

COUNSELOR CORNER

Owooooooo! Hello West Sylvan Wolves!

I am elated to be back in the building after a restful summer. This year feels much different than the last two. There is a settling that has happened which feels palpable. That being said, I am acutely aware that no human was unscathed by the pandemic. We are a community that is working hard to heal and as your counseling team we are here to help.

As we adjust to being back in school there are a few things that I am reminded of every September.

- **Routine:** Middle schoolers need them. Bedtimes, wake times, where and when to do homework and knowing what to expect are always very important but are essential at this time of year. Students are adjusting to new teachers, new classes, and new material every day so it is optimal that their brains have time to settle into familiar systems.
- **Sleep:** Research shows that melatonin (the “sleep hormone”) levels in the blood are naturally higher later at night and drop later in the morning in teens than in most children and adults. This difference may explain why many teens stay up late and struggle with getting up in the morning. Teens should get about 9 to 10 hours of sleep a night, but most do not get enough sleep. A lack of sleep can make it difficult to pay attention, may increase impulsivity, and may increase the risk for irritability or depression.
- **Boundaries:** Though the brain may be done growing in size at age 14 it does not finish developing and maturing until the mid to late 20s. The front part of the brain, called the prefrontal cortex, is one of the last brain regions to mature. This area is responsible for skills like planning, prioritizing, and controlling impulses. Because these skills are still developing, adolescents are more likely to engage in risky behaviors without considering the potential results of their decisions. Setting parameters for students at this age is essential for their safety (this includes, but is not limited to, phone and social media use which has an impact on mental health and sleep habits).
- **Checking in:** While this is a time when children can start to focus on talking to their friends more than their parents it is important to continue to check in. I have found that asking specific questions (e.g. name 3 things that you learned today, on a scale of 1-10 how was math, aside from lunch and recess what was your favorite moment today?) can be more fruitful than simply asking “what happened today?” Conversations like this are often best coupled with movement (such as a preferred activity, playing catch, a board game, or eating a snack).
- **Self-care for you:** Caring for an adolescent may be the hardest job you will ever do. I can not stress enough how important it is for you to take care of yourself. Whether that is three deep breaths, a walk outside, or laughing with a friend. Adolescents still depend on their adults to help them regulate and to guide them through the tough choices.

Have a great September!