

October 24, 2019

Dear Middle School Parents:

As always, I am grateful that another year is underway and that I am back on campus and available to the St. Anne's community. As part of my work with middle school this year, I will again be teaching bi-weekly FOCUS classes in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. These classes will follow a stage-appropriate progression and are generally geared to discussions around social issues, the emotional world of middle schoolers, and academic support themes/ideas. Throughout the year, I rotate classes with Mr. Clough, Mr. Bhat and/or Father Al each trimester.

On a more specific level, 6th grade topics often relate to the stresses of being a middle schooler and the social maturing and subgrouping that often take place at this age. Themes such as appreciating differences, social openness versus the formation of cliques, and the importance of developing and respecting individuality are emphasized.

Seventh grade FOCUS classes look more closely at the physical changes for adolescents and how brain development affects emotions and decision-making. Themes such as teen angst, impulsive decision-making and addictive behaviors (bullying, cutting, and eating disorders) are addressed. Looking at ways in which teens try to exercise control in their lives in positive and negative ways (i.e., ones which will ultimately take away their control) are emphasized.

In eighth grade, I am able to discuss more directly the realities of high school life. These discussions focus on teen stress, drugs/alcohol, violence, and adolescent sexuality. Principles of logic, values, and risk are emphasized in order to help students formulate their thoughts, opinions and future behaviors.

In all my talks, emphasis is placed on increasing awareness, building resiliency, and promoting value-based decision-making. I especially appreciate helping students understand mental-health concepts in a straightforward, simple manner. Because of the wide variety of life experiences and awareness among the students in a given class, these topics are sometimes confusing for an individual student (just as when a new math or science concept is introduced). Students in all FOCUS classes are encouraged to discuss these topics with their parents. These concepts are the basis for my book *Wired and Connected: Brain-Based Solutions To Ensure Your Child's Social and Emotional Success*. Click [HERE](#) to view the **outline for my middle school curriculum**.

In addition to class talks, Mrs. Michelle DeNooy, LCSW, and I will be offering lunch club opportunities in the form of lunchtime drop-in groups. All 6th, 7th, and 8th graders are invited to drop in should they feel the desire. Lunch clubs will be offered from 12:30-1:00 P.M. on Tuesdays for 6th grade, on Wednesdays for 7th grade and on Thursdays for 8th grade. Students may attend these clubs each week or on an as-needed basis. These lunch clubs have been a regular part of the Middle School's program offerings for the past fifteen years and are geared toward normalizing, clarifying, and supporting middle school experiences.

In addition to my lunch clubs, I am thrilled to once again have my associate Nathaniel Ellison, MA, back on campus for his diversity lunch club. This lunchtime group (meeting on Mondays) examines personal and cultural differences, forms of discrimination, and everyday attitudes towards diversity. The group is open to all students (6th, 7th & 8th) in the middle school who wish to talk about these subjects in a very open and welcoming environment. We will also be continuing our middle school girls' lunch

club (6th, 7th & 8th) on Mondays with Mrs. DeNooy. The same goes for our boys' lunch club on Fridays. My associate Tim Pasternak, PsyD, will lead this club.

In addition to classroom talks and lunch clubs, Michelle and I are also available to meet with students individually, as well as to meet with parents for brief consultations around school and family issues. If you would like to meet with one of us, simply call Kris Buckley in the main office for scheduling. (We do try to work in middle schoolers at non-academic times.) You may also talk with your child's advisor regarding scheduling an individual student visit. In visiting with a student individually (other than in a crisis), we do need parents to sign the permission slip prior to our meeting. **Click [HERE](#) for a copy of the permission/disclosure form.** As stated in our disclosure form, any chart notes arising from our work with an individual student are not contained in a SAES student's file.

Finally, Colorado recently passed a new law that allows children 12 years and older to consent to their own visits. While several regulatory issues still need to be resolved, a signature line has also been added onto the form for your son or daughter to sign. In the event a student comes on their own for a consultation without prior parental authorization, they may consent by themselves. As such, we will discuss the importance of notifying their parents. We will contact you within 24 hours to notify you of the visit. Contacting parents following any of our visits has been our standard protocol for the past 24 years.

In closing, I couldn't have been more blessed by having my first book launch and signing at St. Anne's this September. I'd also like to share what a true joy it is for me to work in the middle school community. The spontaneity and unique energy of this age group is amazing, yet can be so confusing at times. (I know this from my own previous fathering experiences as well as having an eighth-grade daughter myself this year!) If during the year you or your preteen/teen could benefit from a consultation, I would welcome your call. Feel free to contact me as well should you ever have questions about the FOCUS classes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Craig Knippenberg', with a horizontal line underneath.

Craig A. Knippenberg, LCSW, M.Div.