

Mercy High School
Counseling Department

GOOD NEWS

September 2020



A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

September 2020

Mercy High School Counseling Department

Good News

S E P T E M B E R

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there are as
many ways to
define success as
there are stars
in the sky.

©POSITIVELYPRESENT

Welcome!

From Mercy's Counseling Department, to new Mercy families, returning Mercy families, Mercy Staff, and Administration:

Welcome to the 2020-2021 school year!

The Good News is a monthly, electronic publication, provided by Mercy's Counseling Department. The intention behind this newsletter is to share our department's insight, resources, and upcoming events.

We welcome your comments, suggestions, and requests regarding *The Good News* and ask that said communication be sent to Counseling Department Chairperson, Trish Brown at tmbrown@mhsmi.org.

I'm Smiling. I promise.

Face Masks and Anxiety

I am running out of adjectives to describe our current reality. Today, I'm going to just go with "weird". At Mercy, we are only physically together 2 days a week, and when we are together, we are expected to keep our distance, we are turning left to go right, and traveling a Cedar Point style maze to grab lunch. In addition to all of this weirdness, we have half of our faces covered by masks. I swear I am smiling at each of you in the halls-even though you can't tell.

Mask wearing, especially for a prolonged period of time (ahem...like a school day) can cause us to feel anxious. My hope is to offer you all a bit of understanding and guidance in this area, in case you or someone you know is feeling anxiety while mask wearing.

Anxiety or worry, like sadness, joy, or anger, is a feeling. And like any negative feeling, individualized coping skills can make a major difference in how we allow anxiety or worry to impact our daily lives.

It is most important to first understand anxiety. Essentially, sometimes our brains get it wrong. This little piece of our brains, called the amygdala, is responsible for our "fight, flight, or flee" response; interpreting our experiences as safe or unsafe and subsequently initiating a chain of reactions to prepare our minds and bodies to react. So, if I come across a bear, my amygdala

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would interpret this as a dangerous situation, send messages of alarm to the other parts of your brain, and then your brain would engage in producing hormones necessary to either prepare your mind and body to run for your life, or to posture up and engage in a bear fight.

As mentioned before, sometimes our amygdala misinterprets situations as unsafe (which is different from *uncomfortable*), such as wearing a mask. There are many reasons why wearing a mask may bring about worry. First, masks may serve as a reminder of our current stressors; illness, uncertainty, etc. which is bound to bring about anxious thoughts and feelings. Mask wearing can also mimic feeling as if we are trapped in an enclosed space, which for many, is unsettling. Most face masks cause make us feel as though our airflow is restricted (although it is not), which can also bring up anxious feelings. Finally, the area of our faces covered by masks can be significantly sensitive to increase in temperature, which may trigger our amygdala to believe we are at risk.

So, how do we deal with this?

The trick to reprogramming your amygdala is to:

1. Not feed anxiety by giving it what it wants. If you take your mask off every time your brain tells you that wearing your mask is unsafe, you are only validating the messages your amygdala is sending you. This part of your brain will think: “Alright! I’m doing a good job! I will make sure to keep sending this message each time she puts that on her face.”

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2. When you start to worry or feel anxious with your mask on, acknowledge the anxiety (think or even say out loud: “this is anxiety”) and then cope with it. You may need to try a few coping skills until you find the one(s) that work for you, so here are a few suggestions!

*** Positive Self-Talk**

When you find yourself thinking negative thoughts about wearing your mask, “talk” back to those thoughts in an attempt to change your perspective. For example, if you start to feel and think that you are unsafe under your mask, remind yourself that research has shown that mask wearing is not unsafe, or remind yourself that you are wearing your mask to keep others safe. Even a simple “I got this” can sometimes quiet the negative voice lying to us through our thoughts.

*** Mantras**

A mantra is a word, phrase, sentence, or song lyric that serves as a positive trigger. Find a mantra that makes you feel calm or comforted and think or say this while wearing your mask. Using a mantra may eventually allow you to feel something entirely different behind your mask.

*** Practice**

If wearing a mask for a full day is new to you, it can be very overwhelming and distracting. Try wearing your mask during times when it is not required, so to desensitize your mind and body from the experience. Like most things, it may just take some getting used to.

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*** Find your style**

There are many different choices of mask fit and make. Try a few out and see if one material or style feels more comfortable on your face than others. You can also attempt to take mask wearing as an opportunity to express your personal style. Experimenting with various prints or messages on your mask may make wearing it more fun than it is stressful.

Look, I'm having a hard time with the weirdness of wearing a mask as well. I still have not figured out how to keep my glasses from fogging up (please reach out if you've found a solution to this!), I miss wearing lipstick, I do not like having this thing on my face, and I do not like not being able to see your face.

With that said, you will not hear me complain because I have found something to love about mask wearing. What I love is that the act of wearing a mask truly represents a community coming together out of love and care for each other. At Mercy, we are prioritizing the health of others, over our own level of comfort. We say often that we are a family here, and families protect each other, even if it's weird, right? For me, wearing a mask at Mercy is an act of love (which happens to be my mask wearing mantra!). So for now, let's keep loving each other in this small way, until we are certain that it is safe to show our love in other ways again. And if you see me in the halls, I promise I am smiling at you underneath this weird thing.

Written by Mercy Counselor, Mrs. Trish Brown

Meet the Mercy Counseling Department

Support Specialist, Mrs. Jennifer Burek

As Support Specialist, Mrs. Burek's smiling face is the first to welcome you to our office. She also handles important department communications, data, scheduling, and organization, as well as creating the adorable bulletin boards found near the Counseling Office! Mrs. Burek has a husband, son, daughter, and dog at home and loves to travel with her family to warm, sunny destinations.

9th Grade Counselor & Department Chairperson,

Mrs. Trish Brown

In addition to serving all Freshwomen, Mrs. Brown is Lead Coordinator of Mercy Link Crew and facilitates the CHAT program, Mercy's offering of Group Counseling. Mrs. Brown has a husband, daughter, and dog at home. She loves yoga and event planning, and has a small, private practice as a Personal Counselor.

10th-12th Grade Counselor, last names A-G,

Mrs. Holly Bennetts

Mrs. Bennetts has quite the passion for College Counseling in the process of college search and selection, serving as recent President of the Michigan Association of College Admission Counseling. Mrs. Bennetts is a wife, mother of 3, and has a dog at home. She also spends her summers in Gaylord, is a beyond avid reader, and has a private practice outside of Mercy as a College Guidance Counselor.

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Meet the Mercy Counseling Department (Continued)

10th-12th Grade Counselor, last names H-O,

Mrs. Arpna Hessler

Mrs. Hessler is a Mercy graduate. In addition to serving 10th-12th graders, Mrs. Hessler is one of the Moderators of Mercy's chapter of BASE. Mrs. Hessler lives with her husband, 2 sons, and dog. She loves and highly values travel in her life and is known to be a Foodie, always trying new and delicious foods.

10th-12th Grade Counselor, last names P-Z

Mrs. Kristen Casey

Mrs. Casey is a Mercy graduate. In addition to serving 10th-12th graders at Mercy, she is the AP Test Coordinator for MHS and a member of Mercy Advisory Council. Mrs. Casey is a wife, mother of 2, and has a dog at home. Mrs. Casey kindly supports her children's travel sports involvement throughout the school year and enjoys shopping, yoga, & Pilates.

Contact Us

Mrs. Burek Jlburek@mhsmi.org, 248-476-8020 ext: 1541

Mrs. Brown Tmbrown@mhsmi.org, 248-476-8020 ext: 1431

Mrs. Bennetts Hbennetts@mhsmi.org, 248-476-8020 ext:1513

Mrs. Hessler Abhessler@mhsmi.org, 248-476-8020 ext:1517

Mrs. Casey Kkcasey@mhsmi.org, 248-476-8020 ext:1526



Mrs. Casey

“Hey Mercy!
Please check out our new
Virtual Counseling Office!



Mrs. Hessler

It is an interactive
document. Just follow
the instructions and
click on the office
items for information!

You can find it in
the Counseling
Schoology courses



Mrs. Burek

“There you can find the
caseload and contact info
for each Counseling
Department member!



Mrs. Bennetts

“Our Virtual Office will also teach you
all about the student services we
provide, as well as how to schedule an
in-person or E-Counseling
appointment with a Counselor!”



Mrs. Brown

Important Dates

August 31st: New Parent Orientation Webinar
6:00pm via Zoom.

September 2nd: 1:15pm Monthly Meet Up for 9th
Graders

All 9th graders will meet with their Link Leaders and crews via Zoom.

September 10th: 3:00pm Coffee with Counseling
Senior Parent Meeting

Hosted via Zoom, Parents will be informed regarding Senior student College Application process and provided support.

September 14th: Course Drop Deadline

September 25th: 9th Grade Virtual Social Event

9th Grade BINGO Night! 7:00pm via Zoom. Details to be shared soon.

COLLEGE CORNER

VIRTUAL COLLEGE REPRESENTATIVE SESSIONS

This year, Junior and Senior students can sign up to meet with College Reps **virtually only** during the months of September and October, scheduled through SCOIR.

In an effort to minimize class time disruption, these virtual sessions will be offered:

Mon/Tues/Thurs/Fri: 3-4pm or 4-5pm

Wed: 1-2pm, 2-3pm, or 3-4pm

Students can view available visits and sign up to attend sessions by logging into their SCOIR account. Please note that Reps are added frequently, so it is wise to check the calendar often!

VIRTUAL COLLEGE FAIR

On September 13th, the National Association for College Admissions Counseling is hosting a virtual college fair featuring over 600 colleges. Interested students can register for the event [here](#).

APPLICATIONS, TEST SCORES, AND CHANGES, OH MY!

To say this has been an application cycle with a lot of flux and uncertainty is an understatement. Colleges are going test optional on a weekly basis, deadlines are being made later, colleges are adjusting their fall plans and we are still in a place of much uncertainty.

There is one constant, however, colleges are pivoting to meet students in their current reality. I recently was speaking with a colleague on the university side and he commented: “I am telling our admission staff that we are fishing with poles and not nets right now.” What does that mean? Traditional ways of interacting are not happening this year, or are not happening in the same way. I don’t think this is all bad, because it actually allows a student to connect with a college on the student timeline. Every year we have students miss a college visit because of class - this year - those visits are occurring from the comfort of the Mercy iPad when no classes are going on. Additionally, just about every school has pivoted to online tours, information sessions and one on one meetings. Take advantage of these.

Perhaps the most difficult part of this current reality is standardized testing, particularly for our seniors. I get it. For most of your life you have heard about the importance of the ACT or SAT in the context of college admissions. Now schools are going test optional or test blind. It feels like a bait and switch. How can something that has been emphasized as so important no

longer matter? Colleges (and the testing companies) have known for years the best predictor of success in college are the classes a student takes, how they do in them and their involvement in their school community. Many schools were already considering test-optional pre-Coronavirus, this just made the decision easier.

It does sometimes feel like test-optional “wink-wink”, like there is a but after that statement. If you choose to apply to a school without a test, the readers will be looking at your application in the context of you and Mercy. Not “well student A has a test but student B doesn’t.” There are several schools (even some that fall into the selective category) that have been test optional for years.

Colleges are aware of the conflicting messages. In the last week Mercy Counselors have clearly heard, “the last thing we want students to do is to travel to take a test,” “health is more important than a test,” and “optional means optional.” The National Association for College Admission Counseling has a database aptly titled, Test-Optional Means Test-Optional. This lists colleges that are signing on to that statement - Optional means Optional, no winks, secret handshakes or odd eye-rolls.

Prior to Coronavirus, there were about 700 schools that were test-optional. We are now at over 1500. Fairtest.org catalogs these schools in their searchable database. FairTest also has wonderful resources and research about the reliability and validity of standardized tests.

Here are a few tips for navigating this space:

1. Go to the college website and check test status. Are they test-optional, test-blind, or test-required. This will be the first place requirements are updated. Realize schools are changing test policies to optional regularly. Last week the University of Georgia system and Spelman College went test-optional.
2. Look to see if the school is test-optional for scholarships. Some schools are test-optional for admission, but not for scholarships.
3. Look to see if there are additional requirements to apply test-optional, some schools might require a letter of recommendation or an essay.
4. Your counselor is a resource - so speak with them.

If you are not a senior at Mercy, don't worry about a test right now. In fact, the just thing to do is not test this fall so that seniors, who are applying to schools who require scores can get a seat to test.

And finally, in all the ebbs and flows of this year and in this context, the college process this year, I turn to admissions colleagues to help me gain insight into their thought process. One of my favorite places to turn is Rick Clark's blog from Georgia Tech. He is spot on. Here are two of my favorites (it was hard to pick 2). Don't feel like reading? Rick has a podcast too!

[Do I write the COVID essay?](#)

[Conversations Seniors and Parents should be having](#)

Written by Mercy Counselor, Mrs. Holly Bennetts

Take a Moment for Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the simple practice of being totally present in the moment; being aware of your surroundings, your breath, your thoughts, and your feelings.

Mindfulness activities can be calming and destressing, can reduce anxiety, can improve your focus, and can contribute to improved physical and mental health.

The more you practice mindfulness activities,
the more benefits you will find!

Four By Four Breathing

According to *The Little Book of Mindfulness* by Tiddy Rowan, a deeply relaxed person only breathes roughly 7 times per minute!

*** Take a slow, 4 second inhale through your nose, counting slowly to 4 in your head.**

*** Hold that breath at the top for 2 seconds.**

*** Exhale slowly for 4 seconds, again, counting to 4 in your head, either through your nose or mouth, whichever feels best to you.**

*** Continue this for 1-5 minutes.**

Focusing on, and slowing our breath is beneficial when we are feeling anxious, stressed, or overwhelmed. Slowing down our breath calms the body from head to toe; it can slow a racing heartbeat, calm a tense body, and stop stressed limbs from tingling. Slowly counting our breath can refocus our negative thoughts in another direction.

This month's Mindful Moment activity was
provided by Mercy Counselor, Mrs. Trish Brown.

ONLINE

Classroom Etiquette

Here is a reminder of the information sent out by Mrs. Tarplin, which can also be found in the Student Handbook.

- **Camera On:** During face-to-face discussions, the device camera must ALWAYS be ON in order to be considered PRESENT in class. In addition, students must turn cameras on when requested by the teacher in support of class activities. When using the device to complete work, for example taking notes or in-class assignments, students are not required to have their cameras on, however, students must ALWAYS be responsive. Responsive means responding to the teacher whenever feedback is required by using either audio or the Chat feature. Audio may be on mute when students are not speaking.
- **Attire:** Always remember that everyone can see you, look presentable while also being comfortable. You must wear appropriate clothing during any Mercy virtual event: classes, Counseling meetings, extracurricular meetings, etc. The following are not acceptable: pajamas, low cut tops, tops with visible holes, tops with inappropriate images/writing, hats or hoods.
- **Learning Environment:** Students need to choose a well lit area for their learning environment while engaged in virtual learning. Students must be in a seated position, whether the location is a bed, chair, floor, or sofa. Students MAY NOT lie down during virtual learning or other virtual events.

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- **Be on time!** If a student joins a class late it is her responsibility to discreetly notify the teacher of her arrival (private Chat or email) and follow-up with the teacher after class. Students may not receive credit for missed activities/work and teachers may not be able to provide individual instruction within that class session.

Communication Protocols

- Students should use the private Chat feature to notify their teachers when they need to briefly step away from the camera for a bathroom break, to talk to a parent, etc.
- Should issues arise with internet connection the student must email a screenshot of the error message to the teacher immediately. This email will serve as documentation for a student who is absent from class for a considerable amount of time due to the connectivity issue.
- Similar to a traditional school day at Mercy, teachers will be available to students and parents/guardians Monday - Friday, 8am - 3pm. Please be aware that teachers are instructing throughout the day and may not be able to immediately respond to your communication. Any email sent to a teacher outside of that time frame will be responded to within 24 hours as teachers are not expected to check email throughout the evening.
- Students are requested to frequently check their Mercy email and Schoology to remain current with communications from their teachers and the Mercy administration.
- Mercy will continue to maintain the No Emails on Sunday protocol for staff and students, with the exception of emergency emails that affect school attendance or protocols on Monday.

CHAIN OF COMMAND

If your daughter runs into issues or concerns in the classroom, please follow and encourage her to follow this procedure:

1. **Student contacts Teacher**-*The concern/issue/question should be communicated directly to the teacher involved from the student. This can be a face to face conversation or in an email.*
2. **Parent contacts Teacher**-*If the student-teacher conversation did not rectify the situation, a parent should then get involved with directly communicating with the Teacher.*
3. **Student/Parent contacts Counselor or Department Chairperson**-*If the situation is still not resolved after parent-teacher contact, the Chairperson of said Teacher's department, or the student's Counselor should now be contacted.*
4. **Student/Parent contacts either Associate Principal (for academic issues) or Dean of Students (for disciplinary issues)**-*Ms. McMaster is our Associate Principal and Mrs. Tarplin is our Dean of Students.*
5. **Student/Parent contacts Principal**-*our Principal is Mrs. Sattler*
6. **Student/Parent contacts President**-*if absolutely necessary, our President, Dr. Kreger can then be contacted*

This procedure is necessary so that proper channels are always utilized when problem solving and so to encourage Mercy students to develop the necessary skills of direct communication and self-advocation.

SOMETIMES
THINGS DON'T
WORK OUT HOW
YOU THOUGHT
THEY WOULD.

IT'S OKAY TO BE
DISAPPOINTED,
BUT DON'T BE
DETERRED.

keep going.

@POSITIVELYPRESENT

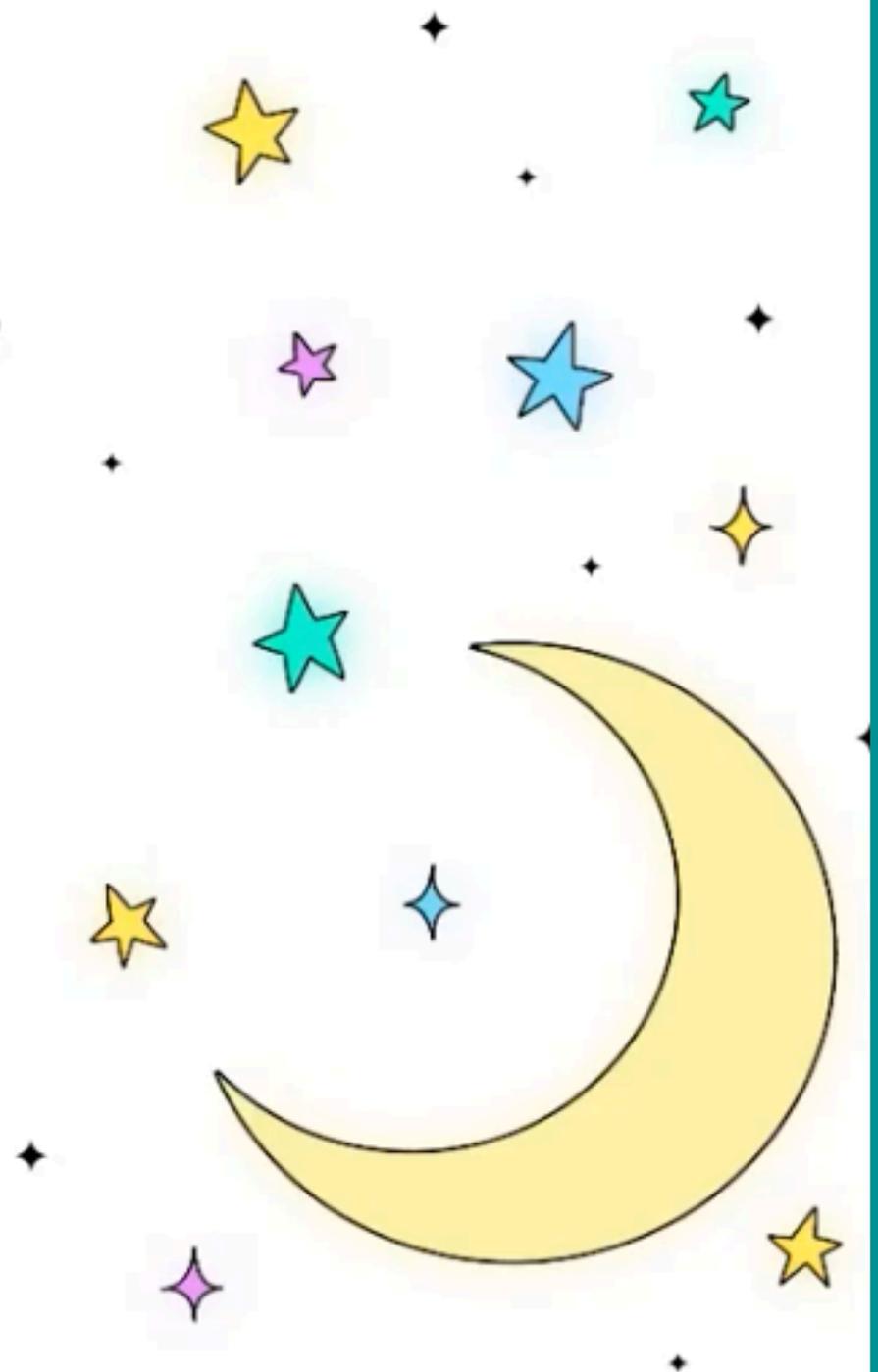


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