

Dear Parents/Guardians,

My name is Dwayne Lumbsden and I am very excited to return to the Center School. I was previously employed with Center School from September 2013 to February 2019 as a School Social Worker and have found my way back home in a new position. I am very much looking forward to working with each and every family, both familiar and new to me. Although I am excited to return to Center, I understand that I am coming back during a tumultuous time. 2020 has been a complicated and trying year for each of us and affected everybody in various ways.

As the country and the world continue to absorb the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19), our interconnectedness has never been more clearly on display. Social distancing has been deemed necessary, which makes social and emotional connectedness even more critical. Now, more than ever, we understand how important it is to demonstrate empathy and resilience, build relationships across distance, and call upon our collective resolve to strengthen our schools and our communities.

A plan for the 2020-2021 school year for The Center School is to build on the importance of Social Emotional Learning (SEL). Social Emotional Learning, also known as Emotional Intelligence, is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions and develop the self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal skills that are vital for school, work, and life success. The process of SEL offers a powerful means to support one another – children and adults – during this challenging time. People with strong social-emotional skills are better able to cope with everyday challenges and benefit academically, professionally, and socially. Now more than ever, we want to build up our students and give them the tools that are necessary in order to not only survive this pandemic, but to thrive from it. Throughout the school year, your children will be exposed to Social Emotional Learning to give them as much success as possible in an effort to see them thrive. The counseling staff will address this throughout session both individually and in groups, while our teachers will incorporate this type of learning into the curriculum.

As we prepare for the reopening of schools throughout the state, I have included tips and suggestions for your consideration. Resources will continue to be provided throughout the entire school year. We would also like to continue holding digital Zoom sessions, led by our counseling staff, with any parents/guardians who'd like to participate as an effort to communicate and lean on each other during this time.

Lastly, I'd like to offer an encouraging word to each parent/guardian. Although we are currently living in a time that is trying, please remember your own resilience. You have faced challenges and adversity with your own special needs child, and you have overcome them and continue to work through them. As we teach our students every day, I am asking you to remember that you are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem and smarter than you think. You can and will get through this.

Once again, I am looking forward to working with each and every one of you and am looking forward to the day when we can see each other in person. Take care and please continue to be safe!

Sincerely,

*Dwayne Lumbsden, MSW*

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## SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING FOR PARENTS

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) highlights five essential areas for academic and relationship success. They are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. These aren't just areas intended for students and children; adults can also benefit from growing in these five areas as well. Regular practice in these areas is what is key to making them grow and remain long lasting. Here are some tips and guides on what you can do as parents to increase your growth in your families.

1. Parents need to take care of themselves – Even if it feels like the last thing you want to do, parents/guardians need to take care of their own mental and physical needs. Children and adolescents are sensitive to the stress of caretakers. Unknowingly, you could pass on your own stress and anxieties to your children. Simply put, you cannot show up for your child if you cannot show up for yourself. Even if it is fifteen minutes a day, parents should find time in their schedule to do something they truly enjoy and which makes them happy. This is a practice each individual in the house can explore as well.
2. Establish and maintain routines – Routines can give us a sense of safety and security due to the consistency they provide. Right now, amid the uncertainty of COVID-19, all of us are experiencing trauma. Disasters, forced isolation and other situations associated with the virus break students' usual routines. Having a daily routine, such as when they were physically in school, can help keep that consistency they had prior to quarantine. Visual routines made with a poster board or on an electronic device can also be very useful.
3. Quality Time - Many parents may be more physically present than they ever have because they are now home. But that does not mean they are truly present due to increased work demands while supporting learning at home. It is important to dedicate structured time to connection and not assume that it will happen organically because we are more "present" now than ever before. Be intentional about when you're connecting with children and when you are working. Set daily times for spending time together, even if it is sporadic time throughout the day and do your best to be present in these moments.
4. Practicing Kindness – Demonstrating kindness gives a more powerful message than just talking about it and it can help build gratitude during difficult times. In our current state, kindness, empathy and resilience are tools we should all be exhibiting on a daily basis. Practicing kindness for others can also help build an appreciation for our own lives. Ideas for demonstrating kindness to others during this time are having your children write a letter of thanks to essentials workers and checking in on family members and friends.
5. Be Creative! – When we allow ourselves to be creative, each of us put ourselves in a position to be vulnerable. This is important and an exercise we should do more often because we open up a part of ourselves that may be otherwise cut off, find opportunities to learn something about ourselves or others and opens up a new way to communicate. During this time of quarantine, it can be the perfect way to be creative and/or try something new. Ideas include trying a new cooking/baking recipe, playing board/card games, creating your own board/card games, virtual dance parties or building a fort. The limit is endless; let your creativity take over.

6. *Celebrate what you can* – Life is still going on, which means that there are still special occasions that are worth celebrating. As long as we stay as safe as possible, we should still be celebrating occasions such as birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, getting a license or getting accepted into college. You can even celebrate the small things and designate certain days in your house such as Taco Tuesday or Friday Funday. This gives the family something to look forward to and also doesn't let us forget about "the good stuff" in life. Research has indicated that when we stop to "savor the good stuff," we develop resilience to the negative events that may be happening in our lives.
7. *Practice active listening* - Do not assume that you know exactly what your child is feeling or is afraid of. Ask questions, listen actively and model eye contact, and then explain what you can in response to their questions. Validate that you see and acknowledge their feelings, fears and concerns. By validating our child's emotions, we help them better accept and understand their feelings, develop self-compassion, and empathize with others.
8. *Practice social and emotional learning daily* - Building important habits takes practice, and just as you brush your teeth every day, students and adults need daily opportunities to identify, express and manage their emotions. Our emotions and stressors change hour to hour and day to day, and it's important that we check in with ourselves and those around us in order to understand what we all need in order to work through those feelings and move through them together.

Please also visit these websites to stay properly informed about COVID-19:

[covid19.nj.gov](https://covid19.nj.gov) – COVID-19 informational hub for the state of New Jersey. Offers services and information about what the state of New Jersey has done to offer assistance with obstacles faced from COVID-19. Also has updated information from Governor Murphy.

[www.who.int](https://www.who.int) - World Health Organization website that has updated information about COVID-19 from across the world.

[www.cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) - Center for Disease and Control and Prevention. Provides information and news about COVID-19. Also provides numbers of current cases throughout the United States.