

>> >> Thank you for tuning into Healthy Minds Podcast. We host conversations with people who are really good listeners and we ask them to share with us. I'm Lucy Caldwell

and I work for the Fairfax County public schools.

This is National school psychologist week.

And to recognize this important observance at invited or Herndon high school psychologist Ronnie Lancaster to be on the podcast right

has been a school psychologist in Fairfax County public schools for over 20 years, working with children from preschool through high school ages

his extensive experience providing comprehensive psychological evaluations and navigating the special education process as part of her job.

She conducts individual and group counseling services to students with a variety of needs and provide spirit in teacher consultations and guidance, specific areas of Ronnie's interest include using behavioral and cognitive based techniques.

We'll talk about that today you might be wondering what are those and positive psychology strategies for anxiety,

self esteem, issues, social skills, training ADHD and autism spectrum disorders

Ronnie received her master's in science and education psychology and a certificate of advanced graduate studies, specializing in school psychology from Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts.

She received her bachelor of arts degree from Providence College where she majored in psychology and minor didn't athletics.

I like to tell people who are listening a little bit about the background.

So they can understand who works era to CPS and the fact is

people come from everywhere welcome Roni and I'm glad you're here.

Well thank you Lee see I'm really excited to be here during school psychology awareness.

Week, yes, you are the person that was selected

by Mike axle or who heads up your program

and I think it's great because this is an opportunity to highlight the role

of the psychologist in our schools, a lot of parents or listeners might not realize that every school

has at least one

assigned to each school and I think that's wonderful.

So

tell us about a day in the life of a school psychologist, what does it look like and if you'd like you can break it up into the pre covid and now

okay what it would have these the clip.

Well first of all I just want to say.

>> 2020 has been unusual in trying year for everybody and you know education in school systems are trying their best to support the needs of our students.

And so

in thinking about

what our school psychology awareness, the is which is the power possibility.

I feel like this is a positive message that is hopeful

and it helps us

think of how to grow the salient and how to read ourselves

and with power implying that there are things that can happen in will happen.

And so when I think of the life of a school psychologist yeah, my day is different every day. You know it really kind of depends on the day and what the needs of the students in the school or not. There are some things that I do on a daily basis that are fairly consistent, you know I am a team member of local screening committee. So I do participate in a lot of meetings for screening children for special education, a large role of school psychologists is to do psychological assessments. And that may be one thing that your listeners have heard that we do right. What does that mean and how does a parent know that they would like to have an assessment for their child. Well, typically in a regular year for school. We have school teams that meet that review students progress in we try to keep track of students who may be at risk students who may be failing or not achieving how we would hope they would be achieving and so through that process we tried different interventions in students are still not progressing. We make referrals what we call our local screening committee. Now sometimes referrals come from teachers and most often were in the school building that is our prime source of referrals. Now that we're in covid parents are at home with their son children and their seen stem struggle academically and so I found this year, I feel like more of our referrals are coming from that parents will be absolutely and sometimes through our counselors because their counselors are often in touch with the parents as well. What are some of the struggles that you're seen with students this year and you know I I imagine that it's probably pretty hard for parents a lot of parents. Yeah, I would agree I I really empathize with our parent and teacher community a lot of our teachers are also parents to try and you know you're at home trying to juggle supervising children to make sure that they're learning also that most folks to a full-time job, so it is overwhelming. And so one of the common themes that I'm seeing this year is how can we help keep our children focused. The virtual learning looking at a screen all day is difficult for anyone to me, especially a younger population are younger students. And so that you know I tend to work in high school so most of my referrals air my experiences recently as with the high school population and even at the high school level and parents are struggling with helping keeping their children engaged during the virtual

school setting so apparent calls you or they go through the school and get to you somehow yet Stan what do they tell you with the problems they're seeing or having it and I'm trying to get at how does a parent know if there's a problem.

Well, we just finished the 1st quarter right so the first kind of clue that they can do is when they get the report card or going through the parent you insists is checking the grades, right so parents often see that there's children or not receiving Gray's that they had been in the past last night so kind of a dip in those grades, sometimes the first clue or seen that work is not being completed.

That's something that the teachers have often been reporting that some students just are not turning in work so they might give the assign it virtually.

Yeah and the student may have checked in, but then they disappeared or something during the claim that it might not be completing that assignment.

Yeah

in Paris unless you're sitting there right there with the child they may not be aware of it especially in high school right and so that's why I think it's important to keep the communication lines open with the teacher and it is you know it your way you know, teachers letting parents know, you know look you're just a child is not keeping up with they work assignments and a little concerned, you know that's what we have in terms as well.

And then you know at the same time parents being able to reach out to teachers and saying look I've noticed

my child is not really doing extra work

or he doesn't seem to know how to turn in because there's also been that technology issue right knee not knowing how to submit sometimes

their work virtually so it's about getting to the problem, what is the problem, yes, basically

so what suggestions do you have for parents who are maybe there have a job and they come home in the evening.

What kind of question should they be asking their student.

You know, because I remember when my kids are home how was your day

that's not what you're supposed to ask you're supposed to sort of ask for specific things to

get at certain information what kind of questions do you suggest parents ask.

I would tend to think that they first want to ask specific questions about maybe one thing they learned today so thinking about the classes that they're taking you know what is something that they learned that they can take away.

From the class period itself

and maybe what assignments did you do what type of work.

Did you complete during class

and you have any homework that you need to do

is there anything you're struggling with that I can help you with

and if not if the parent can help you know trying to help them problem south of where to go get that help

that's a really good idea I know I would have been in big trouble with mass to when my son because they were in those classes that I just gosh.

I don't remember what year was but

wasn't that far along when I definitely would have had the issues and had to be

calling the math teacher.
So this sounds to me like
we're all learning this is new for all parents and in as well as for the teachers
and the staff
and it sounds like to me just keeping engaged
with the staff members is so important for parents isn't it.
It really is keeping engage first of all with their own children so knowing you
having those conversations
and then you know following up with teachers if they're student is struggling if
their child is struggling
because I think that's going to be kind of that red flag for us to know like oh
maybe you should go to teacher office hours or maybe need to you know if it's not an
academic issue, you know some kids are having emotional issues some his had
performance issues where
they can sit and listen
to the lecture but then they don't know how to demonstrate that knowledge on paper
or in an assignment
and so being able to talk to the teacher to to problem solve that and if the teacher
can help media's talking to a school counselor or then reaching out to the school
psychologist and
you know part of our role is really to help
identify lower those barriers to learning so kids can learn and teachers educators
can educate.
And so that's you know a real crux of what school psychologists do.
And I kind of like to think of us as like a
a leg of a
3 legged stool right then that the educators has one leg parents as the other like
critical team members and then school psychology kind of falls into that 3rd leg
where we are all trying to lift our students up to help them grow and achieve
and we can work together as a team so when we can see children having challenges.
We want to take time to stop and identify what that challenges in what may be behind
it, you know I had mentioned again, you know there's so many factors that go into
academic challenges that kids have
and being able to problem solve that with someone else can often be helpful because
then that leads to what interventions speak to be put in place.
What are some of the I completely agree with you.
What are some of the
things that parents can do with their children with their students.
>> To try to look at resiliency and us thinking about today, it's to rainy dreary
day.
But if you look up and you see the clouds there are beautiful shapes and
so to sort of find that silver lining in to look up.
When a lot of things can seem down and sometimes you know when you look at the news
and
you pay attention to sort of social media and everything going on around you.
It can be overwhelming so with
resilience strategies are techniques not only do you
have suggestions for parents but
yourselves and staff members.
So you don't burn out so that you can handle and all them

psychologist since this is school psychology week.

What do you use in what are the helpful tools.

He suggests for others, that's.

>> Excellent question really X.

And I think

for parents at home with their kids you want to make sure that you have time away from the screen, I can't stress that enough.

You know kids are on the screen parents are on the screen majority of the day for school.

So I think it's important to take that screen break go outside get some fresh air screen to mostly draining and they they really are

and I think

there's something about being outside in nature that done.

The juvenile, it's folks you know take those deep breaths

you know we have to take time to breathe.

And time to see.

What is good in our life.

And what we can be grateful for

and so

by doing things like

Benin nature exercising,

you know that it comes back to our physical well-being is as well, you know starting with the basics we want to make sure we're getting enough sleep.

We're eating properly.

And in that we

do some type of physical activity, it doesn't mean you have to play sport or you know go run 10 miles maybe it's a walk around the block.

Maybe it's getting on the treadmill for 10 minutes, you know whatever it may be just getting just moving itself is positive and and gives your body time

to

basically

get rid of stress, you know exercise helps you get rid of stress sort of reset yes incident.

How do how does your team in the your colleagues do it.

We really I can imagine some of the stories that you hear the challenges that you see

are quite emotional.

They are in.

We have to be sure we're practicing self-care and I think that's very important.

I'm very

thankful that I work in a department with leadership that also finds that to be important because if we're not taking care of ourselves how can we take care of others right,

yes, and so

what I have found talking to colleagues that people are doing to take care of themselves.

Are some of the things I already talked about rain.

Lot of people like to go for hikes they go outside the exercise outside

try to be social with each other, you know talking to each other about difficult

cases and is often not helpful because then we can get validation or we can get suggestions from each other.

And just talk through difficult problems together.

We also were to take time to do things to develop our own interests, you know, whether it's music

reading gardening

you know having some type of other interest that you can Foster

is also a way to do practice self-care

and that will come in handy when all this is over maybe someday yes that we don't see the end in sight.

But we know somehow that we will get through this

and then what what we can to have come from what's going to emerge, I think about that a lot.

Yeah, I think a school psychologist or folk focus often is trying to assess the challenge.

And then how can we turn this into an opportunity for growth yeah, nice how can we take some difficult challenge in our life.

Still remain hopeful, and know that we can move forward

and there are things like

COVID-19 that are out of our control right, you know their circumstances in life that happen.

That are not in one's control.

But there are things we can do to cope.

And there are things that are in our control.

In this trying to manage what we can control.

Yeah really good point and I love what you said about turning it into an opportunity for growth.

This has been hard it's been hard period.

And let's say there's somebody out there who might be listening in who's had let's say 3 really horrible traumatic,

sad things happen

in their life in within the course of a few days.

Let's just say that

what advice do you have for that person.

Well first of I just want to listen.

I want to hear their story.

I want them to feel comfortable

and trust me enough that they can tell their story because sometimes just telling about the experience is comforting itself, you not be judged for it.

And then

so to have someone that you can talk to yes and so everybody who's listening make sure you have that person

that is very important in you know if it's not someone in your family, maybe it's a friend, maybe it's a mentor, maybe it's someone in the school.

You know it is very important that we still have connections to people.

Even though we may feel isolated at home right now.

And sometimes there's that fine line of how much

Stu you want to be that person who keeps complaining to a friend or keeps you know sort of dumping on them how do you balance being that person and

knowing when

maybe I'd set a little too much to that personally in might be bringing them down. You know, I don't know there's probably a term for that. I think you know you have to just be mindful of other people's plates and other people, you know everybody has their own story right way and has their own challenges that they're dealing with so you know you can check in with that person is too much and yeah, and let birdie knew like you know asking them for what they're feeling is with hearing all the information and maybe that could be a sign that you may need to talk to somebody who is more of a professional you know if you find yourself constantly talking to friends about difficulties, you're having maybe that's the point where we reach out to you know some type of mental health person to receive additional support in its OK I think part of what school psychologists do is we're trying to bring awareness to mental health issues and the stigma ties it right. And I feel like I'm that's one thing we're trying to do with this podcast as well as with a healthy mind. Some Web pages and in collaboration with Fairfax County's healthy mines program are really trying to stigmatize health mental health issues. You know you would take care of yourself if you had a broken leg. Why don't you take care of yourself in the same way when you're struggling with substance use or any other type of issue that seems to be prolonged and I think it seems with the covid in the pandemic in general as the months go on and now the days are shorter and you know the holidays are coming which are already sort of hit or miss as far as people's emotions, you know people are supposed to be happy and the holidays, they're supposed to want to be with family but back bring about its own set of issues and trauma, frankly, yes, enough for some people the holidays are just stressful whether it is trying to manage family or perhaps you know you lost a loved one. In is just a reminder that that person is not there. So holidays in itself can be stressful. I think part of it is being able to prepare yourself emotionally for that and that again comes back to that self-care how are we taking care of ourselves and being sure that those basic physical needs are being met first. One of the issues I am actually hearing from some of our teenagers, yeah is sleep is a problem here stain up really Lee doesn't the screen cause a problem getting yeah so it isn't you know, I try to tell students to get on a schedule I think this is very important. If you're on a schedule, you know school kind of gives you some type of routine you have to be your class they last a certain amount of time you get breaks built in and then school ends but after school to you want to have it and evening schedule you want to have time for yourself to relax what have time to do your homework and eat maybe spend time

with friends and family.

And then you would have time to unwind right which means putting away the screen. And I do talk to students sometimes about the social media use to well, it's a great way to connect with people especially during this time

where we can have as many personal interactions.

We want to make sure that the social media is a positive thing in her life not a negative thing if it becomes

something that's making you feel bad about yourself

stay away from it you can turn it off you don't have to that's in your control you don't have to look at it.

But I do think you know half hour before bedtime putting away the screen.

Maybe doing something that's going to relax you like reading a book maybe taking a bath.

Do you think sleep has always been a problem for teenagers or is it sort of worsening because of the covid in the pandemic

I think it has worsened a little bit.

I think it is and has always been a problem first of all because their circadian rhythms

are biologically tree to stay up later

in you know sleep in a little bit later and so you know with school starting early they can have

to adjust against their biology.

But I do think that with covid it everybody's at home is how you lose track of time right

had again I think that structure and thinking about you know having a schedule of some sort.

I really like that idea that suggestion for parents.

In especially as it's gone lot

on, you know people thought in the beginning this would be over.

We get to go to our concerts in the summer,

you know vacations and all of that and to it so that it has been disheartening how did you get drawn to the field

of psychology in school psychology specifically that's a great question to.

Well when I was in college, I was studying psychology and I had always enjoyed

working with children and so you know I had needle through you know high school can be set up a Boston area yet and then

also you know doing some meaning when I was in grad school as well.

But

right after college, I worked at a group home with children with traumatic brain injury.

And so while I was there.

One of the psychologist who was at the program

and he had really inch I was always interested about how the brain works how children learn.

You know emotions in regulation in half

behavior kind all interact, yeah, and the development of the child

and so he was he had offered a class actually through the place that I was working in that really kind of inspired me to

think about how I could learn about

the brain and how kids learn and then apply that in a school setting.
And so when I
that was kind of my initial spark to apply to a program for school psychology in
once there I really became intrigued about
initially the psych it's going to be a a fancy where the same metrics or how the
testing
kind of revealed different at different aspects of a person, you know how they learn
how they process in motion and so it.
It was just very it's inspiring in lightning and
because I wanted to work with the school age population in us school psychology
really fit.
She started looking around and Fairfax got lucky.
Yes, I was very lucky to get hired by Fairfax County.
And I've actually spent most my whole career here.
They really think that
speaks to how well we are supported
right in this County, and you know mental health.
Since when I started back in 99 to where we are now yeah,
I've seen a great increase in the need for mental health and
support for students absolutely I completely agree with that.
>> And I think talking about it and just getting mental health on the map and
having all of our psychologists and social workers and counselors
to talk about what they do here at the healthy minds.
Podcast
I think is been really enlightening and I hope parents are finding it in lightning
too.
We talked a little bit about structuring and in 9.
We don't have a whole lot of time left but I want to
ask you about goal setting how important is goal setting.
It's funny you ask that I was actually.
>> In a virtual class the other day talking to students about goal setting and it
is very important.
I always thought so yeah, it in its 20 year.
Why.
Well, I talked to the students.
The other day
as they were ending 1st quarter in starting new quarter.
It's a great time for reflection.
In 4 goals that and so you know looking back at her 1st quarter that was all
distance learning virtual, what went well.
What did you struggle with
looking at what you struggled with what kind of goal killing now set for this next
quarter.
That you want to be a teen double in achievable right that you wanted to be
something that you can actually meet we don't want to set goals that are so lofty
will never meet them.
We want goals to be reachable
and so maybe it's so I realized I wasn't keeping up with my school work.
Right right so gold, maybe then well.
Do the assignment when it is a sign when I have that asynchronous time

use that Monday as a day to catch up on school work to meet with teachers if I didn't understand the concept.

You know those for the type a smaller goals that I want the students to think about because like I said you want to be make them achievable and it gives you something to work for and I think it also

works towards that growth and promote he helped to absent as if you feel like there's something you're working towards.

And there's something that you can change you can be hopeful about it and improving yourself and your situation,

what do you have suggestions on for listeners on how

they can help their child or their somebody they care about 6 goals is there a resource that you would recommend or can they talk to someone

sure they can definitely contact their school if you know they have

if they notice a specific challenge that their child has having you know if you want to try to reach a school psychologist.

We are

you know trying to help parents identify what the problems may be a problem solve with them and so they can

all of school psychologists I think are listed on the school website with our e-mails

also if you go to the Fairfax County Web page under psychological services,

all of the psychologist in schools that they are saying to are listed there with their e-mails

you can also just call the school if you call the school most of the front office staff know who the school psychologist is right and Kerry for you to that person.

And I think you know again starting small and then celebrating the success, yeah, it's the incremental success

and that's part of being resilient to being able to see the strength within your children

acknowledging them and fostering them.

We tend to especially now during covid to get into this negative mindset.

Right and part of what I want people to do

is to have hope

that they can grow out of this difficult time and that we can be the zillion

you know a school psychologist in his educators we've had to adapt to be flexible with how we usually 2 things right and

enlightened me to the to the fact that

you know I wasn't great with technology.

I've learned so much and so it is a learning process for lifelong learners people don't stop learning in challenging situations.

Motivate us to learn

absolutely and you've never done a podcast before and look at you now.

I guess.

So there's lots of new things and I do agree with you so much.

>> That looking for those challenges and how we can address them in our lives or in people we care about and talking about it and I think that's what you're talking about wind.

You mentioned the goal saying you had specific things he said about it.

>> Yes in you know our healthy minds blog on the Fairfax can let's say is an excellent resource it really is they provide lots of information from things like

study skill how to foster
social emotional learning
in how to talk to your kids about stress and how to manage stress.
So there's just executive functioning skills and there's just so much information
within those blocks that I
hope our parents and listeners.
Red bull that could be won gold people could walk away from this podcast with is
just take a look once a week and check out the fcps healthy minds website
and I agree you're going to learn something every time it's also if you're on social
media,
check out their twitter feed and the psychology group you all have a twitter feed.
Yeah, we have a psychologist twitter account as well as an instagram account so you
can follow us there as well there's really good information
and I think you know as parents and
people care about kids it we have to advocate for them.
If they don't raise themselves.
We have to actually do the hard work and
even though sometimes we're all overwhelmed, it's really up to all of us to
know what the resources are work with you schools, whether it's the psychologist or
the social worker,
or the teacher or especiales teacher anybody at the school.
We'll help you
and I think you know, especially now I've seen it I see it every day that people are
coming together again when you say look at the positive.
I see that from where I sit in I'm fortunately, you know, I'm not as hands on.
But
I do see that I hear the stories you have any special stories you want to share as
we get ready to close out.
Any success that you see maybe with a student or a parent,
you know kind of that ah ha moment.
Well, there's so many to talk about ways of thinking about a specific situation.
And I ask that because sometimes people would think school psychologist you know,
and
you'd get sort of a little
tightening up we're a little nervous when you hear that term, but I say let's talk
about the hope and the success that you see.
Yes, so I seen students who
have had very difficult time due to that motion a-town lunges turn
in often times it's it's complex so while the debt
presenting symptom might beings I 80
being able to help parents realize that underneath that perhaps is a learning
disability,
or
you know a lack of confidence in those are skills we can help kids build the unseen
then the students themselves
getting the support they need
and being successful in making growth academically and emotionally
and sometimes socially too you know
hearing about the kid who's made that friend.
You had a difficult time

making friends.

Having students come back and thanking you
for listening,
and Fort sane.

You gave me the confidence to be able to do X y or Z.

Imagine that's incredibly well it is very rewarding
and having parents thank you for helping them through difficult situations,
you know thinking back I had a parent who.

Liz had a child he was struggling with attending school because of
a sickness and we work together with

you know as a team, it's cool to help provide the student with
ways to accommodate their academics that they can still be successful because the
very high achieving kid, yeah.

It help with that transition back to school and so they didn't feel so far behind
and then have that additional stress on top of them

which was an aggravated

a medical condition so being able to provide them.

You know opportunity to share that information and give them the support they need.

Well happy national school psychology week and

I really appreciate you being here with us today and before you go.

We like to ask a couple of questions just to get at the heart of you OK, what's the
oldest thing you have in your freezer

oh my goodness that's a great question.

I am trying to think it's probably like frozen vegetables, yeah.

>> They last a long time they did OK.

>> What's your most unusual talent.

My most unusual talent.

An interesting question to I'm a golfer so maybe I know what that's my self care,
yeah, absolutely

got to focus on that

and what do you think is the best thing about working from home.

The best thing from working from home.

Well first of all I don't have to commute.

It's huge about Loudoun County so

the commute is a big difference.

So I could be available.

I think feel like longer

to parents and students and I actually feel like I'm having
more conversations with parents.

That's great.

It's really encouraging to hear.

Well thank you again for being with us today and for celebrating

and I encourage anybody who is listening please reach out to your school
psychologist on any resources or any information you'd like to talk about with them
and I know if they can't help you,

they'll know somebody who can within that school system

to thank you again for being here and if you have a topic he'd like healthy minds
podcast or explore,

just let us know send in your suggestions, healthy mind.