



## Avondale Middle School Counseling Information

### The Middle School Years

The Middle School Years have been called one of the highest stress periods in human development. Middle school students are often described as an emotional roller coaster ride, going from ecstasy to despair in a brief period of time. If your middle school student becomes moody, forgetful, or secretive, *do not panic*. That is normal.

Avondale Middle School's Guidance Program has been planned and developed to meet the changing needs of students, parents, and staff by using resources in the school, home and community.

### What Does a Counselor Do?

- Individual counseling
- Small group counseling
- Scheduling
- Coordinate standardized testing
- Academic monitoring
- Consult with faculty about individual student needs on an ongoing basis
- Present Middle School orientation for incoming 6th grade students
- Conduct new student groups
- Arrange parent conferences upon request
- Refer to outside agencies

### We Assist Students & Parents In:

#### Improving communications between home and school:

- Academic progress
- Social development
- School relationships
- Outside referrals
- Attendance issues

#### Current needs & concerns at home:

- Family relationships
- Divorce
- Grief issues
- Child abuse/neglect
- Concerns with others:
  - Teachers
  - Peer relationships
  - Conflict resolution
  - Decision making

#### Concerns with self:

- Feeling accepted, fitting in, and appreciated for their unique qualities
- Further developing their emotional & intellectual development
- Exploring their potential for future educational and career opportunities
- Gaining & developing individual responsibility to self, home and community



## Middle School Students & Stress/Anxiety

It's very common for kids to have some degree of anxiety about moving to a new school or transitioning from elementary to middle school or middle to high school. This is especially true for kids who have anxiety issues. Starting middle school can trigger fears of getting lost, being late to class, difficulty managing more complicated schedules and being socially isolated.

The most important thing for you to do is to stay calm and project a sense of confidence in your child's ability to succeed. This doesn't mean to ignore your child's fears. Listen to her concerns and then normalize them as much as you can. You can do this by saying things like:

- "Most kids worry about adjusting to a new school and keeping up with homework."
- "It's OK to feel this way. It may take a little time for you to figure this all out, but I'm confident that you'll do fine."
- "You're right that every year classes get a little harder, but it all evens out because you're a year older."
- "When I was your age, my friends and I were all a little nervous about adjusting to middle school because we didn't know what to expect. But it turned out to be great. I'm sure it will turn out fine for you too."

When your child's anxiety starts to interfere with their academics and/or social interactions at school, then reach out to his/her school counselor for help! School counselors are familiar with different kinds of anxiety disorders (social anxiety, separation anxiety, test anxiety, panic attacks, PTSD, and generalized anxiety) and can work with your child's teachers on informal accommodations to get them through this tough time.

## Tips/Coping Strategies for Anxiety

Adolescents can act similar to toddlers in that they have emotional meltdowns and temper tantrums, mainly due to the hormonal changes their bodies are going through. Distraction techniques are good for calming them down and "distracting" them from the issues on hand. If the issues/behavior persists for more than a few weeks and/or intensifies, consult with your child's pediatrician, a therapist or ask your child's school counselor for help.

**In the meantime, have your child try some of these techniques...** It's a good idea to allow them 30 minutes or so when they get home from school to de-stress before doing homework and/or chores.

- **Remain calm**-When stressed/overwhelmed, focus on deep breathing for 2-3 minutes...Deep breath in through your mouth, hold it and count to 10 then release it through your nose. Repeat if necessary.
- **Art therapy**-If your child is artistic, provide them with a sketch book and colored pencils so they can draw anything they want. Ask them to share with you and talk about their drawings. Kids who aren't as verbal may give you clues to how they are feeling by looking at what they draw. Some kids like to paint, others like to play with sand or other tactile objects. These can all be therapeutic.
- **Writing**-Some students like to write. Give them a journal or spiral notebook so they can record their feelings in a journal. If they are upset with someone, have them write a letter to that person saying everything they've always wanted to say. Then tear it up and/or throw the page away. That can be very therapeutic.
- **Think Positive**-Have your child write a "gratitude journal" about all of the things they are thankful for. Have them read the page every day to remind them of all of the wonderful things in their life.



- **Reading**-Students who like to read can get "lost" in a great book! Allow your student time each day to curl up in their favorite spot and read for 30 to unwind from the day and de-stress.
- **Get Moving**-Studies show that exercise can increase your brain's natural "feel good" chemicals and of course it's a great all-around way to de-stress! Encourage your child to participate in sports (in and/or out of school), play basketball in the park, walk around the block, ride their bike, or any sort of physical exercise 20-30 minutes per day. Fresh air, sunshine and physical movement outside is very good for the health and well-being of kids. Many spend too much time inside playing on the phones and/or video games.
- **Have a Healthy Snack**-Many kids get moody when their nutritional needs aren't being met. If they go too long between meals without food, their blood sugar can dip, causing a sudden mood change. Some students are worried about their body appearance and think it's OK to skip meals but that can slow down their metabolism and have the opposite effect. Make sure your child eats something for breakfast. Many Roundup teachers at Avondale Middle School allow student to have a light snack/breakfast in class. They can also keep a snack on hand in their locker to eat between classes or after school before activities. Junk food can have an undesired effect on their moods so make it a healthy snack/meal! Protein is key! Avoid carbs and sugar overload.
- **Play Music**-If your child is in music class, have them practice their instrument, play the piano or even relax by listening to their favorite (calming) music for 30 minutes.
- **Fidget Device**-While these are great for **at home** use, they are discouraged at school unless your child has a note from his/her doctor along with a medical diagnosis/reason for using them. At home, these can be great stress relievers (fidget cube, spinney device, squishy ball, etc.).
- **Phone Apps**: There are some great phone apps for dealing with stress and anxiety. One such app is called "**Relax Melodies**" that your child can listen to for 20-30 minutes before bed to relax and/or as needed. The app allows your child to pick relaxing sounds and they are encouraged to relax in a quiet place with these sounds to de-stress. There is also a **coloring book** app that comes highly recommended by our students that allows them to color different designs. Try searching for some different apps on your phone.
- **Rest**-Much of the time kids get stressed or cranky because they are hungry or tired. Much like infants and toddlers, adolescents are no different. Try encouraging your child to take a short nap or getting extra rest. Proper sleep and nutrition will make him/her feel better and prevent sickness. Taking a short "**time out**" to rest each day from the stress of life can be beneficial to all.
- **Mindfulness**-Many people, kids included, worry about the future and things they cannot control. Mindfulness teaches people to live in the "here and now". Focus on an object and describe it using all of the senses. Spend 2 minutes on that exercise. The goal is to focus on what's going on in the present time and let the unnecessary worries about the future go.
- **Goal Setting**-When people worry about the future, setting goals and the steps needed to achieve them help us to worry less about what might happen in the future. Writing our goals down and reviewing them allows us to have more control over our future.
- **Bibliotherapy**-Reading good books are a healthy way to cope with problems. Try reading books that help with goal setting, problem solving, self-help, etc. A great book to start with is: "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens."

If you know of any other great techniques that have worked for your child, please feel free to share them with his/her school counselor!

If your child's symptoms interfere with their schoolwork and/or relationships, please discuss this with his/her counselor at school. Remember, this is a stressful time for students and parents so hang in there!