



## Face to Face Communication Strengthens Relationships, Reduces Conflict

Even as DoDEA moves toward 21st Century learning practices, one thing remains unchanged. Educators, students, and parents still need to communicate with one another in a way that builds trust, ensures mutual understanding, and solves problems. Ken Kirk, assistant principal at Ramey School in Puerto Rico and formerly a school psychologist at Quantico, speaks for many educators when he points out that despite all the conveniences offered by digital communication and telephones, nothing beats a face to face conversation when it comes to making sure two parties understand each other.

This is particularly true at Ramey. Many of the 475 students in kindergarten through 12th grade are the children of native Spanish speakers. Meeting in person with parents to discuss student performance and behavior prevents misunderstandings that can arise from subtle language barriers. “Face to face conversations allow people to build relationships based on common understanding,” explains Kirk (pictured at right). “As a school administrator, our job is to collaborate with stakeholders, parents, students, and local agencies. We need relationships in order to do that well.”



Unfortunately, face to face conversations take time, which is a limited resource for educators. Kirk acknowledges that sending an email might seem like the most efficient use of time, but it is not always the most effective. Unlike email, face to face communication allows for two-way communication. Often schools engage in one-way communication to keep parents informed of school news. That has its place, says Kirk, but when it comes to problem solving or understanding the subtleties of another person’s perspective, a face to face meeting that allows both parties to share their concerns can resolve issues and prevent misunderstandings further down the road. “In the long run investing time early on can have a larger pay off in the end,” says Kirk.

In addition to meeting directly with parents, Kirk visits the classroom when he needs to speak with a teacher. He and Principal Donato Cuadrado also meet informally twice a day to discuss school business. “There’s something very real and authentic about communicating face to face. It builds community and partnerships for learning,” remarks Kirk. “Ultimately, that is what schools are all about.” ■

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## DoDEA Welcomes New Special Education Chief

DoDEA recently welcomed David Johansen to the DoDEA Headquarters team as Chief, Special Education Branch. DoDEA headquarters has divided the responsibilities of Special Education and Student Support Services into two distinct branches. Johansen, who has been with DoDEA for over two decades, will oversee Special Education policy.

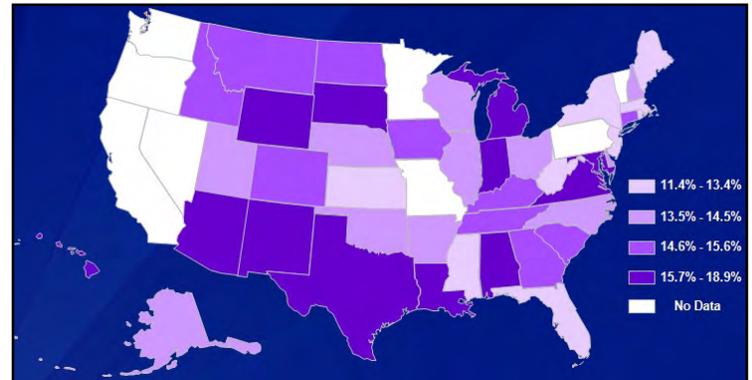
Johansen brings a wealth of expertise and background to DoDEA headquarters. He has 32 years of experience in Special Education and holds a Bachelor's in Communication Disorders, a Master's degree in Communication, and a Master's in Educational Administration.

Johansen has seen the challenges educators face from the classroom, to the district level, to the area office. During his ten years in U.S. public schools before joining DoDEA, he served as a speech/language pathologist in Provo City, Utah. In DoDEA, Johansen worked as a speech/language pathologist in Germany, Korea, and Japan before serving as the Instructional Systems Specialist for Special Education in the Japan District. For the past four years he led the Pacific Area Office's initiatives on Special Education. ■

## CDC: Suicidal Ideation Increasing in High School Youth

While suicide attempts among high school students had been in gradual decline for most of the past decade, since 2009 there has been a slight increase in both suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. Understanding this national trend helps sensitize educators to the possibility of suicide so they do not miss warning signs such as a student abruptly letting grades drop, saying good-bye, or giving away prized possessions.

The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance (YRBS) system, a longitudinal study sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), noted a 14 percent increase in suicidal ideation among high schoolers from 2009 to 2011. Of the 15,425 students surveyed nationally in 2011, 28.5 percent indicated they felt "sad" or "hopeless" for two or more weeks in a row and that these feelings had interfered with their usual activities.



Percentage by state of U.S. high school students who seriously considered attempting suicide.  
Source: Youth Risk Behavior Surveys, 2011.

Fortunately, only half the students who considered suicide actually attempted it (7.8 percent) and the number who suffered injuries requiring medical attention was much lower (2.4 percent). The rates varied from state to state, and the data is not available for all states, but the statistics suggest a need to maintain widespread awareness and a familiarity with the resources available to assist troubled youth.

DoDEA has resources available to support students experiencing psychological stress including access to school counselors, school psychologists, and a robust mental health curriculum. The Office of the Secretary of Defense provided the Signs of Suicide (SOS) prevention program to all DoDEA middle and high schools to help students and staff learn how to help students who are experiencing stress ask for help. To request copies of the SOS kits contact [safeschools@csc.com](mailto:safeschools@csc.com). ■

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## How to Cope During Times of Crisis: Be a “Helper”

Military families deserve special recognition for their demonstrated commitment to service. Each time our U.S. Service Members wear their uniforms, they demonstrate a willingness to sacrifice their lives, if necessary, to protect others.

That type of sacrifice and service was evident throughout the United States from April 15 through 19, 2013; the country experienced a series of jolting incidents including disaster, crime, and a terrorist attack. Educators searching for ways to help students and parents/sponsors interpret these events as they prepare for summer vacation can remind them of this essential truth: *Though we cannot always control our destiny by choosing what befalls us, we can determine our character by our choice of response.*



The Boston marathon attacks and subsequent investigation bracketed a week of distressing incidents across the country. On Monday, two bombs exploded near the finish line of the Boston marathon. On Wednesday night, a fertilizer plant in the small town of West, Texas caught fire and exploded, killing many people and causing widespread damage to homes and schools. That same day poisoned letters intended for the President, a senator, and a judge tested positive for the deadly substance Ricin. On Friday, residents of Boston were in lockdown and mass transit was shut down during an unprecedented manhunt. Friday evening’s arrest of the second bomber concluded an emotionally exhausting week that left many people wondering what would come next.

Throughout the week, stories of sacrifice and kindness emerged to provide hope and comfort amid the onslaught of troubling news stories. At the Boston marathon, several individuals ran towards danger to help others and offer first aid immediately after the explosions. Others opened their homes and hearts to comfort those affected by the incident. In Texas, organizations ranging from the Boy Scouts to the American Red Cross collected clothes and supplies to help the community recover from the devastation.

Despite the heart wrenching scenes of injury and devastation, many people cited the advice attributed to Fred Rogers, known to two generations of children as Mr. Rogers, to “look for the helpers.” They noted that each time disasters unfold, there are many people who emerge to assist those in need. Others expanded on that theme to emphasize that “we should be the helpers.”

The sentiment evolved further in a call to individuals to prepare ourselves to be ready to help. Personal preparedness begins with individual action. Following are four simple actions individuals can take to increase their personal level of preparedness:

- ▶ Sign up for a first aid course – courses are offered repeatedly throughout the year through the installation community services or American Red Cross.
- ▶ Develop leadership attitude and attributes – either through summer seminars or family dialogue.
- ▶ Continually develop empathy toward others through mindful reflection and reinforcement of personal values.
- ▶ Participate in emergency response drills – as noted surgeon Atul Gawande observed, Boston’s hospitals were ready because they had practiced their emergency response procedures and techniques.

The strength of character that is often revealed by members of military families during difficult times begins with disciplined commitment to preparation. Today’s students cannot control the events they will encounter tomorrow, but they can choose to prepare themselves to respond courageously. ■

## Suicide Prevention Fact Sheets for Teachers Available Online

The Suicide Prevention Resource Center has created a series of fact sheets for educators to use in their suicide prevention efforts at school. The series provides basic information about the warning signs of teen suicide in a colorful PDF format. The fact sheets can be customized before printing so that they address the needs of the local school population. Educators can then distribute these fact sheets to the school community or post them in common areas.

One of the fact sheets, “The Role of High School Teachers in Preventing Suicide” lists the warning signs that students are most likely to display in the school setting. It contains information on how teachers can respond to the warning signs of teen suicide and provides information about additional resource materials about suicide prevention, including a list of prevention programs. These fact sheets can supplement the highly effective teen suicide prevention program already in place in DoDEA, by providing a portable reminder of the warning signs that a teenager might be considering taking his or her life. To learn more, visit <http://www.sprc.org/sites/sprc.org/files/Teachers.pdf>. ■

## Summer Food Safety: Clean, Separate, Cook, Chill

As the academic year draws to a close, schools and communities often come together to enjoy picnics, barbeques, field day events, and office potlucks. Unfortunately, this is also the time of year when hospitals see a rise in food poisoning related to improper food safety practices. During a recent interview, Colleen Kesselring, Registered Dietitian, DoDEA School Meals Program, offered some simple food safety advice in preparation for the summer season. Kesselring started with a guiding principle: “Think before you act. My former commander used to say ‘safety first, strategy always’ and that philosophy applies to food safety.”



Kesselring summarized the wealth of information made available by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and pointed to a four-step process to prevent food poisoning:

 **CLEAN** – Washing hands with warm soapy water for 20 seconds is the most important step. It is normal for bacteria to live on the human body, but be careful not to introduce those bacteria to food. Always wash hands before any food preparation and after handling any raw meat including fish and eggs, as well as any raw meat juices.

 **SEPARATE** – Proper separation begins at the store by isolating meats in individual grocery bags and placing the food in the appropriate refrigerator compartments at home. During food preparation, raw meat must be kept separate from cooked meat and other ingredients that are not going to be cooked.

 **COOK** – The unsafe zone for food is 40° to 140° Fahrenheit. Bacteria thrive and reproduce quickly in this temperature range. Therefore, be sure to cook meats to at least 145° F at the core. Cooked foods left out for more than two hours should be discarded. On hotter days, when temperatures exceed 90° F, food left out should be discarded after one hour.

 **CHILL** – Uncooked food and leftovers need to be stored at a temperature below the 40° F threshold. Kesselring recommends obtaining a thermometer and placing it in the refrigerator to ensure proper chilling, preferably around 37° to 38° F.

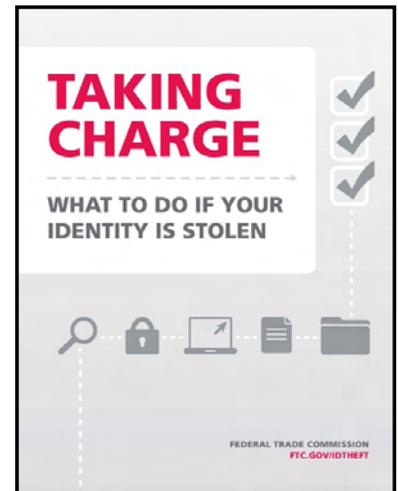
According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one in six Americans will get sick from food borne illnesses this year. Last year there were 19,531 confirmed laboratory cases of food poisoning and many more went unreported. “Food poisoning is unnecessary and entirely preventable,” concluded Kesselring. To learn more about food safety, visit <http://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/index.html>. ■

## Your Identity: Going Once, Going Twice, Stolen!

Identity theft is not an unknown concept to the vast majority of people. However, the far reaching repercussions of this lurking threat might not be obvious to everyone. Identity thieves leave victims with more than hefty, unexpected credit card transactions. They bestow a potentially lifelong burden on their unsuspecting victims. A DoDEA colleague who prefers to remain anonymous recently described a personal anecdote in which she was traumatized by the fallout from identity theft, concluding: “It shapes you; it is always with you.”

Describing identity theft as a “long ordeal of proving who I am,” the victim noted that a bit of information and awareness can protect others from a similar experience. The best place to start is the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). The FTC provides extensive information about the early warning signs of identity theft and lists the measures individuals can take to reduce their risk of identity theft:

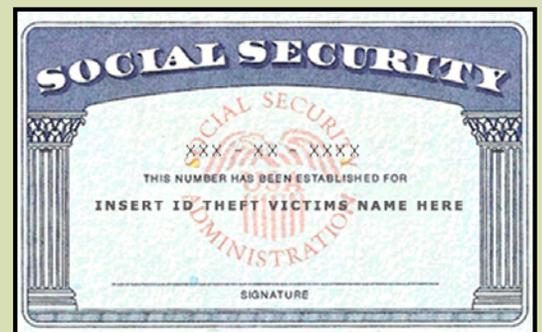
- ◆ Request an active duty alert. Deploying military personnel should request that an active duty alert be placed on his/her credit reports to mitigate the risk of identity theft while abroad. These alerts last for one year but can be renewed for longer deployments. Contact any of the three national credit reporting companies to make such a request.
- ◆ Review personal credit reports for irregularities or errors a few times a year. Individuals are entitled to one free credit report every 12 months from each of the three credit reporting companies. This allows one report to be ordered every four months for free.
- ◆ Monitor account and billing statements regularly. If there are unexpected transactions, follow up and inquire immediately.
- ◆ Treat all personal information as sensitive or classified data.
- ◆ Consider using a theft protection service to monitor accounts, credit reports, and personal information.



The measures above are a selection from a comprehensive FTC guide to identity theft prevention and recovery called “Taking Charge.” This user-friendly document contains instructions, progress checklists, and sample forms and letters. To read more about identity theft, download a copy at <http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/pdf-0009-taking-charge.pdf>. ■

### Identity Theft Red Flags (Warning Signs)

- ◆ Bills and expected documents no longer arrive in the mail.
- ◆ Vendors decline checks and credit cards.
- ◆ The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) reports more than one tax return filed under the same name or income reported from an unfamiliar source.
- ◆ Sudden influx of spam email, calls from telemarketers, advertisements, or solicitations.
- ◆ Medical service providers seek payment for services that were not requested or a legitimate medical claim is declined because medical benefit limits have apparently been reached.

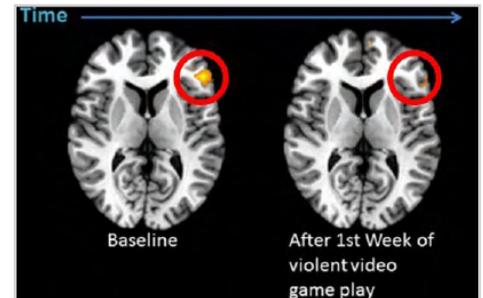


When dealing with identity theft, time is essential. Taking immediate action can prevent or help minimize the damage caused by identity theft. If there is any indication that personal information was stolen or misused go to <http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0274-immediate-steps-repair-identity-theft#immediate> right away and follow the “immediate steps.” ■

## MRI Reveals How Violent Video Games Change Brain Function

A study using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) has found that playing violent video games can alter brain function in young men. The question of whether or not violent video games make players more violent has been debated for many years. This study is among the first, however, to provide clear evidence of reduced activation in the frontal cortex of the brain after a week of playing a shooting video game. Because that portion of the brain is associated with impulse control and cognitive function, these changes could impact behavior in the classroom and at home.

The study was conducted at the Indiana University School of Medicine in 2011. Participants, all of whom were men between the ages of 18 and 29, underwent a baseline fMRI at the beginning of the study and follow-up exams at the one week and two week marks. During the fMRI, they completed an assessment called the Emotional Stroop Task, which asks participants to choose between violent and non-violent words. This test is designed to measure an individual's ability to control cognitive flexibility and attention.



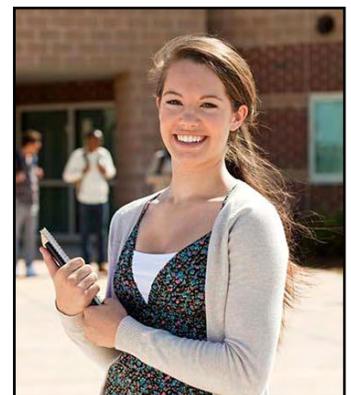
*The fMRI shows decreased activation in gamers after playing one week of violent video games.*

During this test, the participants who had played the violent video games showed less activation in two brain areas associated with cognitive function and emotional regulation after one week of violent gaming. The brain changes appeared to be temporary, however. After a week of not playing any video games, those participants' brain functions returned almost to their baseline levels. A control group showed no changes in brain function throughout the study.

Playing video games has been associated with many positive health benefits. Some games have been found to increase physical activity and others, when played with a partner, can improve social skills. However, students who play excessive amounts (more than 10 hours per week) of violent video games may experience cognitive changes that manifest as behavioral problems in the classroom or at home. Educators may wish to share this information with the parents of students who play violent video games. ■

## Positive Teens Make Smart Health Choices in Adulthood

New research shows that prevention and wellness programs that focus on encouraging teens to have a positive outlook can have profound benefits long term in preventing unhealthy behaviors such as binge drinking, taking drugs, unhealthy eating, and smoking. The study conducted by researchers at Northwestern University and published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, examined data collected from 10,147 young people in 1994, 1996, and again in 2001. The students who had positively answered questions about hopefulness for the future, self esteem, and enjoyment of life in 1994 were the least likely to engage in risky health behaviors in the 2001 follow-up.



When selecting prevention programs to use in the school setting, it is understandable that educators prefer to choose programs that address specific problems in the school, such as bullying, suicidal ideation, and substance abuse. Educators, however, should not overlook those programs that aim to increase wellbeing and help adolescents develop positive psychological characteristics. These programs can improve the school climate in the near term and positively impact the health of students well into adulthood. A series of guides to prevention programs is available from the DoDEA Office of Safety and Security at <http://www.dodea.edu/offices/safety/safeSchools.cfm>. ■