



### Robinson Students Make a Habit of Good Character

Many schools in DoDEA use the Character Counts! curriculum to teach the six essential elements of ethical behavior: Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring, and Citizenship. At Robinson Barracks in Germany, counselor Lori Higgs has taken the program a step further by modifying it to fit the needs of her kindergarten through fourth grade students. “I believe the most powerful thing I can teach kids is character,” explained Higgs who has been with DoDEA for five years.

She added four additional components to the already robust curriculum: Leadership, Determination, Practicing Safety, and Joy. Determination teaches children to “stick to a goal until you get there.” Practicing Safety emphasizes personal security awareness, prevention, and stranger danger. Something that might seem surprising for a character-focused curriculum was the inclusion of Joy. “Actually joy is the perfect way to wrap up the school year,” points out Higgs, who devotes a month’s worth of guidance lessons to teaching each character attribute. “Children learn that the character traits they learned about all year can directly affect their happiness and resiliency.”

“In Latin, ‘character’ is the plural of the word habit,” explains Higgs. “I start from there, teaching kids when people know you they know you by your character, they are thinking about your habits.” Those good habits recently paid off when Higgs led three anti-bullying assemblies in the cafeteria. Each group of 100 children sat quietly for the presentation of pro-social skills including how to be an “upstander” instead of a bystander to bullying. “In October, we practiced the habits of being a trustworthy listener and students were ready for a large group activity,” Higgs explained. Afterwards, the students painted their thumbs for stamping the anti-bullying pledge to show their commitment as a school community to being an “upstander” and not a “bystander” if they witness bullying.



Character education also relates to lifelong citizenship skills. In November, students discussed ways to show gratitude and then learned how to write thank you cards. This proficiency will come in handy again in the weeks following the winter holidays. Higgs noted that some of the children have expressed amazement when they realize how each character trait and skill learned feeds into the next. She added, “It’s very powerful for the students to see how quickly we can grow good things or bad things in our garden of life with the seeds we sow!” ■

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## Get Ready for National School Counseling Week



DoDEA Schools will celebrate National School Counseling Week, February 4 - 8, 2013. This opportunity to recognize counselors is sponsored by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) and highlights the impact school counselors can have in helping students achieve school success and plan for a career. This year's theme is "Liberty and Learning for All."

School counselors tailor their services to the challenges confronting students in different grades and locations. Whether helping a DDESS elementary student develop strategies to adjust to the deployment of a parent/sponsor, or assisting a high school student in the Pacific in making career decisions, it is difficult to overstate the impact counselors have on academic achievement and school climate.

In addition to serving on crisis management teams and bullying prevention task forces, they partner with parents and sponsors to help them navigate the challenges of frequent moves, deployments, family separations, and making new friends. Counselors serve as a conduit for information between parents, teachers, and administrators when a student is struggling emotionally, socially, or academically. They help students examine their abilities, strengths, and talents which, in turn, enable students to set goals that are optimistic, healthy, and worthwhile. They are always searching for positive ways to further enhance the social, emotional, and academic well-being of students. This education, knowledge, and experience makes them an integral part of our DoDEA schools.

Schools may wish to customize their observation of National School Counseling Week. ASCA has developed numerous materials and documents that can be used to express appreciation for the work of individual school counselors. These include scripts for morning announcements, proclamations, certificates of appreciation, and craft ideas. For more information, contact [safeschools@csc.com](mailto:safeschools@csc.com). ■

## DoDEA Reassures Students and Staff

As news broke of the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School in December, committed educators throughout DoDEA demonstrated their professionalism by processing their own emotional reactions so they could continue to serve students. In a message emphasizing the importance of safe learning environments, DoDEA Director, Marilee Fitzgerald stated, "Our schools will activate their crisis action teams to assist anyone who needs extra support in dealing with the terrible tragedy in Newtown, Connecticut." The Director noted that employees could access the Employee Assistance Program and referred personnel to the DoDEA web site for additional resources available at [www.dodea.edu](http://www.dodea.edu).

Ms. Fitzgerald added, "I ask that we all redouble our efforts to ensure a safe and secure learning environment for our students and employees – our top priority." She noted that DoDEA teachers are personally familiar with the innocence of young students: "We know all too well of the innocence, joy, hopes, and dreams of young children who are in our elementary classrooms. . . . our educators inspire our precious children, nurture their dreams, and prepare them to fulfill their aspirations."

Throughout DoDEA, educators are reviewing security plans and procedures. Tips on explaining violent incidents to children and reviewing access control procedures are available from [safeschools@csc.com](mailto:safeschools@csc.com). ■

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## Incident Command System Allows Schools to Meld Quickly Into the Response Effort

For years principals have heard that they need to be prepared to turn over responsibility for their school to the incident commander when police or fire/rescue units arrive on the scene of a crisis incident. While this is still true, according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), it is not that simple. Helping educators serving on the school crisis management team understand how to implement the Incident Command System (ICS) in the school setting allows the school to minimize loss of life, traumatic impact, and property damage during an incident.



FEMA's independent study course: Introduction to the Incident Command System for Schools (IS-100.SCa) emphasizes two concepts. The two text boxes below depict how school personnel fit into the ICS structure, as part of either the Unified Command or the Command Staff.

### Unified Command

In a unified command, agencies with distinct legal, geographic, or functional areas are represented by incident commanders who make decisions by consensus. The incident commanders within the joint command make decisions together. The ability to coordinate decision making works better when these leaders have practiced making decisions using scenario-based table top or full scale exercises.

Operating as part of a unified command benefits the quality of response by ensuring decision makers with the responsibility for the outcome participate in the decision making. Including the superintendent or principal in a unified command offers one way to ensure the individual with the best understanding of how to care for students, and the responsibility for the outcome, is part of the decision making process. School administrators need to be involved in decisions regarding the parent-child reunification process and the shelter and feeding of students.

Once a decision has been made by the unified command, however, it is implemented by one Operations Chief, Planning Chief, Logistics Chief, or Finance Chief, just as it would be in a traditional ICS implementation.

### Command Staff

The Incident Command System (ICS) recognizes that some individuals are needed at the command post. Typically the four functions established as part of the command staff are:

- ▶ The Safety Officer, to watch everyone else and interrupt if responders are attempting to proceed in an unsafe manner.
- ▶ The Public Information Officer/Public Affairs Officer, to respond to inquiries from the news media as well as other agencies within the community.
- ▶ The Liaison Officer, to represent the Incident Commander to other agencies and communicate their needs and positions to the Incident Commander.
- ▶ And the Mental Health Officer, to ensure that the decisions and priorities established by the Incident Command meet the psychological needs of students, staff, and other first responders and mitigate trauma exposure.

Understanding how to implement ICS in schools allows administrators to minimize loss of life, traumatic impact, and property damage. For additional information, visit FEMA's Independent Study site at <http://training.fema.gov>. ■

## How to Build Resiliency to Daily Stress

Numerous recent studies have linked chronic stress to a range of cognitive and immunological problems. The consensus among the medical community now seems to be that most people would sleep better, work more efficiently, and be less vulnerable to infection if they adopted techniques and practices to reduce stress. The Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury (DCoE) recently posted a blog entry entitled “10 Tips to Boost Resilience in Service Members.” This list is unique in that it includes activities that build resiliency to stress while at the same time helping individuals become more efficient workers, time managers, and communicators.

First among these tips is learning to communicate regularly and effectively. The DCoE blog notes that learning to “express what you think, feel, or believe in a way that will help you solve problems and receive the outcome you desire,” can prevent stressful situations arising at work or at home. The blog also recommends that building a support system can have long term positive effects on stress. “When you’re challenged or stressed, sometimes it’s easier to respond successfully with the support of family and friends.” Unfortunately, making friends during the middle of a personal crisis is difficult. Taking time to build strong relationships when things are going well, shores up resiliency against future difficulties.

Finally, the DCoE encourages personnel to be accepting of change. “Accepting the things you cannot change allows you to focus on the things you do have control over.” This tip may be particularly beneficial for educators facing the winter challenges of coughs, colds, unpredictable weather, and children enjoying indoor recess.

Building resiliency to stress takes time, however. For information about other stress management tips, or to take an online self-assessment of resiliency skills, visit the DCoE at [www.dcoe.health.mil/blog/12-11-06/10\\_Tips\\_to\\_Boost\\_Resilience\\_in\\_Service\\_Members.aspx](http://www.dcoe.health.mil/blog/12-11-06/10_Tips_to_Boost_Resilience_in_Service_Members.aspx). ■

## “Trashing” Negative Thoughts Reduces Stress

Anyone who has ever tried not thinking about a particularly worrisome topic knows that reducing negative thoughts can be difficult. While several forms of cognitive therapy teach procedures for reducing stressful thoughts, new research suggests adopting a surprisingly simple technique might also help.

Researchers at Ohio State University found that when people jotted down stressful or negative thoughts on a sheet of paper and then threw that paper in the trash, they also “mentally discarded the thoughts” and subsequently felt better emotionally. The converse was also true. When study participants, all of whom were high school or college students, wrote down their stressful thoughts and put the pieces of paper away for safe keeping, the thoughts tended to stay with them throughout the day and actually served to amplify their stress.

The researchers cannot explain this phenomenon, but they postulate it might be related to how people label or “tag” their thoughts. “However you tag your thoughts – as trash or as worthy of protection – seems to make a difference in how you use those thoughts,” explained Richard Petty, a co-author of the study.

DoDEA students and staff members may want to keep a waste paper basket handy if they intend to adopt this practice. The technique only worked when the study participants took the time to write down the stressful thoughts and put them in the trash. While a follow-on study found that typing negative thoughts on a computer and moving those files to the electronic trash was beneficial, simply imagining discarding negative thoughts had no positive effect on mood or well-being. ■



## Raising Proper Digital Citizens

In a time when over 75 percent of 12 to 17 year-olds own a cell phone, it is never too early to educate and prepare kids venturing into the vast – and sometimes frightening – digital world. Educators and parents can benefit from “Cell Phone Smart,” an awareness campaign that promotes appropriate cell phone use and safety among youth.

This resourceful campaign is one of the iKeepSafe programs, which is funded by the U.S. Department of Justice and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). The campaign-bundle offers diverse curricula for teachers, resources for parents, and exciting educational games for students focused on cell phone use and safety.



Cell Phone Smart materials revolve around the iKeepSafe “Mobile Safe Education Matrix.” The Mobile Matrix identifies the main principles for safe, fun, healthy, and ethical mobile phone use. Topics include how to effectively manage/monitor a student’s “digital footprint,” develop healthy online peer relationships, appropriately multitask with phones, and properly recognize the domains of cell phone use. Each topic outlines the critical objectives for young cell phone users and then spells out for teachers and parents what to teach; which behaviors to change or strengthen; and offers sample activities, scenarios, and discussions.

One lesson titled “The Spy Who Texted Me” helps young people prepare for the online world by teaching them about where it is and where it is not appropriate to use their wireless devices. For example, one of the discussion scenarios asks students to imagine how they would feel if they were performing onstage and an audience member began speaking on a cell phone. This particular 30 to 45 minute lesson is appropriate for grades four through six and is packaged together with a clever game to reinforce the targeted key concepts:

Young cell phone users learn to . . .

- ◆ Turn off or silence their mobile phones for events that take place in quiet public spaces, such as movie theaters, plays, live music performances, libraries, or houses of worship.
- ◆ Refrain from cell phone use when others deserve our full attention, for example during presentations, lectures, or speeches. Even silently checking the time or a text message can distract others as well as the speaker.
- ◆ Recognize others’ right to privacy, even in public. It is often tempting to share or upload embarrassing content but doing so without their consent is improper and unethical cell phone use.
- ◆ Prioritize face-to-face interactions with strangers. When you are in the check-out aisle, interact face-to-face with the cashier. Ignoring someone can be hurtful.
- ◆ Be aware of their surroundings. Engaging in a cell phone conversation while others are around can be disruptive and sometimes irritating.
- ◆ Use mobile phones appropriately in school. Phones are a great way for students to stay connected or do research but they must be aware of the school’s rules.

To download the full Mobile Matrix or view other lesson materials and games, visit the Cell Phone Smart page at [www.ikeepsafe.org/educators/cellphonesmart](http://www.ikeepsafe.org/educators/cellphonesmart). Additional campaign media materials for cell phone safety, including fact sheets, posters, and a reminder not to talk in movie theaters are available from [safeschools@csc.com](mailto:safeschools@csc.com). ■

## What's In Your DoDEA SOS Kit?

When DoDEA administrators receive the Signs of Suicide (SOS) kits for middle and high school students, they find a wealth of resources designed to increase awareness in the school community of the SOS mantra of suicide prevention: Acknowledge, Care, Tell (ACT). Together with the SOS suicide prevention kits, these posters, newsletters, and related publications allow educators to sustain a comprehensive suicide prevention program throughout the school year. These resources include:

- ▶ SOS Prevention Program Middle School and High School Implementation Guide Binders with DVDs.
- ▶ SOS Newsletters for students to take home. (High school and middle school versions are available.)
- ▶ SOS Prevention Program DVD for presentation at suicide prevention assemblies (29 minutes.)
- ▶ Prevention Program Screening Forms – 300 copies. These include forms for both students and parents. School counselors use these forms to assess which students may be at risk for suicide and need additional support.
- ▶ SOS Parent's Newsletter for parent/sponsors (high school and middle school versions).
- ▶ Signs of Self Injury – a school-based curriculum for high school students which builds upon the lessons of SOS as it teaches students to “Acknowledge, Care, and Tell” (ACT) when a peer is engaging in self-harm.
- ▶ ACT cards and posters which can be used to raise awareness among students that “Some Secrets Should be Shared.” These materials are also available in Spanish.
- ▶ Military Kids Connect posters and postcards. These materials can be used to help raise awareness about a related program developed by the National Center for Telehealth and Technology (T2). This program helps military children stay in touch with deployed parents. For more information about Military Kids Connect, see the June 2012 DoDEA Safe Schools Newsletter ([http://dodea.edu/Offices/Safety/upload/12\\_10.pdf](http://dodea.edu/Offices/Safety/upload/12_10.pdf)).
- ▶ After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools. For more information about this resource, see the January 2012 DoDEA Safe Schools Newsletter ([http://dodea.edu/Offices/Safety/upload/12\\_05.pdf](http://dodea.edu/Offices/Safety/upload/12_05.pdf)).
- ▶ School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors among Youth packet.



In addition to these materials, administrators ordering the high school kits will receive two supplementary resources: The SOS Booster Kit and “What Parents Can Do to Best Support a Child’s College Experience.” Some research has indicated suicidal risk increases during the freshman year of college. These resources can help parents and educators prepare college bound students for the emotional changes and academic challenges that many young adults face during the first year away from home.

SOS kits are made available by the Department of Defense with support from T2 through Military Pathways. DoDEA administrators can replenish their kits at <https://register.mentalhealthscreening.org/Intro.aspx?MEID=32>. ■

### This Just In . . . Gatekeeper Training

Military Pathways is now offering Plan, Prepare, Prevent: The SOS Online Gatekeeper Training. This 90-minute online course helps educators implement the SOS program. It is part of the new Gatekeeper Training package which also includes the Training Trusted Adults DVD. Continuing education credits may be available for some school nurses, counselors, psychologists, and social workers taking part in these trainings. For more information, email [youth@mentalhealthscreening.org](mailto:youth@mentalhealthscreening.org). ■