



Connecting the dots

BPS School Psychologist Newsletter



Happy Holidays

The BPS School Psychologist team would like to wish you peace and joy this holiday season and throughout the coming year.

Welcome

We have two new additions to our team! Welcome to BPS **Heather Sarles** and **Eric Teal**. We would also like to welcome **Juliana Aboudi** and **Denise Shearer Thompson** who are serving as BPS School Psychologist Interns this year.

Shout Outs

Congratulations to **Lauren Taurasi** and **Nicole Mathews** for being nominated as School Psychologist of the Year. They represented BPS at the [Florida Association of School Psychologists \(FASP\)](#) conference in November.



Winter Break Ideas

- **Get Cooking:** Make meals and memories together this holiday season. Have your child assist with measuring ingredients for your favorite holiday treats to help strengthen math skills.
- **Pen Pal:** Have your child write letters to relatives and far away friends to keep spelling and writing skills sharp.
- **Story Time:** Share stories with your children about your favorite holiday memories. Kids love to hear stories about when their parents were children.
- **Read:** Read and re-read your favorite holiday and winter themed stories. Help your child make connections to the text by asking questions such as, "How would you feel if this happened to you?"
- **Movies:** Movies can be educational too! Just remember to ask questions. "What was your favorite part? What would you have done differently?"
- **Game Time:** Break out the board games and word puzzles to keep math and spelling skills fresh. Crossword puzzles, word searches, and sudoku puzzles offer hours of fun. Check out our school psychology word search on the back page!

Self-Care During the Holiday Season

By Cara C. Flickinger, Ed.S., NCSP, School Psychologist, BPS

As we approach the holiday season amidst a pandemic, it is likely that some traditions and feelings may vary from what we have come to know. Even under “typical” conditions, the holiday season can come with increased feelings of grief, distress, and anxiety. This year, multiple factors both related to and separate from the pandemic may influence how we feel as the season approaches. No matter how you are feeling, you are not alone.

A [self-care plan](#) can help us incorporate strategies that can be used to improve or support continued wellbeing. Please consider reviewing the strategies below and choosing a few that you can commit to utilizing on a regular basis.

- Schedule time for [self-care](#). Set a daily reminder to build the habit of self-care.
- Start small. Incorporate one new self-care practice and build from there.
- Tend to your physical health. Adequate [sleep](#), [nutritious foods](#), water, and physical activity can greatly improve how we feel.
- Practice gratitude. Take a few moments each day to consider the people and things for which you are grateful.
- Find creative ways to stay connected to the people and traditions that help you feel a sense of comfort and safety. For example, holiday movie nights, meals with loved ones in person or virtually, sharing holiday recipes, or attending virtual or socially distanced holiday events.
- Make the most of enjoyable traditions that are able to be continued safely. Examples include, indoor and/or outdoor decorations, sending cards to loved ones, holiday crafts, driving or walking around to see holiday decorations, and volunteering or donating to a charity in need if you are in a position to do so.
- Compile a list of people and activities that help you when you are feeling stressed, anxious, or sad. Regularly review your list and incorporate these people and activities into your day.
- Try to find the silver lining and model positive self-talk. For example, “We get extra time to relax and play at home since we won’t be traveling.”
- Identify negative thought patterns. Shift these thoughts to more realistic, positive ones. Consider what you would say to a loved one who is having similar thoughts about themselves.
- Reflect on how you are [feeling](#). At times, we may simply need to acknowledge and accept our feelings. There are other times when we might realize that we can use our feelings as guides in order to make modifications to improve how we are feeling. For example, if we are setting unrealistic expectations for ourselves and/or others, we may constantly feel overwhelmed, resentful, and disappointed. We may need to adjust our goals and expectations, so they are more realistic and achievable.
- Validate your own and your loved ones’ feelings. It is OK to feel disappointed, sad, or frustrated that things may be different this year.
- Practice [relaxation strategies](#). Simply pausing for one minute to sit still, close your eyes, and focus on your breath as you breathe deeply can provide immediate positive results. Other activities include visualization, meditation, and yoga designed for [children](#) or adults.
- Avoid excessively checking the news or social media.
- Be kind to others and yourself.
- Reach out for help if you need it. This may involve contacting a friend or family member, [a local organization](#), or a [national organization](#) for support.

References

Topor, D.R. (2019, October 22). Prioritizing the “me” in merry: Self-care strategies for this holiday season. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/self-care-strategies-holiday-season-2017121812926>

Connecticut Children’s. (2020, October 30). How to help kids handle holiday disappointment during COVID-19.

<https://www.connecticutchildrens.org/coronavirus/how-to-help-kids-handle-holiday-disappointment-during-covid-19/>

Please see the Winter edition of Heart of Brevard for the full-length version of this article.

Mindful Moment

By: Christopher King

The “Take-Five” exercise is an easy, simple to remember, and always accessible emotion regulation technique. It is useful whenever one is feeling overwhelmed, needs a quick moment to refocus, or to help calm down to improve decision making. The exercise anchors one’s awareness back to the present moment. The idea is to use your five fingers to count each breath cycle. It is important to introduce this technique when your students are calm. Model the process yourself to show your audience exactly what to do. Make sure you are also relaxed to help build a positive association. Let them know that this exercise can help calm them down the next time they feel overwhelmed.

BASIC STEPS WHEN DEMONSTRATING TO YOUNGER STUDENTS

1. Tell the children to fan out their hand “like a star.”
2. Next, tell them to take their pointer finger from the opposite hand and begin to trace along the hand that is fanned out. Tell them to inhale through their nose as they trace the outside of their thumb, then exhale through the mouth as they trace along the inside of their thumb. Inhale as they trace the outside of their pointer finger, exhale as they trace the inside of their pointer finger...and so on and so forth until all of the fingers have been traced.
3. As they trace each finger, encourage them to not only focus on every breath, but also have them consider how the small movements feel on their hands. Conscious attention applied slowly has a calming and relaxing effect.
4. When they are finished, ask about their emotions. Do they feel a difference? Sometimes the exercise needs to be repeated...that’s called “Take-Ten.”

OLDER STUDENTS/ADULTS

Older students and adults can also benefit from the use of this technique in a simple, more subtle way. Have them make a fist and open one finger at a time when a breath cycle has been completed (one in breath and one out breath). When the palm is fully opened, have them reassess their current emotional state and decide if another cycle is required. This can be done right before a test, with their hand hidden under the table, or at a meeting right before a presentation is given.

School Psychology Awareness

By: Veronica Sinclair

National School Psychology Week was November 9 through the 13th. The theme this year was “The Power of Possibility.” The National Association for School Psychologists (NASP) designates one week each year in November to recognize School Psychologists and the critical work that they do every day. There are over 35 School Psychologists that work in Brevard County Public Schools. While they may not always be visible because they cover multiple schools, their presence is surely felt by students, families, and school staff. School Psychologists utilize their expertise in consultation, interventions, assessments, counseling, and more to assist their school teams. If a student has a concern, such as academic or behavioral, School Psychologists collaborate with their school teams to help identify strategies to overcome challenges. School Psychologists are vital members of the school and provide support to help all students thrive.

“The Power of Possibility,” theme underscores the importance of resilience and optimism. It is especially important during uncertain times to focus on what we can control and celebrate our accomplishments. When we highlight our past achievements, we can look to what we did right in order to continue to succeed. If you see a School Psychologist, please thank them for all that they do to support their school communities!

Reference: nasponline.org

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SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY WORD SEARCH

By: Kristie Doucet

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COGNITION
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DEVELOPMENT
ENGAGEMENT
GENERALIZATION
GRATITUDE
INDIVIDUALITY

READINESS
POSITIVITY
RELATIONSHIPS
SATISFACTION
WELLNESS
PERSONALITY
MOTIVATION
KINDNESS