

# Culture COUNTS

October 2020

## Connecting around the “Campfire”

By Randi Downs

This year, more than ever, we need to make space for connections to happen — connections between our students and their peers, as well as connections between students and staff. One way to do this is by employing a relationship strategy from Gamestorming.com called “Campfire.” In this activity, small groups tell stories around random words or images (intentionally brainstormed by the teacher ahead of time) on index cards or sticky notes. Some examples might be learning, struggles, masks, family, etc. These 10-15 words will be used to connect experiences as students and staff tell their stories. If some of the students in your group are learning remotely, the same strategy can be done using Padlet. If you are utilizing an online gathering platform, like Zoom or Google Meet, you can share the Padlet link so that all students have access.

When you are ready to begin the storytelling, secure the words on a wall where they can be seen by everyone, and say that the “campfire is lit.” Participants can then take turns choosing a word and telling a story associated with that word. When I facilitated this strategy recently, I listened as individuals chose a word and told their story. I then moved that word to another wall in the room. When the next turn came, participants could connect to their peer’s story or choose another word from the word wall and tell their own story. If your students wish to add a word, that’s okay, too. This goes on until the facilitator puts the “campfire” out.

At the end, the group looks at the collection of words chosen by the storytellers and discusses any throughlines or trends. This provides an intimacy necessary for groups to grow and learn together. There will likely be laughter and there may be tears — this strategy makes space for it all. In my groups, however, we also discovered a common theme — hope. While some of our stories were sad, being together gave the group a connection as we moved forward together in anticipation of the upcoming school year.

If you would like to facilitate your own Campfire with students or staff, please contact me at [rdowns@ocmboces.org](mailto:rdowns@ocmboces.org) and I will be happy to help you plan so that it can be a positive and effective experience for you all.

“  
**Let us  
remember:  
One book, one  
pen, one child,  
one teacher  
can change the  
world.**”

— Malala Yousafzai

Welcome Back to a  
New School Year!



Turn to the second page  
to see more photos from  
the first week!

### In Online Contexts...

- Utilize breakout rooms in Zoom or another video conference platform to create campfire groups.
- Create a space for each group to record their words, such as Padlet.
- Provide instructions, and give students a time limit.
- Link the Padlets to one document so that learners can appreciate the experience of each group.

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# Welcome back! Thank you for a great first week!



## Self-care resources to use at home

Looking for tips and resources on reducing stress, supporting your loved ones, and getting through COVID-19? Instructional Coach Randi Downs recommends visiting Healing Hearts Wellness: <https://mailchi.mp/01c0e1a7bdb0/coronasupport>.



*Healing Hearts Wellness*

HOLISTIC SERVICES FOR MIND BODY AND SPIRIT



# Wellness Counts

## The Power of Positive Messages

Did you know that positive attitude and wellness are connected? Numerous studies have shown that people who have a positive attitude and are generally optimistic enjoy a better quality of life and health. Staff at OCM BOCES shared positive messages with their students, families and each other during the previous school year. They plan to continue this practice into the new school year.

Check out the Cortlandville Campus High School Special Education Staff Virtual Choir sharing a positive message of their own, with their cover of the song "Home" by Phillip Phillips:

<https://youtu.be/ZKD9QmO63KI>



Staff at Cortlandville got together on Zoom for Virtual Choir. Members of the choir not only sang along to "Home" by Phillip Phillips, but also played instruments, including the bass, drums, and classroom instruments.

## Mindful Activities with James Butler

We were so fortunate to have James Butler back in Student Services for opening day to share some mindfulness techniques for students and staff. Here is a resource from his website that you might find helpful:



### Check-in reminders:

- "Name it to tame it." -Dr. Dan Siegel
- "Emotions are data, not directives." -Dr. Susan David
- "It's a state, not a trait." -Dr. Dan Siegel
- We are not the emotion. Instead of saying, "I am (emotion word)." Use these as options: "I notice I am feeling \_\_\_\_\_" or "I feel \_\_\_\_\_" or "I recall that I was feeling \_\_\_\_\_."

### Other options for your check-in...

- Check in with your mind, body and heart. What do you notice?
- Name your emotions. Use "The Feelings Wheel" for help putting words to what you're experiencing in the moment.
- Using Zones of Regulation, what color zone represents how you're feeling in this moment?
- On a scale of 1-5 (1-lowest, 5-highest), how are you feeling in this moment?
- What song best represents how you're feeling in this moment?
- What movie/show (or character) best represents how you're feeling in this moment?
- What book (or character) best represents how you're feeling in this moment?
- What type of water best represents how you're feeling in this moment?
- If your body could talk, what would it say in this moment?
- Using any 5-10 words, how would you describe yourself in this moment?

## Recipe of the Month: Moist Chocolate Cake (Milk-free, egg-free recipe)



2-2/3 c. flour  
2 tsp. baking soda  
2/3 c. cocoa  
2 c. water  
2 tsp. vanilla  
2 c. sugar  
1 tsp. salt  
2/3 c. salad oil  
2 tsp. vinegar

1. Sift dry ingredients into a bowl.
2. Add liquid and mix well.
3. Bake in two greased layer pans or in a greased 13 x 9 x 2-inch oblong pan for 30-35 minutes in a 350 degrees oven until toothpick comes out clean. Cool and frost.  
NOTE: Batter will be very thin.

Thank you to Anita Parks for submitting this recipe!

# Wellness Counts

## Exercise and stress: Get moving to manage stress

**Exercise in almost any form can act as a stress reliever. Being active can boost your feel-good endorphins and distract you from daily worries. Here's an article from the Mayo Clinic:**

You know that exercise does your body good, but you're too busy and stressed to fit it into your routine. Hold on a second — there's good news when it comes to exercise and stress.

Virtually any form of exercise, from aerobics to yoga, can act as a stress reliever. If you're not an athlete or even if you're out of shape, you can still make a little exercise go a long way toward stress management. Discover the connection between exercise and stress relief — and why exercise should be part of your stress management plan.



### Exercise and stress relief

Exercise increases your overall health and your sense of well-being, which puts more pep in your step every day. But exercise also has some direct stress-busting benefits.

- **It pumps up your endorphins.** Physical activity may help bump up the production of your brain's feel-good neurotransmitters, called endorphins. Although this function is often referred to as a runner's high, any aerobic activity, such as a rousing game of tennis or a nature hike, can contribute to this same feeling.

- **It reduces negative effects of stress.** Exercise can provide stress relief for your body while imitating effects of stress, such as the flight or fight response, and helping your body and its systems practice working together through those effects. This can also lead to positive effects in your body—including your cardiovascular, digestive and immune systems—by helping protect your body from harmful effects of stress.
- **It's meditation in motion.** After a fast-paced game of racquetball, a long walk or run, or several laps in the pool, you may often find that you've forgotten the day's irritations and concentrated only on your body's movements. As you begin to regularly shed your daily tensions through movement and physical activity, you may find that this focus on a single task, and the resulting energy and optimism, can help you stay calm, clear and focused in everything you do.
- **It improves your mood.** Regular exercise can increase self-confidence, improve your mood, help you relax, and lower symptoms of mild depression and anxiety. Exercise can also improve your sleep, which is often disrupted by stress, depression and anxiety. All of these exercise benefits can ease your stress levels and give you a sense of command over your body and your life.

Source: [www.mayoclinic.org](http://www.mayoclinic.org)

### Have a suggestion for Wellness Counts?

We want to hear from you! Please submit any wellness suggestions for the newsletter to [wellness@ocmboces.org](mailto:wellness@ocmboces.org).