TIP: Treat yourself like you would treat your best friend. Be kind and supportive. Be forgiving.</p>
<p>Distraction</p> <p>Focused on something else temporarily to decrease difficult feelings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listen to a podcast• Clean and organize• Play video games• Paint, draw, or engage in an art activity• Exercise• Watch TV or watch a movie <p>TIP: It is not healthy to distract yourself for extended periods of time. Eventually, you have to deal with the underlying issues.</p>	<p>Self-Soothing</p> <p>Calm your mind and body to reduce feelings of stress, anxiety, and worry.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Breathe deeply for a few minutes• Yoga, dance, or other movement• Meditate, listen to a guided meditation• Take a warm shower or a bath• Go for a walk <p>TIP: Do a grounding technique. Example: Name 5 things you see, 4 things you hear, 3 things you smell, 2 things you can touch, and 1 thing you taste.</p>

Lynn Lyons, LICSW continues to offer support to parents during the pandemic. She has 5 podcasts available through this link <https://luxerecess.com/amomsretreat/>

Williams Middle School - Random Acts of Kindness Challenge

We would like to continue to challenge each student to perform at least one act of kindness for a family member, community member or friend. Take a picture, video or write about your act of kindness, then email us to share what you did.



A student highlight of this week's WMS Random Acts of Kindness:

Lilly Mae Turgeon - Grade 8

Hello WMS! I hope you're all doing well at home and staying safe when you do go out! You have probably seen or heard on the news that there is a massive shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for medical staff, in particular face shields and masks. Even in our own towns, new rules are popping up all over the place to keep us safe and healthy. One such rule comes from the "Big Y" in Longmeadow, where "Customers are required to wear cloth face coverings/masks in accordance with state or local regulations." Finding disposable masks turned out to be pretty hard, but that's understandable as hospital staff needs them more than we do. Instead of just going without any protection when I did finally leave the house, I pulled our old sewing machine out from the basement, grabbed some fabric and thread, and started creating my own masks! I have given some of them to my friends and neighbors, who have really liked how useful and creative they are! They are super fun to make, feels great to share them with others, and it's a productive way to spend all the free time I have now!



Happy Mother's Day to all of our Williams family mothers. Enjoy your special day!



As always, if you need to contact us, please feel free to email us at:
mmorrissey@longmeadow.k12.ma.us Mary Morrissey, School Counselor
mtucker@longmeadow.k12.ma.us Megan Tucker, LICSW, School Social Worker
Be well and take care.