

SEBASTOPOL INDEPENDENT SCHOOL NEWSLETTER

*The healthy social life is found
When in the mirror of each human soul
The whole community finds its reflection
And when in the community
The virtue of each one is living.*

Dear Parents,

Many parents and faculty members are inspired by the work of Kim John Payne on social inclusion. As members of the Coordinator's group we wish to bring the practices Kim has developed to our community. We hope they will become established in our homes and classrooms. The practices are simple and yet life transforming. So let's help each other to create healthy new social practices.

Kim cited two studies that found that children who bully are significantly lacking in:

1. Perspective taking (being able to see another's point of view)
Which is a quality of our thinking capacity.
2. Empathy (being able to put oneself in another's shoes)
Which is a quality of our feeling life.
3. Impulse control (being able to refrain from reacting)
Which is a capacity of our life of will or action.

This then leads us to be able to have...

4. Imagination and fantasy (imagining different behaviors)

Cultivating these four abilities will create a healthy social life—in the classroom and in the family.

Here are some practices that help to cultivate these four essential abilities:

Politeness and Courtesy, at home, at school, everywhere! When we are courteous our children will imitate our behavior. When we behave practice politeness and courtesy we create a happier, more orderly world for our children. We can do this by taking the time to greet each other, holding doors, offering assistance, letting others take the first turn. Through these practices we let go of our own self-centered ways. We look outward with care for those around us. We are building the forces of empathy.

Magical and beautiful things happen when we practice politeness and courtesy:

- time slows down
- we create trust
- we acknowledge the worth of others
- we listen
- we relax and breathe more deeply
- we feel good
- we soften our attitude

The list goes on and it is all good! Together we can build the practice of politeness and courtesy throughout our whole school community.

No Put-Downs! Another practice that would benefit the social realm is the “No Put-Down Practice.” Bullying often begins as put-downs. Unfortunately, put-downs are often seen as funny. Most modern humor involves put-downs of self and others. But put-downs, jokes, name-calling and teasing can and do easily escalate into social exclusion, bullying, cliques and gangs.

Put-downs can be verbal or non-verbal. Raised eyebrows, turned backs, cold shoulders, disapproving looks and glares can deliver an attitude of criticism, negativity or even hatred. Body language is another way that put-downs can get delivered. We are asking and hoping that every adult in our school community take up the no put-down practice. If we engage in the no put-down practice we will build a tremendous capacity for empathy in our children. We will be practicing impulse control and holding within ourselves an appreciation for another person’s way of being. Our children will notice and imitate our behavior and will find themselves living in a healthy social climate free of put-downs. Imagine that!

Disapprove – Affirm – Discover – Do-Over (DADD). This tool can be used immediately to deal with a simple clash between young children, or it can be used over the space of days or weeks when the issue is more complex. Here’s how it works: When a parent or teacher notices a put-down or misdeed they are encountering a “teachable/reachable moment.” Because only one out of every ten put-downs is actually witnessed by adults it’s important to speak up when the opportunity presents itself. When we are silently we are implicitly condoning the behaviors we witness.

Disapprove:

We begin by expressing disapproval for the action, “It is hurtful to behave as you did.” “We don’t speak that way in our family.”

Affirm:

In order to separate a child’s actions from his/her whole being there needs to be followed up by an affirmation...”You hardly ever speak like that.” “So often you say helpful things.”

Discover:

Then the adult discovers what the subtle issues are. “What’s up?” “Something must be bothering you.”

Do-over:

When the issue is clarified the adult can help the child to do over. “Let’s work out a way to say what you need to say without being hurtful,” or “You’ll need to apologize for the words you used and then say what you really needed to say.”

In thus way we honor everyone’s needs while acknowledging our responsibilities toward others.

I’d like to express my gratitude to Kim John Payne for his essential and transformative work. There are CD’s of his lectures available in the office for parents to borrow.

Please join us and help to become the change we want to see. Together we can build healthy social practices that will enhance and bless our school community and our world.

Theresa Melia for the Social Inclusion Coordinator’s Group (with editions from KJP)