

# Stepping Stones

Ripon Area School District \* Student Services Department \* December 2016



## How to Help a Child with Test Anxiety

*From the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction*

### What is Test Anxiety?

Test anxiety is actually a type of performance anxiety. Performance anxiety is when a person feels worried about how they will do on something, especially when they feel it is important. For instance, a child might feel performance anxiety when trying out for the school band or for the basketball team. When taking a test, your child might get a stomachache or headache. Some kids may feel shaky, sweaty, or feel their heart beating quickly. In fact, a small dose of anxiety can be helpful, keeping people sharp and focused. But when symptoms take over so that your child can't function or is so anxious that they feel sick, they may not be able to do their best. When under stress, the body releases the hormone adrenaline, which prepares it for danger. Adrenaline causes the physical symptoms, such as sweating, a pounding heart, and rapid breathing. Focusing on the bad things that could happen can make your child feel worried. Your child might think, "What if the test is too hard?" A thought like this does not leave much room in their mind to concentrate on remembering the answers to the test questions.

### Why Continue to Give Tests?

If teachers know that students get stressed out about tests, why do they still give them? Believe it or not, both teachers and students benefit from tests. Tests measure how well students are learning the skills and information their teachers have been teaching them. And tests of all different sorts are a part of life – from the driving test your child will take one day to the test they will take if they decide to be a doctor.

### What Can You Do?

- ❖ Talk to your child. Just talking to someone about their anxiety can make them feel better. Have them describe what happens to you when they are taking a test and try to help you figure out some solutions. For instance, learning study skills can boost your test-day confidence, or a positive attitude going in will change their perspective about the test and allow them to think clearer.
- ❖ Help them to prepare for the test. Talk to them about paying attention in class, doing their homework, studying for the test. Using practice tests and sample test questions if available. On test day, they are more likely to feel calm if they feel like they know what to expect.
- ❖ Train them to expect the best. Teach them to think positively. Have them say to themselves, "I studied and I'm ready to do my best."
- ❖ Focus on blocking bad thoughts. Teach them to watch out for any negative messages they might be sending themselves about the test. These thoughts can make anxiety worse and make it harder your child to do well on the test.
- ❖ Help them accept mistakes. Assure them that everyone makes mistakes and that is alright.
- ❖ Teach them to breathe. Help your child learn breathing exercises that can help calm them down. Here's how to do it: inhale slowly and deeply through your nose, and then exhale slowly through your mouth. Have your child do this two to four times before a test or when they start to feel anxious and they may find it calming.

**“If you desire  
to make a  
difference in  
the world,  
you must be  
different  
from the  
world.”**

Elaine S. Dalton

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# Intangibles to Consider When Choosing a College

*Steve Hazell*

Students rightfully emphasize academic considerations when choosing a college, but it's also important to consider less obvious factors when narrowing down the list of colleges you are interested in. Realistically, you won't spend all your time studying or attending lectures, and the world that exists around the campus is going to play a role in how happy you are at college. Your state of mind when you are at college has an impact on how successful you will be as a student.

One important consideration is how far away from your home town the school is. This can go either way. Some people want to get as far away from their home town as possible, and others want to be able to return home regularly. Think about how often you hope to go home, and how much of a hassle you are willing to put up with when it comes to going home.

Additionally, the population of the town where the college is located is important to consider. There is no right or wrong answer, it just depends on what you are looking for. Some people are thrilled to be going to a large urban area, and others prefer to relocate to a town that has a small population. I went from a town of 12,000 to UW-Madison for my first semester of college and felt totally overwhelmed by the size of the city. My GPA suffered as a result. I transferred to UW-Stevens Point, which was a much better fit for me, and my grades improved considerably. This isn't meant as a criticism of UW-Madison- I have friends who went there and loved it. It just wasn't right for me.

Another way to get a feel for college intangibles is to spend time exploring the area around campus on foot. Are the surrounding areas safe and well kept up? Are there restaurants or coffee shops nearby that appeal to you? Do you see people doing activities that you like to do? If you ask people for directions, are they helpful?

You are more likely to have the college experience you hope for, and to be successful as a student, if you consider both the academic and intangible factors when you choose your college. The extra thought at the start of the process can result in a much better fit in the end.



# Technology Corner Update

*Lindsey Michels*

Looking for a resource to technology safety? Wondering what the current trends that students are doing online? Looking for updates on the latest apps, websites and online activity of your children? Well, there is a wonderful resource available and it's FREE!!!

The Protect Kids Online (PKO) Podcast is brought to you by the Wisconsin Department of Justice, Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force. This podcast is designed as a resource for parents, grandparents, guardians, or caregivers of children. Get information about the trends and updates on the latest apps, websites, and online activity of children 17 years of age and younger. Topics include:

- ❖ Tips and methods for combating online child exploitation and sextortion
- ❖ Activities of the Wisconsin ICAC Task Force
- ❖ App of the Week
- ❖ Internet safety laws
- ❖ Cyberbullying
- ❖ Healthy online habits
- ❖ Protecting your child from strangers online
- ❖ Safe sharing tips
- ❖ Responses to listener questions

Stay informed, and keep your children safe. Subscribe! [Click HERE for iTunes](#), [Click HERE for Google Play](#), or search for Protect Kids Online on your favorite podcast app! You can also listen or connect with them at [ProtectKidsOnlineWI.gov](http://ProtectKidsOnlineWI.gov).



## Keep your Contact Information Updated

*School District Offices*

Is the information in the school offices and on Infinite Campus current contact information? While trying to schedule IEPs or meetings will the staff be able to contact you?

We find that cell phone and household phone numbers frequently change. Double check that your mailing address is also correct so all mailings can reach you. The school district also uses emails to keep in touch with you. Is all of your information accurate? If not, please be sure to notify the office in writing regarding any change in contact information.

When it comes to scheduling IEPs we have a process of reaching you. By law we need to give three good faith attempts to contact you to schedule an appropriate time, date, and location of the meeting. Staff will call you to find a date/time that works the best for your family. Then an invitation will be mailed to your home. Please sign the form, let us know if you are able to attend the meeting, and return it in the envelope provided at your earliest convenience. After an appropriate amount of time an email will be sent with the invitation attached if no response is received. If you do not have an email address, the letter will be mailed again. The final attempt will be a phone call to confirm the time and date of the meeting. We will continue to try to reach you if time allows. If you receive another invitation after returning it, it is possible that your signed form is in transition so don't fret if you see another.

It is critical to have your contact information up to date so we can reach you and you can stay an informed parent.

## ASTOP Presentations

Todd Arft

Ripon Middle School and Catalyst recently had ASTOP come into our school to educate our students about sexual abuse & personal safety. In 6th grade they learned how to identify & respond appropriately to risky situations using ASTOP's risk reduction: Say NO, Get Away, & Tell Immediately. In 7th grade they learned that media influences our assumptions & how to "face the facts" by dispelling common myths of sexual abuse. In 8th grade students were given a hands-on opportunity to showcase their knowledge of sexual abuse & how to put a stop to it by playing ASTOP Jeopardy.

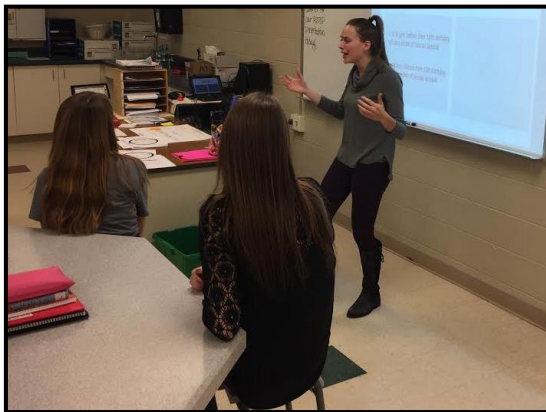
## Expanding Your Horizons STEM Conference

Todd Arft

On Saturday, November 19<sup>th</sup>, 41 Ripon Middle School and Catalyst students traveled to the University of Wisconsin Madison for the Expanding Your Horizons STEM Conference for young women. Students spent the day learning about careers in the science, technology, engineering and math fields.

Students were split into small groups, and lead through a day of hands-on workshops and workplace tours, where they found out what it is like to work in careers with a science and math focus. The girls were able to select the specific areas that interested them, and attend workshops correlated with those careers. Each workshop was led by a female professional in that specific field. Students each selected three different career exploration activities/workshops to attend.

The conference is a nationwide event, which gave our students the opportunity to interact with peers from a number of other schools. The event was a great way for the RMS and Catalyst group to see the prevalence of women in the STEM field, and begin to envision themselves as part of that movement. As a result, many students walked away with a better idea of what type of career they now wish to pursue.



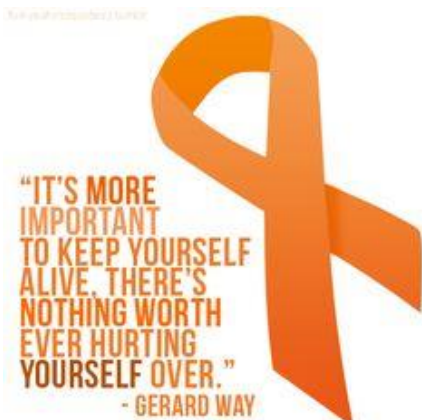
# Nonsuicidal Self-Injury/Cutting- What is it and what should parents know?

*Jolene Schatzinger, Mary Lyke, RN, BSN, and Kids Health*

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- 1) What is it?
  - a. Cutting is an attempt to interrupt strong emotions and pressures that seem impossible to tolerate. It may be related to broader emotional issues that need attention. Most of the time, cutting is not a suicide attempt.
  - b. Parents can help teens who cut - and the earlier, the better. Cutting can be habit forming and people can underestimate the risks of getting seriously sick or hurt along with it.
- 2) What should parents know?
  - a. Accept your own emotions about cutting. It's not your fault or your teen's fault.
  - b. Learn all you can about cutting and why teens do it and what can help them stop.
  - c. Stay positive - For example, it may help to:
    - i. Let your teen know you'll be there to talk to when feelings are painful or troubles seem too hard to bear.
    - ii. Help your teen create a plan for what to do instead of cutting when pressures get strong. For ideas, consult a School Counselor, School Nurse, or check out [www.adolescentselfinjuryfoundation.com/page11](http://www.adolescentselfinjuryfoundation.com/page11).
    - iii. Encourage your teen to talk about everyday experiences and put feelings, needs, disappointments, successes, and opinions into words.
    - iv. Be there to listen, comfort, and help your teen think of solutions to problems and offer support when troubles arise.
    - v. Spend time together doing something fun, relaxing, or just hanging out. You might take a walk, go for a drive, share a snack, or run some errands.
    - vi. Focus on positives. While it helps to talk about troubles, avoid dwelling on them. Make sure what's good about life gets airtime, too.
  - d. Be patient and positive.
  - e. Talk to your child. It may be difficult and your teen may resist your efforts, but don't give up.
  - f. Seek professional help from a qualified Mental Health Counselor who also can help your teen develop new coping skills.

If you have questions please contact your child's School Counselor or School Nurse.



# Second Step Curriculum Implementation

*Jocelyn Hoeper and the Committee for Children, Second Step Program: Review of Research*

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Years of educational research have demonstrated that the goal of bringing all students to high levels of academic achievement requires not only intellectual development, but social and emotional development as well. That is because students achieve academic success in part through their ability to get along with peers and teachers, manage their emotions, focus their attention, follow instructions, and avoid risky behaviors. The *Second Step* curriculum programs are well known and respected within the realm of social-emotional learning (often referred to as “SEL”) for their solid research base and student appeal. Elementary age students in the Ripon Area School District are among the more than 10 million students who benefit from their use in the US each year. Currently, all students in Ripon’s 4PS, Kindergarten, and First Grade classrooms receive weekly instruction in social-emotional learning topics through implementation of the *Second Step* program’s Early Learning and Skills for Social and Academic Success curriculums.

*Second Step* is a universal, classroom-based program designed to increase students’ school success and decrease problem behaviors by promoting social-emotional competence and self-regulation. It teaches skills that strengthen students’ ability to learn, have empathy, manage emotions, and solve problems. Students with these abilities are better able to participate in and benefit from classroom instruction.

## Skills for Learning

At the elementary level, skills for learning include such basic self-regulation skills as demonstrating effective listening behaviors, consciously focusing attention, remembering and following directions, staying on task, and assertively asking for help. These skills lay the foundation for constructive participation in all learning activities.

## Empathy

The *Second Step* program helps students develop the ability to have empathy for others which is the basis for helpful and socially responsible behavior. Young children with higher levels of empathy tend to be less aggressive, better liked, more socially skilled, and more academically successful. Being able to understand what another person is feeling prepares students to manage their own emotions and solve interpersonal problems. At the elementary level, the program teaches students skills for identifying emotions in themselves and others, labeling these emotions, taking the perspective of others, and showing compassion.

## Emotional Management

Teaching students to recognize their own strong emotions and use strategies to calm down has been shown to be effective in increasing their ability to cope with challenging situations and decreasing the likelihood of aggressive and other problem behaviors. Being able to identify, understand, and respond to how someone is feeling provides the foundation for helpful and socially responsible behavior, friendships, cooperation, coping, and conflict resolution. Strategies such as deep breathing and positive self-talk are taught to help students calm themselves when experiencing strong emotions, such as anxiety or anger, instead of acting on their first impulse. As a result, they are better able to use other skills, such as problem-solving, to make positive choices and get along with others.

## Problem-Solving

Many different interpersonal problems can have an adverse affect on children’s success in school. In fact, researchers have found that students’ academic achievement can be predicted at least as well by their early interpersonal skills as by their intellectual abilities! The ability to resolve interpersonal conflicts respectfully builds social competence. Socially competent children are both happier and more successful in school. The supportive

## Second Step Curriculum Implementation Continued

*Jocelyn Hoeper and the Committee for Children, Second Step Program: Review of Research*

relationships they are able to form with teachers and peers increase their sense of connection to school, help them do well in school and decrease the likelihood of their involvement in unhealthy or anti-social behaviors. The *Second Step* program teaches students to use four specific problem-solving steps after calming down. Creating a neutral problem statement, generating safe and respectful solutions, and evaluating the consequences of solutions facilitate the selection of pro-social solutions to interpersonal conflicts.

Research has shown that one of the most effective ways to prevent youth problems is to develop youths' social and emotional competence through proven SEL programs such as *Second Step*. Teaching social-emotional skills supports the mission of our schools to produce students who are academically and socially successful, and is a critical component in the education of the whole child.

### 30 Days of Random Acts of Kindness

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1. Clean up your neighbor's lawn or shovel their driveway/sidewalk
  2. Let someone get in front of you when you are in line
  3. Leave a thank you note in the mailbox for the mail carrier
  4. Tell a family member why you are thankful for them
  5. Donate a toy to Toys for Tots or other toy drive
  6. Donate food to the food pantry
  7. Make cookies for the lunch server at your school
  8. Smile and say "hi" to 5 people you don't know
  9. Volunteer at a soup kitchen
  10. Share with someone you don't know
  11. Make care packages for our armed forces
  12. Write a thank you letter to your parents
  13. Deliver treats to the police station/fire station
  14. Help your teacher clean up the classroom
  15. Give someone a compliment
  16. Send holiday cards to soldiers
  17. Read a story to sick kids
  18. Donate books to the library
  19. Help make dinner
  20. Give someone a hug
  21. Make someone laugh
  22. Send flowers to a hospital
  23. Do arts and crafts with younger kids
  24. Donate school supplies to a school
  25. Recycle paper and plastic goods
  26. Visit a nursing home
  27. Visit an animal shelter
  28. Make a craft for someone you love
  29. Sing carols at a hospital
  30. Give out candy canes to people

# In The New Year...

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

I want to learn...

I want to go...

I want to do more...

I want to read...

I want to improve...

I want to imagine...

I want to try...

I want to change...

I want to \_\_\_\_\_

In the new year I am going to...