

# Counseling Corner

## Whiteford Elementary School



## The Power of Inclusion

All humans have the desire to feel like they belong. We grow through connection and being a valued member of our communities. Without connection, we may feel isolated, unimportant, or unvalued. By teaching our children to be inclusive members of society, we are teaching them to create a compassionate community with a sense of safety and belonging, which ultimately promotes kindness, curiosity, empathy, and connection. It is not always enough to simply teach what not to do; rather, it is important that we explicitly teach what to do to create the desired inclusive community. Below, you will find purposeful teaching moments that families can incorporate at home.

### 1 Friendly Invitations

Many children need to be taught how to intentionally include others. As humans, many of us have the assumption that if they want to, they will. For example: if they want to join us, they will ask to join us. If they want to talk to me, they will approach me. In reality, so many more people than we think actually know how to or feel comfortable approaching a person or group of people and asking if they can join a game, activity, or conversation. Teaching our children to practice utilizing friendly invitations helps them become more comfortable inviting others, but they also become more comfortable with seeking out and approaching others! Some simple invitations include: "Come join us! There's lots of room!", "Do you want to sit with us at lunch?", "Do you like soccer? You can join our game!", "Are you looking for someone to play with? Come play with us!" At Whiteford, we also have a Buddy Bench! When someone is sitting on the Buddy Bench, this tells us that they are looking for someone to play with. Challenge your student to invite anyone sitting on the Buddy Bench to join their activity!

### 2 Cliques vs. Friendships

Healthy friendships were discussed in the previous edition of the Counseling Corner Newsletter. While there are different types, a clique tends to be a group of friends that are close-knit, spend a lot of time together, and don't easily allow others to join them. Cliques of people typically exclude others on purpose. It is possible for groups of friends to be close, have similar interests, and spend much of their time together while still including others and appreciating differences that they may have. In the counseling program here at Whiteford, we learn friendship skills, such as how to be a good listener, conversation skills, teamwork and cooperation, how to play fair, accepting others, and conflict resolution. These are all skills that can be reiterated at home for additional learning opportunities!

### 3 Unintentional Exclusion

Passive exclusion is what happens when a student might not think to invite another student. Although unintentional, the excluded student is still impacted by this. As humans, having a routine (such as sitting at the same lunch table or playing with the same friends at recess) is comfortable and keeps our days predictable. Talking with children to help them understand what unintentional exclusion is can in turn encourage empathy. One way to approach this is by having them consider what they would feel like if they were the student being left out.

Read more in the Resources tab in my Schoology group! Inclusion is too big and important of a topic to squeeze a ton of information into one short newsletter. So, be on the lookout for Part 2, Inclusion: Diversity, coming on November 17!

