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How to Reassure Your Kids That It's Safe to Go to School

by Matthew Percy, Psy.D.

It's fall and for many of us that brings back the feeling of new beginnings, probably because it's the start of a new school year. As a child, I remember being excited to start a new grade or school, meet my new teachers, see school mates again and wear my brand new school clothes.

However, with all the media stories about so many school shootings and terrorist attacks, going back to school can be a fearful thing for some kids. As the prevalence of violent attacks around the world grows, it is important that caregivers be equipped to handle the questions of children. Such attacks can be difficult for children and adults alike to understand, but with the following considerations, you can help children feel safer and more secure in an often-confusing world.

- Above all, listen to children and give them information when they want it. Difficult news is often less distressing than what might be imagined on their own. Often, their fantasies are based on their worst fears, many of which are naturally self-focused.
- Regarding when and how much - follow their lead. Children will ask questions when they are curious AND able to approach difficult content. Anything more might overwhelm them. Children have ways of protecting themselves when they are approaching the point of overwhelm, so let them go off and play, for example, when they seem disinterested.
- Find ways to validate their feelings, including fear, while also assuring them of your role in keeping them safe. While you can't make unrealistic promises about their safety, you can remind them that you'll always do your best to keep them safe.
- Protect children from unnecessary or excessive exposure to news, videos, or upsetting images. When there has been an exposure, make it safe to talk about it - let them know they can say, think and feel anything about it - if they want.
- Structure and predictability, especially with familiar routines, can help children feel safe in the midst of chaos. Providing them a secure base encourages them to explore their thoughts and feelings while returning to normalcy when they need to.
- Caregivers know their children best. Although children tend to be remarkably resilient and self-protective, watch for signs of disturbance including problems with moods, acting out, attention and concentration, sleep and appetite. If such signs become present, health care providers can help steer families in the right direction.

For recommendations from the National Mental Health Association, go to p.3.



Dr. Matthew Percy, Clinical Director, joined Samaritan in 2014. He is a licensed clinical psychologist with nearly 10 years of experience including graduate training at William James College in Boston, MA. He provides psychological assessment and psychotherapy services to individuals of all ages, specializing in depth-oriented play therapy for children ages 3 and older. He can be contacted at (206) 527-2266 x347 or mpercy@samaritanps.org.

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Counseling Locations

Seattle
Main Office (Green Lake)*

Beacon Hill
Presbytery of Seattle

Maple Leaf
Lux Communities

West Seattle
Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish
West Seattle Professional Bldg.

Shoreline
Shoreline Free Methodist Church

Bellevue
Bellevue Presbyterian Church*
Overlake Park Presbyterian Church
St. Andrew's Lutheran Church

Auburn
Family of Grace Lutheran Church

Kent
Washington Baptist Convention

Federal Way
St. Vincent de Paul Parish
Sunrise United Methodist Church

Renton
Fairwood Community United Methodist

Tacoma
Immanuel Presbyterian Church

***Low Fee Clinic Locations
in Seattle and Bellevue**

The main office of Samaritan Center of Puget Sound is located at 564 NE Ravenna Blvd, Seattle, WA 98115. We can be reached by calling 206-527-2266 in Seattle, 425-732-2678 on the Eastside or 253-981-6575 in South King County. More information about therapists, locations and programs can be found on our website at www.samaritanps.org.

Why I Serve on Samaritan's Board . . .



Bob Crist has served on the Puget Sound Leadership Council since it was established. He is currently retired but his past professional responsibilities included positions in public accounting as a partner with Ernst and Young, as Chief Operating Officer with Community Health Plan of Washington and as Administrator of First Presbyterian Church of Bellevue, a 3,000 member congregation.

Bob is currently serving on Samaritan's board as the Chair. Prior to that, he served as the Treasurer during his first term on the board. When we asked Bob why he serves on Samaritan's board, he said:

- It's a privilege to share my skills and background to make a difference.
- It is impressive to me that Samaritan continues to be faith-based since they were founded in 1960.
- I believe in the value of counseling as a treatment strategy and I'm pleased that we can make this available to folks from all walks of life regardless of their ability to pay.
- It is enjoyable to work with members of the board and staff-they are great folks who have passion for what they do and I enjoy the strong sense of community I feel when working with them.

How to Reassure Your Kids It's Safe to Go to School

(continued from page 1)

To guide parents through difficult discussions about school violence, the National Mental Health Association offers the following suggestions:

- Encourage children to talk about their concerns and to express their feelings
- Talk honestly about your own feelings regarding school violence
- Validate the child's feelings
- Empower children to take action regarding school safety (encourage them to report bullying, threats or talk of suicide)
- Discuss the safety procedures that are in place at your child's school
- Create safety plans with your child (i.e., help them identify which adults at school they can talk to if they feel threatened at school). Also, ensure your child knows how to reach you or another family member if they feel threatened. Remind them that they can talk to you anytime they feel threatened.
- Recognize behavior that may indicate your child is concerned about returning to school
 - Lack of interest or poor performance in school
 - Absence of age-appropriate anger control skills
 - Seeing self as always the victim
 - Persistent disregard for or refusal to follow rules
 - Cruelty to pets or other animals
 - Artwork or writing that is bleak or violent or that depicts isolation or anger
 - Talking constantly about weapons or violence
 - Obsession with violent games and/or TV shows
 - Lack of enthusiasm, energy or motivation
 - Carrying a weapon to school
 - Overreacting to criticism
 - Restlessness and agitation
 - Bullying
 - Misplaced or unwarranted jealousy
 - Involvement with or interest in gangs
 - Withdrawal from friends and activities
- Keep the dialogue going
- Seek help when necessary

Source: National Mental Health Association
 Weaver, J. (2013). *Honest conversations can help ease your child's fears about school safety.* NBC News. Retrieved from <http://www.nbcnews.com>

It Has Already Happened

by Peggy Hansen, MS, LMFT

Midway through Jon Kabat-Zinn's book about mindfulness, *Full Catastrophe Living*, in the chapter on "Responding to Stress," there is this brief story:

Doug was involved in an automobile accident in which no one was hurt. The accident was not his fault. He said that previously, he would have been furious at the other driver for ruining his car and for the inconvenience it caused him on a very busy day. Instead he just said to himself, "No one was hurt, it has already happened, let's go from here." So he tuned in to his breathing and proceeded, with a calmness that was totally uncharacteristic of him, to deal with the details of the situation.

Recently, I experienced eye symptoms that, for a person with macular degeneration, were alarming. I felt myself go into that fearful "what-if" place, knowing that I could lose significant vision in my "good" eye. What would that mean in my life and work? Rather quickly, I recognized that my reaction wasn't really "What if?" It was "Oh, no! This cannot be happening!"

See Page 7 to learn
about
Mindfulness Based
Stress Reduction
Classes

Over the next few days as the retinal specialist dealt with the distressing symptoms, I watched my mind's deep, insistent denial that this was actually happening to me. I wanted to figure out what I could have done to avoid it. I floundered around in a whirlpool of negative thoughts where the message was that somehow there had to be a way to make this unwanted thing un-happen.

It felt as if it took me a long time to get out of the whirlpool and move toward accepting the reality: "It has already happened." Once I could begin to say those words – quietly, over and over – I was able to begin to think about what I would do next, how I could cope with what had happened. That felt more manageable.

A second but related thought: We can have a similar whirlpool experience when we're feeling apprehensive about a bad thing that could happen in the future. When that occurs, instead of devoting ourselves to mindless worrying, we could remind ourselves that "it hasn't actually happened." Instead of slipping into the whirlpool, we could take a breath, notice our feelings of fear and then agree to stay in the moment we're in – not the moment we're imagining. We could remember Mark Twain's words: "I've had a lot of worries in my life, most of which never happened."



Margaret (Peggy) A. Hansen joined Samaritan in 1987. Peggy is a licensed marriage and family therapist. She sees individuals, couples and families at Samaritan's main office near Green Lake. She can be contacted by email at phan-sen@samaritanps.org or by phone at 206-527-2266 x307.

A Restaurant, a Waitress, a Chef and Me

by Gary Steeves, M.Ed., STB

Several times a year I go away for several days for alone time and solitude in order to refresh and renew my being. I was reading and reflecting about agape love, that unconditional love that Jesus invites us to embrace, as well as the Spirit of Agape. As I returned to the mountain village where I was staying for an evening meal, I became intentional about “being love” to anything I encountered and to be in the Spirit of that love.

The voice inside me spoke and guided me away from the restaurants I was considering earlier in the day. Walking a mile from the heart of this village, in the rain, seemed so absurd. There, the last hotel and restaurant in town seemed to draw my feet and soul. When I glanced at the menu, my jaw dropped. On it were items from the Swabian Alps in Southwest Germany, where my paternal ancestors resided before coming to America. These dishes are a cultural heritage, yet not seen outside of that region.

I sat alone at a table. The waitress approached and asked me to please be gentle with her because it was her first night on the job. I told her we would get through this together. I asked her before she offered me any water, to please inform the chef that I was taken by the menu selections. In a matter of moments Chef Joe poked his head out of the kitchen, found my gaze upon him, and lifted up his thumb in gratitude. An energy and synergy was in the air. To my surprise, it was not the waitress that brought me my German dinner delight, it was Chef Joe!

The next day I was led back to the same restaurant. This time I asked the waitress to ask the chef if he would prepare a meal with two of the other Swabian Alp menu offerings onto one plate. Chef Joe came and asked me if I liked red cabbage. I replied, “yes.” Then Chef Joe replied, “I’ll take care of you.” The level of energy between the chef, the waitress and myself was so noticeable that the hotel manager came to me and asked if I she could take a photo of the meal prepared for me by Chef Joe. She wanted to get her corporate boss to get approval to add this dish to the menu.

Chef Joe personally brought me my meal of three different Swabian Alp delights. I then told him what had me so appreciative of these dishes-I had travelled three years ago to the Swabian Alps region to frequent the region of my ancestors. He then asked me if I wanted to know anything about him. I learned that he knew all about this region, that he was trained to be a chef in the Pearl of the Swiss Alps, that he and his team won the Olympic Chef Gold Medal. The connection between us, the waitress, the management was so spirit filled with love for the invisible reality that makes up our very being and nature in this time and space.

What a difference awareness of being agape and in its spirit makes. Without it I would have simply sat



Gary Steeves joined Samaritan in 1987.

Gary specializes in integrating emotional, physical, mental and spiritual well being in the growth-hope filled orientation for individuals, couples, and families. Gary sees clients in Kent, Renton and Federal Way. He can be reached at 206-527-2266 ext 320 or at gsteeves@samaritanps.org.

Trauma and Recovery

by Deb Thomas, MS LMFT

At first glance, there was nothing outstanding about the way she looked. I stood behind a woman and her young family in a buffet line—all of us waiting to fill our plates. Nothing caught my eye until the woman turned toward me, making her full face visible, showing half her face unmarked and half seared with burn scars. An additional quick scan took in scars on the exposed parts of her right forearm and hands; she walked with a limp. I also noticed the easy manner the woman and family related to each other. In the seconds viewing the woman's scars and her family, I imagined a story of trauma and recovery.

It is nearing ten years since I saw the woman in the buffet line, and while I never learned her story, I often think of her scars and how I came to see them: hidden at first, then visible when she turned to full view. For this woman, a piece of her story was available for others to see and I've often wondered what people would look like if faces showed the many scars of traumas and pain experienced in daily living. Would scars serve as a reminder that pain from trauma and loss is not quickly or easily healed? Would we feel less isolated and alone in our pain if it were easily seen on the outside?

Two years ago, a friend knocked on my Samaritan Center office door at Bellevue Presbyterian Church's Upper Campus, interrupting a meeting to find out if I had heard from my daughter, Katie – was she safe? At that moment, Seattle Pacific University, the school my daughter attended, was on lockdown and there was a shooter on campus. Twenty minutes after the knock, Katie called and reported she was safe after hunkering down in a nearby apartment. While I was quickly relieved for the safety of my daughter, I soon learned the story did not have a happy ending—what shooting does? My daughter, and hundreds of other victims, came out without visible scars, but the pain did not stop—has not stopped—for many. Two of the shooter's victims were wounded, and one young man, who was a dear friend to many, died. Many others—untouched by bullets—have invisible scars on the inside. Two years later, many continue to feel the pain.

As a Marriage and Family Therapist at Samaritan Center, I spend most of my workdays listening to stories of physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual pain. The issues cover a range of topics including recovery and healing from various traumas. Trauma events, like the shooting at SPU, often impact individuals long after the event, and long after friends and families think it should. Perhaps one of the difficulties in healing from trauma is that many wounds are on the inside, invisible to others. Months and years after the event, individuals may experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress, anxiety, panic, and depression. The same is true for emotional and spiritual pain of any cause—we feel the pain, but our faces may not show it, especially when taught to hide the pain from others.

I'm thankful for the Psalmists who wrote about both their joys and laments. I'm also thankful for modern Christian writers who have shared their personal traumas and grief—Gerry Sittser and C.S. Lewis to name two. The stories of grief validate both the feelings of wanting to quickly “get over it” and the experience that grief and pain pay no attention to our desire. In order to heal from traumas, we need to move through the pain, as the way to move forward, weaving the event and impact into our daily life and faith. Individuals often come to counseling when help from family and friends has been exhausted, and when working through the pain on their own is not enough.



Deb Thomas joined Samaritan in 2010.

Deb is a licensed marriage & family therapist with almost 10 years of experience, including graduate training at Seattle Pacific University. Deb specializes in healing of emotional wounds in families, emotion-focused couples therapy and intimacy issues. Contact Deb at (206) 527-2266 x343 or dthomas@samaritanps.org.

Fall Classes/Seminars

To register or learn more, go to www.samaritanps.org.



Marriage Preparation One-Day Seminars

Samaritan offers one-day Marriage Preparation Seminars for couples in Bellevue and Seattle.

The Marriage Preparation Seminar will be held at Bellevue Presbyterian Church in **Bellevue** on **Saturday, September 24, from 9 am to 4 pm**, led by Deb Thomas.

The one-day Marriage Preparation Seminar in **Seattle** at our Ravenna Office will be on **Saturday, October 15, from 9 am to 4 pm**, led by Roger Lin.

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction

A free MBSR orientation will be held **Tuesday, September 20, from 7 to 8:30 pm** at the Ravenna Office in Seattle.

The eight-week fall MBSR class will again be led by Kurt Hoelting on eight consecutive **Tuesday evenings** at our Ravenna Office in Seattle. It will meet from **6:30 to 9:00 pm, September 27 through November 15**.

For those who have taken an earlier MBSR class, Jonas Batt will offer a four-week **Alumni Class** at the Ravenna Office. When the date for the Alumni Class is determined, we will post it on our website at www.samaritanps.org.

Divorce Lifeline Group*

Anyone going through a divorce, separation or ending a relationship knows that it's a time when people need understanding, support and a way to develop coping skills that will make everyday life more manageable and the future more hopeful. A small group provides a safe place where individuals can work through their feelings of loss, anger and grief and—at the same time—develop skills that will help them move through the painful transitions.

Meetings will be at our Ravenna Office near Green Lake in Seattle on **Tuesday evenings**, for 10 weeks, **from 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm**. For more information and an intake interview, contact Rob Erickson at 206-527-2266, ext. 370. **Enrollment for this group is ongoing throughout the year.*

In addition to Divorce Lifeline for Adults, we are forming groups for kids of separated and divorced parents to help them develop coping skills and work through feelings. Kids Groups will meet for one hour for eight weeks, plus two one-hour parent meetings. Groups will be forming in Seattle and on the Eastside. Dates will be announced on our website. For more information, contact Beverley Shrumm

Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) Training for Therapists

Yolanda von Hockauf, M.Ed, RMFT, and Roy Hodgson, MA, LMFT, LMHC, will be conducting an **EFT Advanced Core Skills** training this fall at our Ravenna Office in Seattle, with class meetings on Thursday/Friday and Friday/Saturday dates.

In 2016, the training will be on **November 18-19 and December 8-9**. **In 2017**, the training will be on **January 12-13 and February 17-18**. Class times are from 9:00 am to 4:30 pm. Total cost is \$1700 for the eight class days. For more information and to register, go to our website.

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Did You Know That Samaritan Has Business Pages on LinkedIn & Facebook?

Our business pages on these two social media platforms have a number of benefits – more people are made aware of our services, upcoming classes/events are publicized, and helpful articles of current interest are posted. Note that the purpose of the business pages is to provide information, not to serve as a communication avenue between clients or potential clients and therapists.

You extend Samaritan's outreach when you "**Like**" our Facebook Page and "**Follow**" us on LinkedIn. To access either page, click on the icons at the bottom of our website pages at www.samaritanps.org.

