



The School Counselor

From your MCIU School Counselor

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The School Counselor is a newsletter designed by a committee of Montgomery County Intermediate Unit (MCIU) Nonpublic School Services (NPSS) counselors for parents and school staff. Its purpose is to inform and to offer helpful hints on issues relating to children, school, and families.

The MCIU is a regional educational service agency whose mission is to provide dynamic, visionary leadership and effective, efficient services for constituent school districts, schools, and students. The NPSS division administers state and federally-funded programs of auxiliary services for the students attending non-profit, nonpublic schools.

An MCIU school counselor is typically scheduled at your school each week throughout the school year to work directly with children and to assist school staff and families help students to succeed. If you have questions regarding the MCIU school counseling program and/or your child, please contact your school counselor.

The Goals of Misbehavior

According to Systematic Training for Effective Parenting program authors, Don Dinkmeyer, Sr., Gary McKay, and Don Dinkmeyer, Jr., there are four major goals or purposes for a child's misbehavior. Each behavior evokes a feeling in us when it happens. This feeling can help us identify which of the four goals the child is trying to accomplish.

ATTENTION: All children need it. We have to assess whether or not the child's demands are excessive. If we feel **annoyed**, the goal of the misbehavior is attention seeking.

POWER: If the misbehavior evokes a feeling of **anger** in us, it's probable that the child has not gotten his way and is challenging us to determine who's boss. If the child treats our request slowly or half-heartedly, he is gaining power by being passive.

REVENGE: When a child hasn't gotten his way, he could also try to cause **hurt** feelings. He may want to get even with the parent.

INADEQUACY: When the child just wants to give up and be left alone, we feel like **giving up**, too. We have agreed to expect nothing from the child.

Children don't necessarily know that they have goals for their misbehavior. By recognizing our feeling when it occurs, we can more readily identify the child's purpose and thereby not reinforce inadvertently his behavior. We can help him work through the need, disappointment, or struggle by encouraging him. We can thus instill respect for the child by expecting him to be successful.

Communicating with School Personnel

Communication is a buzzword that we hear all the time. We are encouraged to communicate with our peers, spouses, children, etc. We know that communication requires that each person hear and understand what the other person is saying and that we respond in an appropriate manner. However, sometimes our emotional involvement can hinder successful communication with school personnel. This frequently happens when a child returns home from school and is upset by something that happened in school. Our first impulse is to protect our children and, sometimes, we want to contact someone at the school immediately. If that is your first impulse, consider the following before picking up the phone or writing that letter:

Remember that what your child tells you is from his perspective. That doesn't mean that your child is not telling the truth; it means that his viewpoint may be different from others involved. Remain calm and attempt to calm down your child before proceeding. Ask your child to explain the situation to you from beginning to end. Ask what happened just before the incident so that you can understand the context of the event. When your child has shared the details of the occurrence, ask any questions necessary for clarification. If you don't think that you have enough information or, if you think that your child has reason to be upset, make an appointment to speak with the involved school personnel. This conversation can be either on the phone or in person. Explain the situation as reported by your child and ask if it is accurate. If not, calmly listen to the school's perception. If you determine that you and the person with whom you are speaking are in disagreement, make an appointment to talk to the principal. If you decide that your child behaved inappropriately, allow him to be responsible for his actions.

It is important to read and understand the school's handbook and disciplinary code. Share this information with your children so that they know the behaviors expected while they are in school. We do need to protect our children, but we also need to let them know that we expect them to obey the rules of school and society.

Stress

The term “stress” was coined in 1950 by Hans Selye. Since stress has become a fact of life for adults and children, managing the stress in our daily lives is an integral part of our staying healthy.

Common stressors are change, death, vacation, life’s fast pace, daily hassles, competition in society, disruptive social changes, and lack of control. Stressors for children can include being asked to do something with which they don’t feel comfortable, physical and family changes, academic grades, competitive activities, and the beginning of the school year.

Although stress can be viewed as positive, we invariably perceive stress as threatening. When is stress not healthy? According to L. Michael Ascher, psychologist and Temple University Hospital psychiatry professor, “When your mind is on doing well in a game or on an exam, that’s positive arousal or stress, but if your mind is focusing on the anxiety you’re feeling, instead of on your performance, you’re under too much stress.” We are all aware that too much stress can disable our immune system and affect our relationships and our work performance.

Suggestions for dealing with stress:

- Focus daily on successes
- Find a healthy outlet
- Talk with a good listener
- Reward ourselves in some way
- Laugh

Tips for Parents:

- Talk to your child daily
- Listen
- If there is a problem, help your child problem solve while minimizing criticism
- Contact your child’s teacher and/or school counselor to work together



According to a special report on stress published by Independence Blue Cross, the following are **signs of stress in children**:

Mild to Moderate

- Nail-biting, bed-wetting or soiling clothes (after entering first grade)
- Frequent nightmares
- Excessive fears, e.g. regarding school
- Moodiness or irritability
- Loneliness, inability to make friends
- Constant complaining
- Sleep problems (too much or too little)
- Chronic dissatisfaction with school and school work
- Homework: neglect or preoccupation
- Poor grades

More Serious

- Withdrawal into a fantasy world
- Preoccupation with monsters
- Pervasive physical symptoms that cannot be identified by physical exam
- Substance abuse
- Truancy or dropping out of school
- Running away from home
- Death wishes, suicide threats and attempts

*"Nobody cares if you can't dance well.
Just get up and dance".*

(Anonymous)

