



April Counsellor's Corner

Tara Ryan, B.Ed. M.Ed. (and Sam)
District Outreach Counsellor



April's Topic: End the Madness!

"You kids are driving me crazy!"

If you had the pleasure of spending the 2 week spring break with your child(ren) at home or on vacation, chances are fairly high that you may have had some moments of angst surrounding behaviour (particularly in terms of getting along with siblings if you have more than one child).

I hope you were able to participate in our Spring Mental Wellness Challenge – if not, I've attached it again and there is still time to participate!



Often, parents are happy to get back into routine when school starts back up, particularly when their children bicker with each other through the break. Children often seem to pick the silliest things to fight over; typically it comes down to perceived "fairness", with all parties believing they are getting the short end of the stick. Fighting for status, the bigger piece of cake, or their turn at the remote control all stem from a perceived injustice that must be fought against.



If you were fortunate enough to grow up with siblings, perhaps you can remember times when your sibling inched over the middle line onto "your side" in the back seat of the car, got the favourite cup at juice time, or had better presents at Christmas time.

As you know, kids aren't born knowing how to find their place in this world. Their default mode isn't to know how to share, be patient, speak kindly, or put others first. Developmentally, children are at an egocentric stage during the first years of life, meaning that from their perspective, the world pretty much revolves around them. Reality begins to hit around 24-36 months when they begin to realize that other people have wants and needs that come before theirs (also known as the "terrible twos", and often coinciding with another baby coming into the family). Enter: parent frustration and a mounting impatience for what seems like whiny, demanding behaviour. Time-outs, losing privileges, forcing apologies and long lectures can all contribute to peace entering the house for a short while; however, these strategies are typically short-lived and the fighting tends to start all over again the next day. Family vacations often result in frazzled tempers and the holiday dinner table looking nothing like the peaceful, loving gatherings portrayed in old-fashioned movies.



The truth is: no matter how evenly you cut the chocolate cake or pour the soda pop, you will never be able to parent your children perfectly equally. It's important to remember some of the following things if any of this rings true for you:

- Misbehaviour, conflict, meltdowns and talking back aren't signs of an entitled child; rather, they are **an indicator that a child is lacking a skill required to manage the situation in an**

appropriate way. A child who hits, screams in a grocery store or tantrums on the floor doesn't need those behaviours disciplined "out" – he needs new ways of coping that are patiently taught and modelled to him.

- Fair does not mean everyone gets the same; fair means that everyone gets what they need. Each of your children will require your time and patience for different times and situations; focusing on perfectly equal access and attention will only serve to frustrate you as a parent and encourage pettiness in children.
- How we handle conflict in our family is how our children learn to handle conflict. Yelling at our children to stop yelling at each other will rarely shift children to manage frustrations calmly.
- There is a very distinct difference between punishment and consequences
 - o Punishment stops behaviour temporarily. Prying apart fighting siblings and sending them to their rooms may provide a much-needed moment of quiet in your home; however, does nothing to change things for tomorrow.
 - o Teaching new behaviour creates lasting change. The next time your children argue/fight/yell/hit each other, instead of asking yourself, "How can I stop this behaviour?" ask yourself, "What skill is my child lacking that he/she needs to resort to this behaviour?" and "What replacement behaviour can I teach to make lasting change?"



A sharing example:

The kids are fighting over the Nintendo Switch. You enter the room 4 times to get them to stop fighting. Your immediate instinct is to threaten to throw the entire system away and you spend the afternoon regretting purchasing it in the first place. You send the kids to their rooms and tell them to not come out until they can get along. This gives you some momentary peace as you wonder why they have this same fight over and over. As mentioned above, sending them to their room (punishment) may stop the behaviour temporarily, but **doesn't teach new behaviours**.

Some strategies to consider:

- a) Don't look for the easiest route to have peace. If your kids fight over the iPad, the solution shouldn't be to buy an iPad for each of them. If your kids can't behave in the grocery store, don't get a sitter so you can shop by yourself or entertain your kids in the grocery cart by giving each of them a device. All of these instances are where children learn social rules, patience, resilience, respect and good behaviour.



By isolating our kids from any opportunity to be frustrated or meltdown, we are robbing them of the opportunity to learn to expand their thinking, build resilience, and cope with disappointments.

- b) Depending on the age of your children, I would recommend shutting off the gaming system (calmly) and telling them that you are all going to spend 15 minutes of quiet and calm (that doesn't mean everyone gets to go play their own gaming system; rather, read a book or listen to music). Come together after the break and give each child a chance to speak uninterrupted. Once your children know that you will always allow them to quietly defend anything they hear that they don't like after the other is done speaking, they will learn not to interrupt or get overly defensive.
- c) Get your children to learn how to use "I" messages (example, instead of saying, "He always gets more time with the Nintendo Switch than I do!" teach him to start sentences with the word, "I". For

example, "I feel _____ when he _____ because _____." In this case, "I feel frustrated when we don't get equal time on the Switch because I have to wait a lot longer than him to get a turn." This ends up being a terrific life skill to have as your kids get older; in high school they will know how to approach a teacher to discuss a grade they disagree with without being on the attack, "I feel like I don't deserve this low mark because I put a lot of effort into this assignment and followed the criteria closely," rather than, "You are so unfair!" Likewise, as an adult, you are setting a foundation for communication skills at work and in relationships: "I was disappointed to see that I didn't get the promotion when you granted it to someone else because I thought I really proved myself over the last year," rather than, "I can't believe you would give the promotion to him!" At home: "You never listen to me," becomes, "I feel as though I'm not being heard when you look at your phone as I'm trying to tell you about my day."

- d) Try asking child "A" to tell you what is happening from child "B's" perspective. After a calm-down period, bring the kids together and say, "Bobby, I want you to tell me what you think Jenny wants to say." Obviously, you would give Jenny a turn next to tell you what she thinks Bobby wants to say. Then repeat the process with, "Bobby, I want you to tell me what you think Jenny is **feeling** right now." Then repeat for the other child. This takes some practice and requires calm parenting skills. I realize this seems time consuming, but it is an investment in teaching your children to **move past the ego-centric stage by building perspective-taking and compassion**. At the end of that discussion (which should really total less than 5 minutes once they get the hang of it), you can give each a chance to say if there's anything else you need to know.
- e) At a younger age (e.g. 3 – 5), you can "solve" problems for your children (e.g. set a timer to take turns, play with the Switch together, each gets "ownership" of it for certain days of the week, etc.). As they get older, brainstorm ways to problem solve together. Instead of asking the question, "Who should go first?" ask, "What are some ways we could decide who goes first?" Helping your child to problem-solve instead of solving problems with punishment is an investment in building relationship and conflict resolution skills for the future.
- f) Our children can be terrific problem-solvers if we give them the space, time, and incentive to do so. Once we have instilled in them communication and negotiation skills, a gentle reminder will often set them on the right track, particularly if it is coupled with an incentive. This could look like: "I am going to take the Switch and let you two come up with a plan that will allow you to play without fighting this afternoon. Once you have figured out a plan you can both agree with, come to me together to explain it and if it sounds friendly and calm, I will give you the Switch back."

For more information and/or assistance, contact your school counsellor.

THE COUNTDOWN IS ON TO WIN GREAT PRIZES – THERE'S STILL TIME!!!

You are not too late to enter our Spring contest! Once again, I attach the Spring Mental Wellness Challenge – entries are due April 30, 2019 to me at tara.ryan@sd71.bc.ca or can be dropped off at Brooklyn Elementary School.

Spring Mental Wellness Challenge 2019

The fine print:

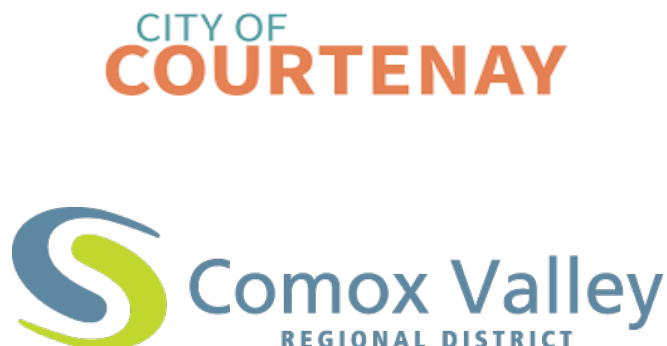
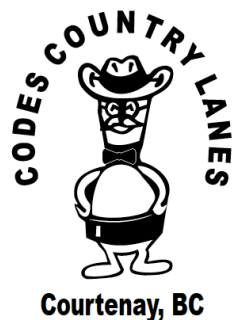
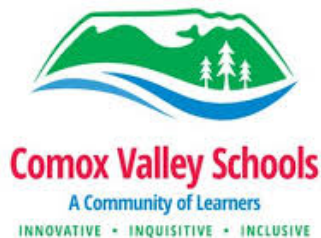
For any of the activities on the attached chart that you complete (in any order), you will receive one entry into the District Draw on May 7, 2019 (Mental Health Day). Complete as many as possible to win great prizes for your family! Have a parent sign on the line beside any activities completed as a family. You can count each one more than once if you like!

Return your entry to the office at Brooklyn School on Guthrie in Comox or take a photo of the complete form and send your entry to tara.ryan@sd71.bc.ca.

Entries must be submitted by **midnight on April 30, 2019.**

The draw will be held on May 7, 2019.

Prizes provided by these terrific community partners:



Spring Mental Wellness Challenge 2019

Family Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

Home School: _____

Age of Children: _____

Activity	Tally (how many times)	Parent Signature
Play a board game		
Plant spring flowers together		
Walk the beach		
Build a family puzzle		
Have a screen-free day		
Do an outside activity that gets your heart rate up		
Together, write 5 kind sticky notes each; drive to a grocery store and put them on random car windows		
Wear your clothes backwards to a beach or park and take a family picture		
Go together to the local library and sign out a book each		
Cook a meal together		
Have a "backwards dinner" (dessert first)		
Spend an entire evening with no lights or screens (careful with the candles!)		
Together, create a "what I love about" list for each family member		
Make sushi or homemade pizza – everyone contributes!		
Swim at the wave pool		
Go bowling		
Play a card game		
Go for a bike ride		
Bake something special for a neighbour		
Do 45 minutes of yard work together		
Look through baby books or old family photos		
Play an outside game		
Have a gratitude day (discuss and practice gratitude throughout the day)		
Family art night – get some canvas from the \$ store		
Eat dinner at the table – screen free!		
Have a family picnic outside or on the living room floor		
Volunteer as a family for an hour		
Plan and complete one random act of kindness for a stranger		
Lego night!		
Go for a walk for at least half an hour		
Have breakfast together at the table – screen free!		
Go hunting for beach glass or shells		
Play Frisbee in the park		
Other:		
Other:		
Other:		