



## Welcome to our newsletter!

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### School Counselors

*Lower School Counselor*  
Shaun Ditty, M.A., LPC

*Middle School Counselor*  
Shekyra DeCree, Ph.D., M.A., LPCC-S

*Upper School Psychologist*  
Suzanne Ritter, Ph.D.

*Licensed School Counselor*  
Amy Brooks

### Health & Wellness Support

*School Nurse*  
Beckie Hoagland, L.S.N.

*School Nurse*  
Janet Fireman, L.S.N.

*Health & Wellness Educator*  
Ann McCabe, M.S./M.A.T

### Academic Support Specialists

*Early Childhood Director*  
Brelle Farrenkopf

*LS Reading Specialist*  
Cyndi Yakscoe

*Learning Styles Specialist*  
Heather Levingston (PreK-Grade 5)

*Learning Styles Specialist*  
Alyssa Thiele (PreK-Grade 5)

*Speech-Language Pathologist*  
Adrienne Moser (PreK-Grade 4)

*Speech-Language Pathologist*  
Alexis Marin (Grades 4-8)

*MS Reading Specialist*  
Tamarah Davis

*MS Learning Styles Specialist*  
Carolyn O'Brien

*US Reading Specialist*  
Jeff Arndt

*US Reading Specialist*  
Katy Frickel

## Helpful Resources From Our Nurses' Office

Please see below several links to helpful articles and resources regarding the latest in COVID testing and vaccination. Click on the link to view the webpage.

- [Place an order for free COVID at-home test kits](#)
- [Schedule a vaccine or booster through Nationwide Children's Hospital](#)
- [NPR article: The use of COVIDRapid Antigen testing](#)
- [CDC recommendations for masks](#)

[Beckie Hoagland](#) and [Janet Fireman](#)  
School Nurses

# Lessons from 7th Grade Health Class

Ann McCabe  
Health & Wellness Educator

## Lessons from 7th Grade Health Class: Air Quality

What is going on these days in 7th grade health class? Well, today we turned off the lights in the classroom and threw some flour in the air. Why, you ask? Let me explain.

I experienced some of the world's worst air pollution while living in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, a few years ago. My sister living in Boulder, Colorado has experienced air pollution this year from recent forest fires. Students often share their own stories about air pollution related to living in or traveling to places like Los Angeles, India, Nigeria or China. When people think about global public health, they often think about access to clean water, adequate nutrition and access to medical care. But what about the air we breathe?

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), [nine-out-of-ten people now breathe polluted air](#), which kills 7 million people every year and [one-third of deaths worldwide from stroke, lung cancer and heart disease are due to air pollution](#). In order to learn about this public health issue while also learning about the respiratory system, 7th graders spend a few days investigating the causes and impacts of air pollution.

We start our air pollution unit with some science demonstrations (thus, the flour). I light a match and hold it underneath an aluminum can, then wipe off the resulting black soot to demonstrate incomplete combustion and to help define particle pollution, or particulate matter. Students throw a pinch of flour in the air with the lights off while shining flashlights on the floating particles; this demonstrates how particulate matter stays suspended in the air for long periods of time. Then we make smog in a jar. I blow out a match and drop into a glass jar with a little water already in it, then have students cover it quickly with foil and some ice to demonstrate how smog is formed.



*7th grade health students demonstrate "smog in a jar" and take readings with AQI monitors.*

After the demonstrations, students research causes of pollution - burning coal, clearing land for crops, dust storms, forest fires - and learn about how air pollution is measured. Students use the site [waqi.info/](http://waqi.info/) to compare real time air quality index (AQI) readings in the US and abroad.



*Global AQI readings from the site <https://waqi.info/>*

This year the middle school purchased five air quality monitors for students to take air quality measurements. Students use the monitors to measure classroom AQI for multiple consecutive days, compare readings from around the school, and demonstrate localized pollution (AQI readings jump from 5, which is healthy, to 90, which is unhealthy, when a match is blown out across the room).

To conclude the unit, we discuss solutions to the air pollution problem. What can we do to help solve this problem? How can this information help us make informed decisions about our own health? And finally - in what ways do e-cigarettes impact the lungs similarly to air pollution - and why would someone vape and voluntarily inhale what is essentially air pollution?

[Ann McCabe](#) | Health & Wellness Educator



# Lower School Counseling Update

Shaun Ditty  
Lower School Counselor

It's cold, and snowy, and many of us are spending the majority of our time indoors because of it. The outdoorsy side of me wants to point out that winter hiking is really quite nice and oftentimes much calmer, quieter, and secluded than in the spring and summer. However, that's not the soapbox for which I will stand on today.

Rather let's discuss the more likely thing on your mind right now, technology. It's cold, the kids can't go outside and play for hours on end without getting too cold. This is the time of year many people rely on technology to soothe the pain that is boredom. It works well as a strategy, until it doesn't.

As you know there are many advantages to technology but there is also a big portion of the internet and what happens on it that young brains have not developed enough to cope with or make sense of. It is our duty as individuals involved in the care and raising of children to help them navigate this potentially difficult area of growth. Like it or not, technology is not going anywhere and for many of us our lives largely revolve around it.

Here is a summary of a few tips to consider when considering allowing your child to have access to technology, and the internet specifically, that I found in an article titled "[4 Things That Will Help You Remain Calm When Your Kids Use The Internet](#)." The content your child has access to can and should be approved and monitored by you. One of the many reasons we don't let children drive cars is because they are not old enough to make responsible decisions and navigate through challenging situations independently. I urge you to think about internet usage in the same way.

## Be the Driver

It is important to monitor what your child is doing on the internet to ensure they don't find themselves in a difficult situation they do not know how to handle. Additionally, they may find themselves watching things that are not developmentally appropriate and they may not realize it. By checking in with your child about what they are watching or playing it helps maintain an open level of communication and provides an opportunity for you to speak with them if need be.

If you set the expectation in the beginning that you monitor their use of technology and have conversations with them about what you notice they are watching or playing, then it is very transparent and open from the start and will hopefully avoid them thinking of it as anything other than a family norm. It is also a great way to talk about what they are interested in. If you notice they are watching videos about a certain topic, that's a great way to connect with them about something they are interested in (more on that later). Don't forget to set good healthy limits on usage time, content etc.

## Put the Seatbelt On

Parental controls have come a long way over the years. While I won't pretend to be an expert in this area, I will say there are a lot of options to consider. There's an app for just about anything and everything now. This is not limited to simply what content they can access on certain sites but when they have access to the internet, don't want your child watching YouTube at 11 p.m. on a school night? Look into apps that can help you control what time the internet is available to them. Worried about them talking to strangers online while playing video games? Make sure chat functions are disabled on those games. I would also strongly encourage you to consider not allowing your child to text in large group chats.

## Do Some Donuts (sometimes)

Every once in a while take the time to sit down and play WITH them. Ask them to show you Roblox or learn something about Minecraft. Engaging in conversations and playing with your children is a great way to connect and have fun together. One of the downsides to technology and internet usage is that it can become a solitary activity. By playing with them you not only engage but also step into their world. Plus, let's be honest, it can also be a nice little break from adulthood sometimes too.

Technology isn't going anywhere and that's honestly a good thing. Our jobs as parents and even humans is to work together to navigate through this new and emerging challenge together. Parenting is not a solo sport so be sure to reach out if you have any questions or need some support.

# Middle School Counseling Update

Shekyra DeCree  
Middle School Counselor

## Winning in the Winter: Helping Kids Overcome the Seasonal Affective Struggle

The struggle is real, but there is *resilience* in the struggle.

The rise of COVID cases and surviving the mid-semester hump during the frigid days of winter can be emotionally challenging for middle schoolers to navigate. Some students have expressed anxiety over the uncertainty of the pandemic, while others are trying to regain a sense of equilibrium after returning from winter break. All-in-all, kids are not immune from feeling the impact of the Winter “blahs” or Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) - [click here](#) to learn more about SAD from the American Psychiatric Association. Parents may easily misconstrue it as typical hormonal shifts and pubescent experiences our kids face.



While the specific causes associated with SAD have not been entirely determined, the information provided by Hillside.org points out that there are a few factors that may influence our emotional experiences during the winter months. Read more about those factors in “[Does Winter Make You Depressed](#).” Partnering with your child, family therapist, and pediatrician can help develop strategies to emotionally thrive this winter.

Children are resilient. When life circumstances create a sense of uncertainty, children can flourish by having a solid sense of what they can control. Spend reflective moments with your children in the spirit of gratitude and empowerment. You can also learn ways to help your child develop a greater sense of agency by reading this blog, “[3 Ways to Help Teens and Tweens Increase Their Sense of Control During COVID](#).” Remind your children that their safety, health, and wellness are top priority at school and that they have a team of faculty and staff available to support them throughout their experiences at Columbus Academy.

Lastly, please remember that we are here to help. Do not hesitate to reach out to the support services staff, teachers, coaches, and administrative team to support your children and their needs. For more questions about mental health, wellness, and flourishing in the middle school, contact Dr. Shekyra DeCree at [decrees@columbusacademy.org](mailto:decrees@columbusacademy.org) or 614-509-2677.

[Shekyra DeCree](#) | MS Counselor

# Upper School Counseling Update

Suzanne Ritter  
Upper School Psychologist

## Happy New Year!

I hope this New Year finds you and your family healthy and getting back into a routine. Even though winter break was restorative for many of us, our teens have jumped back with both feet into their busy lives and are already pretty tired. It is more important than ever during these chilly and dark days for them to find moments that generate positive emotions to help them manage their stressors.

## Flourishing Intervention for January - Gratitude Letters

One of the most effective ways to quickly generate a positive emotion is through a daily gratitude practice. Research has found that gratitude is one of the strongest and easiest ways to elicit an upward spiral producing and increasing more positive emotions which leads to more focus, creativity, energy and overall optimism.

An essential component of gratitude practice is not only noticing what we are grateful for, but acting on those things. In Ethics class, the sophomores were given the assignment to either write every day three things they were grateful for, or to write a letter expressing gratitude to someone they care about and read that letter aloud to them. Here is an example of a [gratitude letter video](#) that demonstrates the power of the letter writing exercise, not only for the recipient, but for the letter writer as well. Our students wrote to their parents, grandparents, teachers, siblings and friends. The feedback from students who had written and read the letters was universally positive - they were moved by the experience and felt it deepened their relationships.

## Mental Health Parent Resources

We remain concerned about the effect of the Covid pandemic, combined with academic stress - and of course, the dark days of winter - on our students' overall mental health. Student Support Services partners with our health class teachers in middle and upper school to teach students about the signs and symptoms of depression and what to do if they, or a friend, is exhibiting any of the symptoms.

In health classes we utilize the The Signs of Suicide (SOS) Program. This is an evidence-based youth suicide prevention and mental health program for middle- and high-school age students. The curriculum teaches a the acronym ACT - Acknowledge, Care, Tell - to help students learn what to do if they or a peer are exhibiting signs of depression or suicide. This program also provides a parent/guardian package with educational and screening materials to review with your child. [Click here](#) for more information and screening materials.

Two additional mental resources that are excellent for parents/guardians include [Erica's Lighthouse Family Engagement](#) and [Nationwide Children's Hospital's On Our Sleeves program](#). Erica's Lighthouse provides handbooks, bookmarks and videos for parents to review. NCH's On Our Sleeves program also provides resources for families to learn more about mental health and how to support your children.

All three of these programs emphasize the need for parents/guardians to educate themselves and their children in order to reduce the stigma associated with mental health disorders. In teens, it is often difficult to differentiate signs of mental health disorders from the normal mood changes of adolescents. Don't shy away from frank discussions with your teen about what you are seeing. Above all, provide a space and time for you to listen to their concerns, with a calm, non-judgemental demeanor.

When in doubt, please feel free to contact me, your family physician, or any mental health provider to further discuss your concerns.

[Suzanne Ritter](#) | US Psychologist

## Mark Your Calendar: PACA to Host Parent Education Event Monday, April 4



### Parent Education Event with Devorah Heitner, Ph.D.

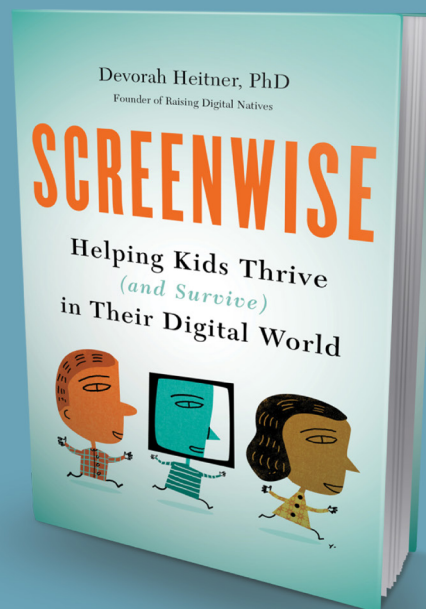
Presented by:



**Monday, April 4 • Dining Hall**  
**Light hors d'oeuvres followed by**  
**a one-hour program**

Devorah Heitner, Ph.D., will join us for this Parent Education event to discuss a realistic perspective on how to thoughtfully guide kids in the digital age, as outlined in her book *Screenwise: Helping Kids Thrive (and Survive) in Their Digital World*.

Devorah is the founder of Raising Digital Natives. Her mission is to cultivate a culture of empathy and social and emotional literacy.



*More details and registration information  
coming in mid-March!*