

Mental Health Awareness Month

1) What is Mental Health?

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps to decide how we handle stress, work with others/ make friends, and make choices. Mental health is important at EVERY age!

2) What are some signs and symptoms of mental health challenges?

(More than just a day or two, here and there.)

- Feeling sad or down
- Feeling confused or having trouble concentrating
- A large number of fears, worries, or feeling guilty
- Big mood changes
- Not wanting to hang out with friends or do things you like/ love
- Very tired, low energy or trouble sleeping
- Obsession with thoughts of things that aren't real or couldn't really happen
- Having a hard time dealing with everyday challenges/ stress
- Trouble understanding and being around people and in normal situations
- Major changes in eating habits
- Big feelings of anger and violent behavior

3) What can I do to improve mine and my family's mental health?

- Talk about your feelings
- Be sure to have a "safe person" in your life when you need help
- Stay active and exercise
- Eat well
- Keep in touch with people you love
- Ask for help
- Take a break when needed
- Do something you're good at/ enjoy

4) Check out some of the things LOWER SCHOOL TEACHERS do in their classrooms to support mental health and wellness year-round!

Mindful Breathing- Students are encouraged to practice this during morning meetings as well as throughout the school day, when students need it. It helps calm down high energy and clears students' minds. Mindful breathing prepares students' mindset and helps to focus prior to starting the next task. At Steward, we teach the importance of breathing through stressful situations throughout the lower school. Intentional breathing can be done anytime, anywhere, with no special equipment required. Paying attention to your breathing means taking air in through your nose and letting it out through your mouth. Students can be encouraged to put their hand on their belly and fill their bellies with air upon breathing in and make it smaller upon breathing out. We've practiced breathing strategies this year to help students to manage big emotions and respond with productive next steps.

Morning Meetings- This establishes a sense of classroom community and creates a safe and nurturing place for students to learn and grow. Morning meetings and restorative circles are crucial to building connections and relationships in the classroom.

Routine- The students benefit from routine and the openness to talk about feelings, big or small. Many classes post or go over daily schedules each morning, which gives students an opportunity to ask questions and process what the day will look like. This routine has proven successful in easing potential anxiety.

Nature- Many classes also like to take advantage of our beautiful campus and do lessons/ activities outside, in the sun and fresh air. Classes also enjoy walks and natural movement breaks around campus and to resource/ specials classes. Time outdoors and movement allows students to move and breathe in the fresh air to help clear their minds and rejuvenate their brains.

Psychoeducation- During character education and school counseling lessons, many lessons are devoted to helping students understand their brains and how they work, especially in the upper grades. This helps students to understand their challenges as natural and normal. This sense of normalcy often frees children from the burden of feeling that they are "bad" or "broken" because of challenges that all children, inevitably, will face.

Play- It's our school-wide theme! It is one of the most important ways that children learn about the world and themselves. It is also a tool used frequently in therapy to build confidence, increase frustration tolerance, teach roles and boundaries, and to build relationships. Often we will provide numerous times throughout the day for outdoor play including: sports, playground equipment, four-square, pretend play with nature's materials or a play kitchen, or even the sensorimotor experience of swinging and sliding. Additionally, we provide opportunities for structured games, hands-on learning as well as board games. (Families should consider incorporating structured play, pretend play, expressive play and outdoor play into weekly routines!)



Family Wellness Menu

Please feel free to adapt classroom ideas to use at home!

Hold a Family Meeting to connect! Check out this resource to ask your child about how their day went.	Get Outside! Come up with a schedule for family walks or time outdoors.	Create a family routine or revisit your current one. Is it working? What needs to change?	Check out the Book "Your Fantastic Elastic Brain: Stretch It, Shape it!" by JoAnn Deak	Embrace PLAY: Schedule a "Family Night" for a meal together and Uno or Candyland. Create a "family design" of a wacky costume or hat for the "Game Champion" to wear with pride!	Have a family conversation about times mindful breathing can help you get through challenging times.
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~The Center for Engagement~