

From the Principal's Pen

October 2021

Submitted by: Jennifer McGee, Principal of Atwood Primary School



We had the chance to go to a hotel over the summer. My eight year old grandson was running back and forth between the hot tub and the pool trying to decide which he wanted to dip into. The choice was easy for me: hot tub. Anyhow, he finally came over to join me, and slid himself down into the steaming, bubbly water. "Ahhhhhhhh..." he said, "this is just what I needed," and I smiled as he closed his eyes, completely enjoying the warmth. And then he added, "I have been so stressed out."

I've thought a lot about his comment about being "so stressed out." It made me feel bad. He's only eight. He shouldn't be stressed out. But then I thought about myself and perhaps what he hears from me. I mean, I probably use that phrase "stressed out" pretty darned often.... Are we creating a society of stressed out children?

So here we are....as busy as ever...if not more so, and experiencing a worldwide pandemic. Are we stressed? Ummmm....I think we could probably all agree the answer is "yes". But let's probe a little farther...are *our children* stressed?

A few years ago, I went to the Model Schools Conference in Orlando, Florida. During the conference, we had a terrific keynote speaker named Juliet Funt. She speaks to executives all over the world, and teaches about our need for "white space." White space is not meditating... it's basically a blank slate...time without a designated purpose. Time that just "is".

Do you remember having that "white space" time as a child? Days that just flowed, one after the other, in front of you, with nothing to do.... Often times, as children, within that time, we became our most creative selves. That was when forts were built, games were created, Barbie villages and Legolands were assembled.

White space is important for our health. We need time, that is not filled with lists of "to dos". We need time to just be and to just let our thoughts flow freely. Children need that time as well.

In Japan, there is a practice called "Shinrin-yoku" which translates to "forest bathing". Forest bathing is considered an essential form of preventative health care and healing. In Japan, not

only is forest bathing a medical practice...but they believe in it so strongly that health insurance covers it!

The goal of forest bathing is not exercise. The goal is not reaching a destination. The goal is simply to go to a forest and walk slowly, breathe, open all of your senses. That's it!

People are often surprised when they feel so much better after camping for a weekend or going to a beach or lake for the day. The ocean, waterfalls, thunderstorms...they all emit high levels of negative ions. These negative ions give us energy and combat depression! Being near naturally running water and being outdoors are natural energizers!

As we enter the fall of your child's 2021-22 school year, we should probably all acknowledge the reality of the stress we are experiencing...and then, move on the best we can. Afterall, children are watching us. We have a bulletin board in our hallways that says: "WE CAN DO HARD THINGS". We CAN do hard things, and we are doing hard things...and the children are watching us do it!

So, as we move through this school year together...while we realize it is not easy...let's remember we have done this before...last year...and we can do it again THIS YEAR. Viruses are tricky buggers....they morph and change and they hang around a lot longer than we want them, but we are smart too. We won't only survive this, we will thrive in it!

In order to thrive, I encourage you to do what you need to to manage your stress. Find some white space time...and fill it with nothing. Find a place to go and surround yourself with nature. Do some forest bathing! Sit by some moving water. Breathe. Let your children see you finding healthy ways to manage your stress.

And, if you need help, ask for it.

We are in this together. We still can do hard things.

Educationally Yours,

Jennifer McGee, Principal of Atwood Primary School

**Dates to Note:**

Monday, September 20: Flu Shot Clinic

Monday, September 20: 6:00 virtual PTA meeting

Tuesday, September 21: Early Release Day/ Noon time release for teacher in-service

Friday, October 8: Teacher Comp Day/ no school

Monday, October 11: Indigenous Person's Day/ no school

Wednesday, October 27: Fall Photo Day