

**From the Principal's Pen
February 2022**



Submitted by: Jennifer McGee, Principal of Atwood Primary School

My children are all adults now, and they are having children of their own. It's so crazy how much things have changed since my children were little. I babysat my five month old granddaughter last weekend. My daughter looked at me like I was a homicidal maniac when I suggested putting a blanket over her when she went down for her nap! She said, "MOM, no items in the crib...not for two more months. No blankets, no stuffies, nothing! It's a suffocation risk."

You all know more now than we knew then. Your car seats are more safely anchored, your children are in them longer, you have more information about health and nutrition and what ingredients are in foods. You have the advantage of more brain research and greater medical advances...all in the last few decades.

So, with all of that information, why are the mental health needs of our children at an all time high? Dr. Ovid, a pediatric neurologist, warns "of a Silent Tragedy" (from his article *Silent Tragedy*) unfolding in our homes today, and that is the acute rise in mental health issues in our children.

The statistics are as follows:

- 1 in 5 children are now diagnosed with mental health issues
- There has been a 43% increase in ADHD diagnoses
- There has been a 37% increase in teenage depression
- Perhaps the most alarming statistic....there has been a 200% increase in suicide for children aged between 10 and 14

Those are the statistics, and we all are well aware of the state of the world around us currently; so....the big question sits: WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT THIS?

Dr. Ovid suggests children today may be deprived of some of the foundational necessities of a healthy childhood. The suggestions he makes for a healthy beginning are quite simple really:

- Emotionally available parents
- Clearly defined boundaries
- Responsibilities
- Balanced nutrition
- Adequate sleep
- Movement ...especially outdoor play!
- Creative gaming (not electronic), social interaction, and opportunity and spaces for imaginative play to bust boredom

So it seems, although we know new things that need to happen to keep your children safe and protected, getting "back to the basics" is probably the best medicine for raising healthy and HAPPY children!

As we approach the frigid month of February, here are some fun suggestions for contributing to your child's firm foundation of childhood:

- Have long periods of time where there are "no phones"...mealtime, bedtimes, morning routine times...be as present as possible when your children are in front of you
- Set firm rules with firm structures children can count on...pick up times, bath time, bed time, meal times...and remain the "captain of your ship"have rules and have your children follow the rules
- Commit to at least one hour a day of outdoor time...it's great for ALL of you!
- Create a regular schedule of "chores" for your children....simple things like putting clothes in the laundry, clearing dishes off from the table, laying out clothing the night before school, taking items out of the back pack at the end of the day
- Implement a consistent nighttime routine, bath time, story time, bed time...
- Offer children only nutritious foods and avoid junk food for their little bodies
- Limit the use of screens and technology
- Help your children with emotional regulations...notice what frustrates your child and help them find strategies to deal with frustration in a healthy way
- Model emotional regulation...practice remaining calm and fostering a calm household
- Teach your children to always use their manners...please, thank you, excuse me...people notice
- Connect emotionally...smile, kiss, hug, read, dance, jump, comfort, play, and have fun with your children

Winter in Maine can sometimes feel dark and long, but it also can be a wonderful time to slow down, build a blanket fort, pull sleeping bags into the living room, and snuggle up together. Mind you...no blankets for the infants! We are all learning!

Educationally Yours,

Jennifer McGee, Principal of Atwood Primary School

Dates to Note:

February 2, 2022 is Two's Day...2/2/22

Monday, February 14: Valentine's Day

February 21 to February 25: Winter Break NO SCHOOL

Some Special Parent Notes and Reminders:

- Two's Day...2/2/22 is **GLOBAL PLAY DAY**...we will play, play, play all day long! It's also Groundhog Day and Global Read Aloud Day! Fun!!
- Please make sure your child comes EVERY DAY with full snow clothes! Some mornings are too cold to go out, but by the afternoon, we are able to go outside!
- Stay tuned....in March we will have our Annual Fundraiser...the Read-a-Thon and we will have our community wide read!

THE CHILDREN WILL HAVE SPECIAL CUPCAKES ON VALENTINE'S DAY THIS YEAR, SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO SEND SPECIAL CLASSROOM SNACKS