



## December Counseling Update

Hello TES families!

I hope your holiday season is off to a great start! This is such a magical time of year, in which you can see the excitement and feel the joyous energy amongst the students. This time of year ***should*** be about spending time with loved ones, making memories, and focusing on all we have to be thankful for. However, for adults, this time of year can end up being extremely challenging and downright exhausting! And with the never ending, holiday “to-do list”, it can be difficult to shift our focus back to what is really important. As parents/caregivers, we go to great-lengths to ensure our children have a happy, memorable holiday. But with that perceived power comes a tremendous amount of pressure. And instead of feeling a sense of fulfillment and gratitude, we often end the holiday season feeling mentally, physically and financially drained!

***So, how can we shift our mindset and begin to focus on what is truly important in our lives? The answer is simple-Ask your child!***

Over the past two months, our SEL lessons have focused a lot on ***Gratitude and Empathy***. These are fundamental social-emotional skills that are usually emphasized around the holidays. However, anytime is a good time to practice developing these key character traits.

**Gratitude**-When explaining what gratitude is to the students, we start by going over the literal definition, which is: “The quality of being thankful or grateful for what you have.” I then ask the kids to go a little deeper into what gratitude actually means to *them* and what it does for our minds. I call this having an ***“Attitude of Gratitude”*** Research shows that thankful people are usually more

optimistic and less stressed. Having gratitude can help people sleep better, lower risk of Major Depression and Generalized Anxiety Disorder and improve interpersonal relationships (NAMI.ORG). I explained to the students that focusing on all the “good” in our lives can actually change the way our brains work and that having an *Attitude of Gratitude* makes us feel good! We then took it a step further, and practiced focusing on the positives by finding them in situations that are typically viewed as unpleasant. For example, “spiders, chores, homework, rainy days, people with different viewpoints than your own, etc.,” And the students’ responses blew me away! Without hesitation, our K-2nd graders were able to find the good in everything I listed. Their responses were genuine and thoughtful. And it was just another great reminder of how much we can truly learn from kids 💜

**Empathy**-Empathy and perspective-taking go hand-in-hand with gratitude and are foundational social-emotional skills. Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of someone else. This is an especially powerful social-emotional skill for children to develop at a young age. Empathy helps develop compassion and strengthens relationships with others. It encourages tolerance and acceptance of others. It promotes healthy mental well-being, social harmony and can reduce the likelihood of bullying. When teaching empathy, I like to use examples that promote the students’ ability to understand how *others* might feel, in certain situations. For example, “*Your classmate was sitting all alone at recess...How do you think they might be feeling? Why? How can you show empathy towards that student?*”. Practicing empathy can be especially helpful during the holiday season, because it encourages us to feel compassion towards others, as well as, compassion for ourselves. It also helps put things into perspective and encourages us to self-reflect on what matters most in our lives 💜

Have a wonderful holiday season!

Mrs.Clark-School Counselor

Resources-

[Gratitude Prompts for Kids](#)

[Gratitude is my Superpower-Read Aloud](#)

<https://biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/ways-teach-kids-gratitude>

[Empathy-Sesame Street](#)

[What is Empathy? Explained by students](#)

[Empathy-SEL](#)

📄 Behavioral Health Resources.pdf