



NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2021



WELCOME DANITA CRAWFORD

The Office of Student Support Initiatives & Recovery is pleased to welcome Danita Crawford, LBS, MS as the new Manager of Recovery Services. This position was created as a result of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas (MSD) High School tragedy that impacted the Parkland community on February 14, 2018.

Her primary role is to manage the recovery services delivered to MSD and its feeder schools, including development, supervision, and coordinated delivery of mental health services and support to students, families, staff and others affected by the MSD tragedy. Prior to her current role, Ms. Crawford served as a District Administrator overseeing the implementation of positive behavior and intervention strategies across BCPS, the 6th largest school district in the United States and 2nd largest in Florida.

Ms. Crawford has had an extensive 20+ year professional career in the field of mental/behavioral health, with 12+ years of Management, 9+ years in Higher Education and 8+ years in Public Administration. She earned her bachelor's degree in Social Relations with a concentration in Criminal Justice from Cheyney University of Pennsylvania. She holds a master's degree in Clinical Health Psychology from the University of the Sciences in Philadelphia. Currently, she is a doctoral candidate for a Ph.D. in Psychology from Capella University. Additionally, Ms. Crawford is a Licensed Behavior Specialist and Certified Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Clinician.

She served as a Broward County Government Contracts and Grants Administrator with the Health Care Services and Children's Services Administration sections of the Broward County Human Services Department, Community Partnerships Division. Additionally, Ms. Crawford has 10+ years of experience in nonprofit organizational leadership. She has served as Clinical Programs Director with Children's Home Society and Project Director with Human Resources for Development. Danita is passionate about promoting the services available to students through support initiatives related to the MSD tragedy and throughout the Broward Schools system.

6 Great Ways to Build

Resilience with your child



Over the past year and a half, the world has experienced a pandemic resulting in grief, loss, confusion, fear, and isolation. Is it any wonder that adults feel exhausted, and children are struggling? Many people feel depleted after this prolonged period of hardship and stress. Even though our reserves may be depleted, however, now is the time to work on building resilience – in our children and for our families.

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from stress, adversity, failure, challenges, or even trauma. While scientists believe that resilience may have a genetic component, it's not generally a quality that a child either has or doesn't have; it's really more of a skill that a child develops as they grow. Like a muscle that needs to be exercised, your child can be helped to practice their resilience skills.

Talk. Talk. Talk.

We need to keep those lines of communication open. Try the technique of asking open-ended questions in order to draw out your child's true feelings on different subjects. This means asking questions that require more than a simple yes or no answer. You can ask your child how certain situations make them feel. You can ask them if they're experiencing anxiety or trepidation about going back to school. Asking "why" questions tends to get to the root cause of issues rather than asking questions that simply require

factual answers. Open communication develops trust. Children who believe they can speak to their parents openly and honestly feel as if they have someone to rely on, someone who won't automatically judge them, and these positive adult influences help buffer the toxic effects of stress.

Allow Children to Learn and Fail

As adults, particularly as parents, we sometimes try to jump in to prevent our child from failing. It is difficult to watch them our child when we know we could help. But children need to take risks and push themselves outside their comfort zone to build resilience. Trying something new and succeeding at it gives a child a sense of achievement and the knowledge that they can do new things and do them well. However, trying and failing is equally valuable. Taking a risk with something new that does not work out teaches children that they can survive setbacks. You can use these opportunities to talk through your family's definitions of success and failure.

Teach Problem-Solving; Don't Give Answers

Adults often have the answers to small problems and issues; we learned those solutions from years spent living life. Children do not have the benefit of this wisdom. They are still learning. They don't have the perspective of time and experience. Rather than providing your child with the answer to every question, let them reason the issue out with you. You can ask skillful questions to lead them along the right path, but the lesson is better learned when they reach the conclusion on their own.

Acknowledge Mistakes

It is not a weakness to acknowledge our mistakes. We all make them! The most honest and resilient people are happy to accept this fact. They share their failures openly and, more importantly, they share what they learned from them. You can share your mistakes with





your mistakes with your children and let them know why you made the mistake and how you will do things differently next time. This is a key component of resilience. We will all face challenges in our lives and whether we succeed or fail, we should not miss the lessons that can be learned.

Coping Skills and Modeling Self-Care

Children learn through imitation. They look to the adults in their lives to learn how to respond and behave. So, it's essential that we model positive behaviors that they can copy. As adults, we can demonstrate calming ourselves down when we are irritated or angry, practicing deep breathing, and focusing on positivity and a firm belief in a brighter future. You can also model self-care, demonstrating to your children that it is OK to take time for yourself when we're feeling overwhelmed. In fact, it is essential to practice kindness and self-love.

Bring Positives into Your Life

There are activities that make all of us feel better. Scientific research shows the benefits of exercise and spending time in nature. Encourage your children to take part in outdoor activities. Free play and structured sports are ways children express themselves and are essential to healthy development. You can also encourage your child to develop an interest in crafts, art projects, games, music, robotics, science, drama, dance, writing, and any other positive activity that allows them to express their individuality.

The more your child understands his or her uniqueness (and the more you can accept and appreciate your child for who they really are), the more they will understand that they are equipped to face any adversity that may come their way. You can prepare them by helping them build resilience and by looking to the future together with optimism and strength.



Tips to Soothe Back-to-School Anxiety

Communicate the Changes

Speak to your children about returning to in-person lessons and how they feel about the change. Since messaging has changed (and may continue to change), it makes sense to explain why.

Prepare and Set Expectations

Start talking about the upcoming changes BEFORE they happen. Children need time to process transitions and it's a good idea to set expectations in a positive way so they know exactly what to expect.

Focus on the Positives

Talk about the great aspects of returning to school like seeing friends and favorite teachers again. Everybody will have lots of stories to tell and experiences to share and returning to school is a part of rebuilding community spirit once again.

Model Routines and Good Habits

As the adult in the relationship, parents and caregivers can help by being good role models for back-to-school behavior. Setting up morning schedules that reduce stress and get you out the door on time is a helpful habit.

Calm Nerves by Doing a Test Run

When young children are making a major transition like starting a new school, it helps to drive by and let the children see their new school, the entrance, the recess areas, etc. You can talk through the first day, so that they feel secure as it approaches.

Empathize, Don't Dismiss

Sometimes children manifest anxiety with tears, headaches, and/or stomach aches. Rather than dismissing their fears with statements like: "You'll be fine; stop worrying!" you can rationally talk through their fears by empathizing and understanding then gently countering their fears with the facts. You might want to practice some breathing techniques and mindfulness techniques with your children to help ease their anxieties.





Surrounding Returning Students with Support

After 18 months of anxiety and uncertainty amid a global pandemic, there is no wonder that students (and parents) are stressed about the return to school. The Broward County School District fully acknowledges that returning students may be experiencing a wide range of issues and that transitioning back to in-person learning may be a challenge for many. Rest assured, supports are in place and many departments and committed professionals are waiting to help our students and their families.

Kathy Keith is a Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS) Specialist. In conjunction with the University of South Florida, and under the guidance of Dr Brian Gaunt, her team advises and assists schools within the District to examine their climate and develop school-wide positive behavior plans. Interventions and support are based on accurate data gathered by schools and are tailor-made to meet each school's unique set of needs. The goal is to establish a framework of policies to make each school more positive - a place where students and staff share a common goal for their environment, a consistent set of rules, and an agreed-upon language of respect and inclusion.

The School Climate and Discipline Department offers three tiers of support for students who may be at-risk or struggling to adapt to the school environment. Tier One may include bringing in supports for specific issues like substance misuse or bullying. The whole school can learn and benefit from more intensive understanding of these issues. Tier Two identifies groups of students who may share common academic or behavioral

issues and works with them to address these issues before they become overwhelming. Tier Three works with individual students to develop plans for their education or to help them adapt their behavior and meet their personal goals. Planning for each student involves working with their teachers, too, to create a place where everyone is working to meet challenges and help ensure success.

Keith's team has been reaching out to principals and administration to get ahead of any issues before students return in the fall. "We need to have a trauma-informed care (TIC) approach in place as we don't know the circumstances our students may have experienced during the past year. We all need to be more aware of the importance of self-care, Social Emotional Learning (SEL), and mindfulness. We're trying to set up the entire school system to be fully ready for the new school year. We've reached out to schools and teachers to remind them of all the positive interventions we offer that can help them deescalate situations and cope better."

Any student who feels they aren't coping can connect to web resources and via phone (often anonymously) to get help. Posters are up in schools and teachers and guidance counselors know how to help and will connect students to resources.

"The most important thing is to know there are resources out there," says Keith. "There are answers and there is hope. We need to know which students need us though, so we ask you to reach out for help because it is always available. We're pressing forward to a new tomorrow. We need our community. We need to support one another. We're here to help."