November

PRESBYTERIAN CHRISTIAN SCHOOL SECONDARY COUNSELOR'S CORNER NEWSLETTER

THEME OF THE MONTH: SELF AWARENESS AND GRATITUDE

THEME 1: SELF-AWARENESS (LOOKING INWARD)

Self-awareness is the ability to recognize your own emotions, thoughts, and values, and understand how they influence your behavior. For adolescents, developing this skill is like building a psychological compass.

- For Middle School Students: This is a period of rapid identity shift. Self-awareness looks like learning to name complex emotions (e.g., distinguishing between anger and underlying anxiety) rather than just reacting to them.
- For High School Students: As college planning and academic pressures intensify, self-awareness means recognizing personal stressors, understanding cognitive blind spots, and identifying when it is time to pivot, rest, or ask for help.

THEME 2: GRATITUDE (LOOKING OUTWARD)

Gratitude is more than saying "thank you." It is a cognitive practice that trains the brain to notice and appreciate the positive aspects of life, even amidst challenges. Neuroscience shows that a regular gratitude practice lowers stress hormones, improves sleep quality, and strengthens social connections.

- **The High Achieving Trap:** In high-achieving communities, students often fall into the trap of "destination happiness" ("I will be happy when I get a 4.0/get into that college/make the varsity team"). Gratitude pulls focus back to the present moment, shifting the mindset from scarcity to abundance.

THE TOOLKIT: ACTIONABLE STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS

- The 3-Second Pause: When feeling overwhelmed during a test or activity, use the Stop, Breathe, Reflect method. Acknowledge the physical sensation of stress (e.g., racing heart), take one deep breath, and label the emotion.
- The "Micro-Gratitude" Challenge: Instead of listing broad concepts like "my family," challenge yourself to find three highly specific things you are grateful for today (e.g., the perfect song on the bus ride, a text from a friend, or a favorite snack or meal).
- Energy Audit: Spend one day tracking what activities drain your energy and what activities recharge it. Self-awareness means using this data to build a healthier weekly schedule.

FAMILY TABLE TALK: PROMPTS FOR THE DINNER TABLE

Research shows that open, non-judgmental conversations at home drastically improve adolescent emotional regulation. Try using these prompts around the dinner table this month:

- "What is something hard you experienced today, and is there a silver lining or something you learned from it?" (Balances self-awareness of struggle with a shift toward gratitude).
- "How does your body tell you when you are starting to get stressed out or overwhelmed?" (Helps students connect physical sensations to emotional states).
- "Who is someone at our school or in our community who made your week a little easier, and how can we thank them?"

Counselor's Recommended Resources

- Podcast for Parents: The Anxious Generation discussions or podcasts featuring Dr. Lisa Damour, focusing on how to help teenagers navigate complex emotional landscapes with self-awareness.
- App for Students: Insight Timer or Stop, Breathe & Think for quick, 3-minute mindfulness and emotional check-ins during study breaks.

Military Family Resource Center - Click HERE
Practicing Gratitude as a Family - Click HERE
How to Practice Gratitude - Click HERE
Making Gratitude Fun for the Whole Family - Click HERE