



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

APRIL 2026

## MEET OUR PREVENTION SPECIALIST



**MARYROSE CASCINA**  
**Highlands Elementary School**

I am the Prevention Specialist at Highlands Elementary School with Eckerd Connects. I've been with the organization for over six years, and I love helping students feel safe, supported, and confident. I care a lot about building strong connections, making sure everyone feels included, and creating spaces where kids can be themselves and have fun. I enjoy rowing to stay active, I'm always ready for an adventure (even the ones that start super early), and my favorite color is green. I also love playing The Legend of Zelda, and I'm proud to be Argentinian and Dominican. I bring a lot of energy, positivity, and community spirit into everything I do at Highlands.

## COPING CORNER



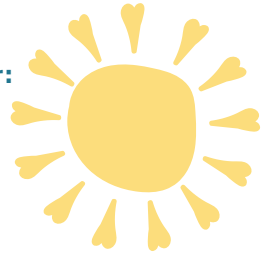
Stress can feel overwhelming. When that happens, kids do not need to fix the whole problem right away. They just need to calm their body first. A calm body thinks more clearly, makes better choices, and is better able to ask for help.

This is why we teach coping skills in our programs. When kids practice these tools during calm moments, they are ready to use them when things get hard. Think of it like a fire drill — you practice so that when the moment comes, the right steps feel natural.

### Try this simple four-step reset together:

- Pause** and plant your feet
- Breathe** five slow breaths in and out
- Move** your body for one minute
- Choose** one small next step

This helps kids calm their bodies before they solve the problem.



## DID YOU KNOW?

**Stress is normal and manageable**  
Stress is a normal part of life. A little stress can help kids get ready for a test or try something new. Too much stress can make it hard to think, sleep, or stay calm.

The good news is that healthy habits can help:

- **Sleep helps the brain rest**
- **Water helps the body work well**
- **Movement can lower stress and boost mood**
- **Time with caring adults helps kids feel safe and supported**

### Try this at home: Ask Questions

**Ask:** "What helped you feel calm today?"

**Make a calm kit:** Fill a small box with a journal, a fidget toy, crayons, or a few kind notes. Let your child reach for it when things feel too big.

**Model it:** Let your child see you use a coping skill. Say out loud: "I'm feeling stressed, so I'm going to take some slow breaths." Kids learn by watching.

## SPECIAL DATES

### Monthly Calendar

#### April - Stress Awareness Month

Make a family calm-down plan.

#### April - Alcohol Awareness Month

Talk about healthy ways to handle stress and safe ways to ask for help.

#### April 7 - World Health Day

Take a family walk, drink water, and get good sleep.

#### April 20 - 26 - Safe Choices Week at Home

Practice three strong answers:

- "No Thanks"
- "I'm leaving."
- "I'm calling a trusted adult."





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: STRONG MINDS, SAFE CHOICES

This month, we are helping students build strong minds and practice safe choices — at school, at home, and in the community. When kids know how to handle stress in healthy ways, they are better prepared to make good decisions and stay safe.

A strong mind does not mean never feeling stress. It means knowing what to do when stress shows up. Kids face hard moments every day, such as a tough test, a problem with a friend, or feeling left out. What they do in those moments matters.

When stress gets too big and lasts too long, kids may make fast choices instead of safe ones. They may act out, shut down, or look for a quick way to feel better. That is why we teach calm-down skills and safe-choice skills together.

A strong mind knows how to pause, breathe, and ask for help. These skills can be learned and practiced at any age.

## WHAT SAFE CHOICES LOOK LIKE:

Safe choices are not always easy in the moment. But when kids practice these skills, they know what to do:

- **Stopping to think before reacting**
- **Saying no clearly and without feeling guilty**
- **Walking away from situations that do not feel right**
- **Reaching out to a trusted adult when things get hard**
- **Choosing healthy ways to handle stress instead of risky ones**



## CONNECTION CHECK

A caring adult can make a big difference in a child’s life. Kids grow stronger when they have trust, support, and calm guidance. Here is what that can look like each day:

- Keep routines simple and steady. This helps kids feel safe.
- Check for behavior changes. For example, if your child seems extra tired, worried, or frustrated.
- Be available and allow them to speak first, and let them finish before jumping in to fix things.
- Practice calm skills together before kids need them.
- Remind your child that asking for help is a strong and brave choice.
- Say: “You can always come to me. You will not be in trouble for telling me the truth.”

## 3 WAYS KIDS RESPOND TO PRESSURE

Three kinds of responses, help kids aim for the third one:



**Quiet and going along** — staying quiet and going along. It feels easier in the moment, but does not reflect what they really want.

**Angry or forceful** — reacting with anger or force. This can make things worse and damage friendships.

**Calm and clear** — calm, clear, and confident. The child says what they mean, holds their ground, and keeps their self-respect. This skill can be learned and it gets easier every time they practice it.

TRY THIS

## CREATE A FAMILY STRESS PLAN - CALM BODIES HELP US MAKE SMART CHOICES

### 1. One Trusted Adult

Who can we call when we need help?

### 2. One Calm Place

Where can we go to cool down?

### 3. One Reset Activity

What helps us feel steady again?

### 4. One Safe Phrase

What can we say when we need help or need to leave?