

# FORCE COUNSELING

## CONNECTION



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## Counselor's Corner

By Jenny Marx

Greetings and welcome to the first Force Counseling Newsletter! I want to introduce myself to everyone. My name is Jenny and I am the Professional School Counselor at Force. I work out of room 112 and am here every day from 7:45-4:00. You can call and make an appointment if you need our services. My number is (720) 424-7435.

Inside this newsletter, you will find what I hope to be helpful and useful information about the school and what is going on in the counseling department.

### Letters to the Editor

Before I let you all go for this month, I want to ask you to please do me a favor. Let me hear from you. I want to know what sorts of information you are interested in. What do you want me to bring up and talk about in these monthly newsletters? I would love to start having a "letters to the editor" section. Let me know what you think at [Jennifer\\_marx@dpsk12.org](mailto:Jennifer_marx@dpsk12.org).

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To give a sense of some of the programs and activities we will be providing this year, here is a short list:

**Guidance Lessons:** Once a month, the counselor and interns will be coming into your child's classroom to teach a lesson on social and emotional well-being.

**Small Group Counseling:** On a weekly basis, we offer a range of groups for those that need extra support. Everything from trauma, anger management, and grief counseling is available.

**Other Programs:** From fifth grade college field trips to the Zara Project Holiday Food Drive, we have a lot going on!

## Restorative Approaches

By Jenny Marx

As we start off a brand new year here at Force Elementary, I wanted to take a few moments to tell Force families about some of the activities staff are doing and learning about.

One of the philosophies that the Denver school district encourages schools to adapt is called, "Restorative Approaches". This is a philosophy that allows staff, students, and families to work together when someone makes a mistake or makes a choice that harms other people. Instead of just punishing the wrong-doer and hoping the kid learns a lesson, Restorative Approaches puts more responsibility on that student to come up with a plan for how he or she can repair the damage they have caused.

When Restorative Approaches is working at its best, it can be a way for a kid who did something negative to turn it around into a positive and to feel great about themselves in the end.

If, for example, a kid gets caught stealing something from another person, Restorative Approaches would give that kid a chance to fix the problem by, say, speaking directly with the person they stole from and developing empathy

for their victim. They would come up with a way to make things right with that victim. Perhaps they would be able to return the stolen item, but by also having a conversation with the other person, they would build a more

positive connection. They could walk away with more understanding for the victim and also with being able to show the victim that they are not an all bad person themselves.

In this way, victims get to have more of a voice and speak out about what they need in order to heal from an incident. This helps teach our kids how to advocate for themselves which is an important skill for them to learn as they grow older. It also teaches everyone how to resolve problems that we have with one another without giving up and burning bridges that could easily be mended instead. We have all had disagreements with other people. It is painful, especially when we cannot see eye to eye with one another after a disagreement. On the flip side, if we can teach the kids communication skills and give them experiences of reconnecting with each other in meaningful ways, they will know the power of building and maintaining healthy relationships. Healthy does not mean perfect, it means changing for the better when we mess up.

Staff in all classrooms at all levels are learning more about this approach this year and we will be trying to implement it whenever possible. We may be calling on you families a lot in order to give us your thoughts and to help the children with the challenges of speaking honestly and listening to each other with empathy. As we go along, please know that we want to hear from you. How is it going? Do you see any positive changes as a result of what we are doing? What suggestions do you have? Thank you for partnering with us this year and every year. The more families and school staff can be a team working together, the better we can all do for the children we serve.

## Guidance Lessons

In the world of School Counseling, there is something called the Guidance Lesson. What is that? Well, let me take a minute to tell you more about it!

Children spend a lot of their school day learning all kinds of skills from how to read and write to how to solve mathematical problems. We do this because we believe these skills are going to help the kids have a brighter future and be able to live a truly satisfying life later on.

We all know that another big part of living a happy life comes from our connections with other people. If we have good, solid relationships-people in our lives who we can count on and who can count on us-our lives are much better as a result. Kids need to learn how to build these relationships and school offers great chances to do that because the children here are naturally exposed to other people their age. Conflict happens all the time. It is a part of life. But, if we can help the kids to learn some skills to deal with life when it gets complicated by other people, we will be giving them a huge advantage in their lives from then on.

Guidance lessons are lessons that we give the students to teach them some of these people skills. They learn about solving problems and talking to each other in productive ways. They learn a lot of other things too. Each month, we will have a new theme or topic that we will be discussing with students. Because we in the counseling department work across grade levels, we will have age-appropriate lessons for each grade level that we teach. Starting with Kindergarten and going all the way to fifth grade, we'll come in to each classroom once a month for 45 minutes and conduct a lesson around the theme for that month.

Starting off in September, we will be discussing attendance and the important of showing up in life. We all know that saying from the lottery commercials, "You can't win if you don't play". In the same way, coming to school is the first step toward getting all those other chances at building skills, gaining an education, being ready for the future. Often, we see kids who don't come to school grow further behind. They feel lost. They can tend to feel less positive about themselves, taking it personally that they don't know what is going on in class or that they don't have a lot of friends. In reality, these are just the natural consequences of not being here.

We all have our different reasons for not being here when we're not. When it starts to get to be a pattern, you can expect someone from the school to ask you about it. We want you to want your kids to be here. If there are reasons you are reluctant to send them to school or if there are things going on in your home that are making it harder to get them here, let's talk about it and find a solution for it. Their lives will be way more satisfying and you will feel a sense of freedom once we can get into good attendance habits. Let's make this work for everyone. Please tell us what we can do to help you feel great about leaving your children in our care every day. We want to do right by them and by you. Communication is the first step to making that happen!