

August 2011

Dear St. Petronille Parents,

My favorite song this summer was *Knee Deep* by the Zac Brown Band ... if you listen to US99, you probably heard it a few (hundred) times! For me, it just captured the spirit of “getting away from it all,” and I have always identified with the water as a place to feel at peace and connected. I have to admit I was kind of surprised that so many other people identified with the song, too, since it’s been #1 on the country charts much of the summer. I guess I’m not the only one who wants to be knee deep in relaxation!

Yet here we are ... about to be knee deep in another school year! Yikes, where did the summer go? Are you ready for homework, after school activities, playdates, parties, sports, friendship ups and downs, academic challenges, social leaps of faith and other assorted, exciting adventures of school?

These first few weeks are definitely a transition time, and it will be harder on some families than others. A little nervousness is normal (“I don’t have any good friends in my class!” or “I don’t know my teacher at all!” or “I’ll never be able to keep up with all that homework!”), and it can be difficult to get back into the routine of earlier mornings and bedtimes, that’s for sure. Here are a few thoughts that might help smooth the way:

- *Give kids time to adjust.* That first week or two can be full of anxiety, so be patient as you settle into a new normal. As routines are redeveloped and established, it should get easier. Some kids have a better tolerance for transitions than others, so to help with that:
- *Highlight fun things about school:* seeing friends, cool school supplies, new adventures. When you ask about their day, have them name two good things that happened during the day. If they can’t come up with anything, emphasize that they made it through the day!
- *Listen to your child’s worries, but don’t try to solve them.* Instead, help them think through the problem, remind them of how they overcame their fears in the past. This will foster independence and boost their confidence.
- *Consider adjusting your schedule temporarily.* During those first weeks, kids can benefit from extra time with their parents at the end of the day, so they can air their concerns or just have a little down time with someone who loves them!

As for me, your school social worker, I will try to be extra sensitive to your children during those first weeks of school. I’ll do a lot of walking around, introducing myself into classrooms, checking in with anyone who needs extra support and just being present to all. If you have a concern you’d like to make me aware of, please don’t hesitate to call or come by my office any time!

During the year, I will be available to your children in a variety of ways. I am often in the classrooms working with the kids on things like teamwork, friendship, bullying, social skills, mental health, etc., and I work with students individually or in small groups in my office as well (for example, on things like anxiety, worries, peer problems, grief, coping with family transitions such as divorce). Referrals can come from you, teachers or the students

themselves, but I will seek your permission for ongoing sessions. Also, if you need a referral to a community resource, please call. I am happy to try to help you in any way I can.

A few more things: this year, I am very excited to once again have an intern to work beside me here at St. Petronille. Jenny Jarrin will join me on Thursdays, and she is getting her Master's Degree from the Adler School of Professional Psychology. I hope you will have an opportunity to meet her, and I know your children are going to love her!

We will also be having Parent Talks again this year ... not only on Tuesday mornings as in the past, but on a selection of days to accommodate the requests of those who could not come on Tuesdays. We are going to have some great speakers, and I will post our schedule soon. One date I ask you to please reserve is October 26, when Alexian Brothers will sponsor a screening of the movie *The Race to Nowhere* at the Arcada Theatre in St Charles at 7pm. This is a don't-miss exposé about the price of privilege, and I know some parents have seen it and recommended it to me ... and I am so excited to be able to bring it to you. Tell all your friends and neighbors.

We'll be offering Rainbows again this fall as well ... more information to follow. Rainbows is a support group for children who have experienced loss through divorce or death. And yes, we will have our Academic Mentoring program up and running before too long ...

Well, as you can see, I have much more to tell you, and I guess it is obvious ... I am getting "knee deep" in school, and it has barely begun! Let me just say that I am really looking forward to seeing each and every one of your children and to working with you as well. And I am deeply honored to be working with Dr. Kelly and the amazing St. Petronille staff for this, my 8<sup>th</sup> year. Thank you for including me in your community!

Blessings,  
Kathy Gudonis, LCSW  
Alexian Brother Parish Services  
In partnership with St. Petronille School

p.s. How to contact me? I am at St. Pet's Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. You can call me at school, 630-469-5041, x3102. Another way to reach me is email, [Kathryn.gudonis@alexian.net](mailto:Kathryn.gudonis@alexian.net). For those of you who had my cell phone number, it will be changing as of September, so it's best to use email on my "days off!" Thanks!