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Remember this:
You are as magnificent and intricate and brilliant as a snowflake.
But you are not as weak or impermanent as one.

- UNKNOWN

Message from the MHS Team
The holiday season is here!
For many, it is an amazing, magical time of year. It's also one that can be incredibly stressful. From preparing for visitors and dealing with family conflict, to managing schedules, staying on budget, and continuing to navigate COVID-19, it is easy to become stressed and overwhelmed.

Before the stress of the holidays sneaks up on you, read this issue of Mental Health Matters for a host of tips and resources to promote your inner peace. You can learn about the benefits of gratitude and spreading kindness, both for your mental and physical health. The "Mindful Moment" offers advice for managing big feelings, both for children and adults. Finally, as you look to set resolutions for 2022, be sure to check out "Why 'New Year, New You' is Damaging to Your Mental Health" and our suggestions for healthy commitments in the coming year.

We hope this issue makes your holiday season full of more magic, and less stress. And we wish all of our students, families, staff, and partners of Dallas ISD best wishes for a happy holidays and wonderful start to 2022!

Warmly,
The MHS Team

Launching in August of 2021, the Mental Health Matters Newsletter will be published quarterly by Dallas ISD's Mental Health Services Department.

The newsletter will be available on our website and offer resources and tools to support health and wellbeing.

For more information about MHS services within the district, please visit www.dallasisd.org/mentalhealth
National School Psychology Week
From the National Association of School Psychologists

During the week of November 8–12, 2021 schools throughout the country will celebrate National School Psychology Week to highlight the important work school psychologists do to help students thrive.

This year’s theme is “Let’s Get in GEAR.” (Grow, Engage, Advocate, Rise). The theme’s acronym provides a challenge to grow both personally and professionally. It encourages us to engage in best practices and advocate for children’s access to mental health and learning supports. To rise implies resilience and renewal despite the challenges of the past.

When one gear moves, the gears connected to it move as well. When we move together there is a positive synergy that builds and becomes greater than any single effort. We grow together, we engage critical systems, and we advocate and rise together.

The Science of Kindness

Performing acts of kindness has been shown to boost reported levels of happiness, self-worth, and calmness while decreasing symptoms of depression. As we face the trauma of a pandemic, ongoing racial inequalities, a host of global challenges, and the stress of the holiday season, we can make a difference in our community by spreading kindness.

Check out this short video for more information on how being kind and helpful has a positive and uplifting effect on both the giver and the recipient.

We challenge everyone to show peace, kindness, and compassion, both for ourselves and others. In doing so, we can promote mental wellness and spread acceptance, grace, and healing throughout our community. Here are a few socially distanced suggestions for spreading kindness to get you started:

- Write a kind email or letter to someone.
- With chalk, write an encouraging note on your sidewalk.
- Reserve judgment.
- Send 5 check-in texts, videos, or messages to someone you care about.
- Call a friend/family member and tell them what they mean to you.
- Nurture your creativity.
- Celebrate a colleague.
- Make someone laugh.
- Go out of your way to do something nice for someone that you live with.
- Remind someone they matter.
- Practice self-care.
- Do a 7-Day Gratitude Challenge by writing down 3 things you are thankful for each day.
- Find a way to support a local charity or non-profit.
- Make a new friend.
- Spend a day relaxing.
SEASONS GREETINGS &
a happy new year!

Maintaining Mental Health During the Holiday Season
Paraphrased from this [article](#), from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
The holidays can be a joy-filled season, but they can also be incredibly stressful. For individuals and families coping with challenges, the holiday season can be a lonely or stressful time, filled with anxiety and/or depression.

Here are some suggestions for how you can reduce stress and maintain good mental health during the holiday season:

1. **Accept your needs.** Put your own mental and physical well-being first. Recognize what your triggers are to help you prepare for stressful situations. Is shopping for holiday gifts too stressful for you? What is making you feel physically and mentally agitated? Once you know this, you can take steps to avoid or cope with stress.

2. **Manage your time and don’t try to do too much.** Prioritizing your time and activities can help you use your time well. Making a day-to-day schedule helps ensure you don’t feel overwhelmed by everyday tasks and deadlines. It’s okay to say no to plans that don’t fit into your schedule or make you feel good.

3. **Be realistic.** Even pre-pandemic, the happy lives of the people shown in those holiday commercials are fictional. We all have struggles one time or another and it’s not realistic to expect otherwise. Sometimes, it’s simply not possible to find the perfect gift or have a peaceful time with family.

4. **Exercise daily.** Schedule time to walk outside, bike, or join a dance class. Whatever you do, make sure it’s fun. Daily exercise naturally produces stress-relieving hormones in your body and improves your overall physical health.

5. **Eat well.** With dinners, parties, and cookie trays at every turn, our eating habits are challenged during the holiday season. Try to maintain a healthy diet through it all. Eating unprocessed foods, like whole grains, vegetables, and fresh fruit is the foundation for a healthy body and mind. Eating well can also help stabilize your mood.

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Share Gratitude This Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving presents us with a great chance to recognize and increase our feelings of gratitude. This not only benefits our stress levels, but also our relationships, satisfaction, and overall health. Here are a few gratitude activities to try:

- Share what you are grateful for on social media. Try to avoid comparing your life with what you see on social media.
- As you gather for Thanksgiving dinner, invite everyone to share a positive memory or something you appreciate about the others in the room.
- Write a thank you note, text or email to someone who is important to you. Tell them why they are so special.

It’s not happiness that brings us gratitude. It’s gratitude that brings us happiness.
- Jeremiah Say
Many big feelings loom in the air when the winter holidays are upon us. Excitement and joy, but oftentimes worry, sadness, and a desire to check out on the surface, as well. I experience this whole range of emotions around this time of year. When I see these big feelings in myself and how difficult they can be to manage at times, the empathy I have for my students grows immensely. I didn't always see things this way. Through practice and self-study, I deepened my understanding for how to manage. Here's what I do:

1. Name the feelings/emotions arising
2. Regulate those feelings/emotions in the moment.
3. De-escalate by taking space, some long exhales and practicing the various ways of positive thinking, empathy, and gratitude.
4. Transform those feelings/emotions in a healthy way that is workable and realistic.

Practicing these steps is a continual learning process that leaves me humbled, at best. I know how important it is to relate to those I work with and for. I try to avoid saying hurtful things to people I love and care about. The time and energy it takes to repair and clean up the damage from a hurtful word are so much more than the time and energy it takes me to prevent myself from losing control of my emotions in the first place. It's trickle-down regulation! The lessons we learn in becoming aware of how we self-regulate and show up for our students shape how our students learn self-regulation and use it in their classrooms.

Let's face it. This learning curve of working with our feelings in a healthy way is steep! How often do you practice steps to manage yours? If we are all enrolled in becoming better at it, little by little and step by step, with grace, patience, effort, and some planning, we ALL benefit.

Our kids get to experience more valuable learning time from their hard-working teachers. Our relationships improve across the board. Friendships are easier. Our health and well-being are positively affected.

This is why I'm such an advocate of the social-emotional learning that is developed in the use of The Calming Area. We call it The Calming Area as opposed to The Calming Corner to avoid negative associations of getting put in The Corner as punishment. To use The Calming Area well, it's important to get an understanding of how difficult self-regulation can be. If it's difficult for us as adults with fully developed brains, those small humans with still-developing pre-frontal cortexes are at a real disadvantage. It's also hugely important to introduce The Calming Area with guidance, modeling, student involvement, and the ability to maintain it. The initial planning may seem daunting, but it can be quite simple. The most important part is implementing with an intention of compassion that self-regulation is hard, but we can all learn together.

- **This link** has various examples of simple calming areas and easily accessible items that can be used for your classroom calming area.
- **This video clip “Why Do We Lose Control of Our Emotions?”** can be a start in explaining this to kids, and the kid in all of us adults as well.

If you are feeling stuck with how to implement your calming area successfully, one of our MHS School-Based Clinicians can help with that. Reach out to your school counselor to find your assigned School-Based Clinician. We have guidance, resources, and materials to assist. We are here for you!

May we all move through these next few winter months of holiday time with more peace of mind, happier hearts, and harmony in connection.
MENTAL HEALTH IS NOT A DESTINATION, BUT A PROCESS. IT'S ABOUT HOW YOU DRIVE, NOT WHERE YOU ARE GOING.

- NOAM SPANCER

**Important Dates**

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<tr>
<th>November</th>
<th>Homeless Youth Awareness Month</th>
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<td>November 8-12</td>
<td>National School Psychology Week</td>
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<td>November 11</td>
<td>Veteran's Day</td>
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<td>November 18</td>
<td>Great American Smokeout</td>
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<td>November 20</td>
<td>International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day</td>
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<td>Transgender Day of Remembrance</td>
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<td>November 25</td>
<td>Thanksgiving</td>
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<td>December 10</td>
<td>International Human Rights Day</td>
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<td>December 31</td>
<td>New Year’s Eve</td>
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<td>January</td>
<td>Human Trafficking Prevention Month</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 1</td>
<td>Happy New Year! Welcome, 2022!</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 11</td>
<td>Human Trafficking Awareness Day</td>
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<td>January 17</td>
<td>Martin Luther King, Jr. Day</td>
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**Why "New Year, New You" is Damaging to Mental Health**

Excerpt from *The Talkspace Voice*

There's nothing wrong with aspiring to be your best self. We all have dreams, whether that means getting healthy, cutting out your nightly junk food habit, or writing a book. But pinning those aspirations to a specific date can set you up for failure — and mental health issues — in the future. Skip “New Year, new you,” and establish realistic goals for personal success.

Unfortunately, so many goals fail because you haven't considered the bigger picture: lifestyle change. Running more is great, but you need to understand how increased activity levels fit into your actual day-to-day life. Are you ready to wake up and run every morning? Do you know the best food to refill your energy bar?

Before setting goals, make sure you understand exactly how to achieve them. Willy-nilly resolution-ing is a fantastic way to set yourself up for failure —which is no good for your mental health, especially if you're repeating the same mistakes year after year.

But there's hope: smart goal-setting not only will help you beat the annual “I-failed again blues,” but your new-and-improved lifestyle can also better your mental health.

Just remember to think about the bigger picture—not just a fly-by-night aspirational and unachievable new you.
Ways to Beat the Winter Blues and Feel Great
Excerpt from Everyday Health

Dark mornings, darker evenings, and chilly gray days in between mean winter is here — and with the coldest season come the winter blues. There’s no clinical diagnosis for the “winter blues,” but experts at the National Institutes of Health say the so-called winter blues are fairly common and are usually marked by feeling more down than usual, sad, or less energized.

Because the winter blues is not a discrete medical condition, an accurate measure of how many people it affects is difficult to know for sure. Estimates suggest anywhere from 14 to 20 percent of American adults experience such seasonal mood changes.

A small percentage of people who experience a change of mood with the season do have seasonal depression, a more severe condition that is a medical disorder, also known as seasonal affective disorder (SAD). SAD affects about 1 to 9 percent of Americans (prevalence rates differ, depending on location and how severe the change of season actually is), according to research published in November 2015 in the journal Depression Research and Treatment.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, SAD is a recurrent form of major depression, characterized by feelings of hopelessness and despair, fatigue, problems sleeping and concentrating, and changes in appetite. Symptoms of winter blues are milder than those of SAD, but that doesn’t mean you should brush off your blah feeling.

“Feeling blue for a period of time is not, per se, normal,” says Jacqueline Gollan, Ph.D., associate professor in psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. “When people feel blue, it’s a signal that something in their life needs attention.”

And there are things you can do to lift your mood. This winter, try these bad-mood zappers to beat the winter blues and stay well all winter long:

- **Lace-Up Your Running Shoes and Get Moving** Getting at least 20 minutes of vigorous activity four times a week has been shown to reduce depressive mood, says Dr. Gollan.

- **Set Your Alarm Clock and Stick to a Sleep Routine** Tempting as it might be to sleep in on dark mornings, it’s best to stick with a regular sleep schedule — which means waking up at the same times on weekdays and weekends. It’s important to get at least seven hours of sleep every night for your overall health, according to guidelines from the National Sleep Foundation.

- **Queue Up a Stream of Laugh-Out-Loud Films** Experts believe that laughter actually stimulates processes in your brain that counter depressive symptoms.

- **Give Yourself a Manageable Task to Accomplish** It’s important to build activities into your day — even chores, like cleaning the floor — that will give you a sense of competence and accomplishment. According to one psychological theory, we all have an innate need to feel competent in order to also grow emotionally, have a sense of integrity, and maintain well-being.

- **But Don’t Let Your To-Do List Get Too Out of Hand** Don’t overwhelm yourself with lists of projects and chores just because you can’t do other activities you might spend time doing in other seasons. If you love to garden in spring and summer as a stress-relieving activity, that doesn’t mean spending those same hours in the winter cleaning your closets is going to do you the same amount of good — nor be as enjoyable.

- **Book a Staycation — Even if It’s a Mini One** Most people get a lift when they have something to look forward to, Gollan says you can save money and still get a boost by planning mini-getaways closer to home.

- **Don’t Hesitate to See Your Healthcare Professional** “Blues can be part of some other system,” says Gollan. Chronic pain, headaches, sleep disorders, and even heart disease are all linked to depression symptoms, so check in with your healthcare provider to make sure your winter blues aren’t something more serious
Mental Health America: Tools and Resources

Check out this link for more information

Mental Health America (MHA)'s work is driven by its commitment to promote mental health as a critical part of overall wellness, including prevention services for all; early identification and intervention for those at risk; integrated care, services, and supports for those who need them; with recovery as the goal.

MHA's campaign, Living Well 4Mind4Body, has a number of free tools available to help you explore the connection between our physical body and our mental health. Learn more about whole health and what you can do to improve your overall wellness, including:

- **Are you stressed?** Includes a stress screener, fact sheet, and quiz to see if you are at risk for a mental health condition.
- **Student Mental Health Matters**: Whether you are a parent or a child-serving professional, these fact sheets provide information on how to support students.
- **Workplace Wellness**: Most of us spend more time at work than at home. If you have a mental health condition, it could impact your work.
- **Live Your Life Well**: The Live Your Life Well campaign provides 10 tools to help you achieve wellness.
- **When Well Seems Far Away**: If you or someone you know has a mental health or substance use condition, wellness can seem unachievable. But recovery is a reality.

Want to learn more about mental health?

- Schedule a professional development training with your campus' School-Based Clinician or local Youth and Family Center. We offer presentations on a variety of mental health topics.
- Visit our Mental Health Matters Dallas Symposium website where presentations are available in our online archive. There are over 16 free sessions in both English and Spanish for staff, parents, and community members.
- Follow us on social media!

JUST BREATHE.
YOU ARE STRONG ENOUGH TO HANDLE YOUR CHALLENGES,
WISE ENOUGH TO FIND A SOLUTION TO YOUR PROBLEMS,
AND CAPABLE ENOUGH TO DO WHATEVER NEEDS TO BE DONE.

LORI DUCHENE