

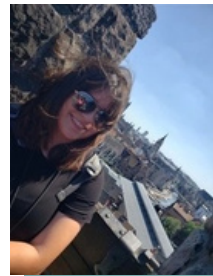


Providing evidence-based substance misuse prevention services by enriching life skills through education and strength-based practice, providing creative outlets and enhanced youth protective factors.

NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2026

MEET OUR PREVENTION SPECIALIST



MAE JESSE
Apollo Elementary School

I joined Eckerd Connects two years ago as a Prevention Specialist and have since had the opportunity to help launch the program at Apollo Elementary in Titusville. It has been such a rewarding and exciting experience!

My educational background is rooted in human services and mental health, and I bring seven years of experience working in this field. Outside of working with my kiddos, I enjoy traveling and exploring new places. Fun fact: Switzerland is my favorite destination I've visited so far, and I'm looking forward to returning—especially after jumping off the Swiss Alps! Always remember to breathe in, breathe through, breathe deep, and breathe out.

DID YOU KNOW?

Big Feelings Don't Always Use Words

Kids don't always know how to explain how they feel. Sometimes stress or big feelings show up in their bodies or behavior instead of words. Noticing these changes early can help adults give kids the support they need.

A child who is struggling may:

- Say they have a stomach ache or headache often
- Feel tired or have trouble sleeping
- Want to be alone more than usual
- Stop enjoying things they used to like
- Get upset or frustrated more easily
- Show changes in how or when they eat

★Try this at home: Notice the Clues

Ask your child open-ended questions like "What was the best (or hardest) part of your day?" or "Is there anything you wish adults understood better?"

COPING CORNER

Simple Tools for Big Feelings

When kids feel overwhelmed, small activities can help them calm down and feel safe.

Try This: 5-4-3-2-1 Reset

Ask your child to:



NAME 5
THINGS THEY CAN SEE



TOUCH 4
THINGS AROUND THEM



LISTEN FOR 3
SOUNDS



NOTICE 2
SMELLS



THINK OF 1
THING THAT MAKES THEM FEEL CALM

THIS ACTIVITY HELPS SLOW DOWN BIG FEELINGS AND HELPS KIDS FOCUS ON THE MOMENT

SPECIAL DATES

February

Monthly Calendar

February 7 - Send a card to a Friend Day:

Have your child make a card or write a note to someone who makes them feel happy or feel supported

February 14-20 - Random Act of Kindness Week:

Try one kind act each day (examples: say something nice, help with a chore, share a smile, invite someone to play)

February 24- March 2 - National Eating Disorder Awareness Week

This week is good to talk about how food helps our bodies grow strong, avoid negative comments about bodies or food, and encourage balance, kindness, and self-care



Each school day we work with youth on ways to build their personal strengths.

Join our efforts in ensuring they LIVE BEYOND these activities and have an opportunity to practice these skills with you and with their community.

PREVENTION TOPIC: EMOTIONAL AWARENESS

Kids feel many different emotions every day. Some feelings are happy and exciting, while others feel confusing or hard. You never know what someone else may be going through, which is why kindness, patience, and understanding matter so much. Learning how to notice feelings and handle them in healthy ways can help kids feel safer, calmer, and more confident.



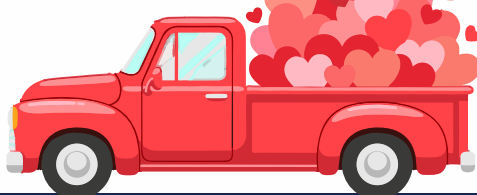
Emotional awareness means being able to see and name how we feel. When kids can say, "I feel worried," "I feel sad," or "I feel frustrated," they are more likely to ask for help and find ways to feel better.

Healthy coping means using safe and helpful ways to deal with big feelings. This can include taking deep breaths, talking to a trusted adult, taking a break, or doing something calming like drawing or listening to music.

WHEN KIDS LEARN THESE SKILLS, THEY CAN:

- Calm their bodies
- Talk about problems instead of keeping them inside
- Feel more confident at school and at home
- Make healthy choices when things feel stressful

Families play an important role in helping kids build these skills. When adults listen, talk openly about feelings, and practice coping tools together, kids learn that they are not alone and that it's okay to ask for support.



SIGNS A CHILD MAY NEED EXTRA SUPPORT

All kids have hard days. When changes last a long time or start to affect sleep, school, or friendships, it may be time to check in.

Some signs to watch for:

- Spending less time with friends or family
- Complaining about not feeling well often
- Getting upset very quickly
- Sleeping much more or much less
- Skipping meals or worrying a lot about food



HOW CAREGIVERS CAN SUPPORT



You don't need all the answers. Being kind and present matter most.

Ways to start a conversation:

- "I noticed you seem quieter lately. How are you feeling?"
- "You don't seem like yourself. Want to talk or spend time together?"
- "I'm here for you if you need help."

Helpful things adults can do:

- Listen without interrupting
- Keep daily routines when possible
- Offer comfort and reassurance
- Ask for extra help if needed



AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Holiday Stress Busters - Make a list of things or activities that help everyone feel calm.

Kindness Countdown - Do one small act of kindness a day

Family Talk Time - Use meal or car rides to ask: "What was the hardest part of your day? What helped you get through it?"

Create a Comfort Kit - Include a journal, fidget, coloring page, or positive notes