

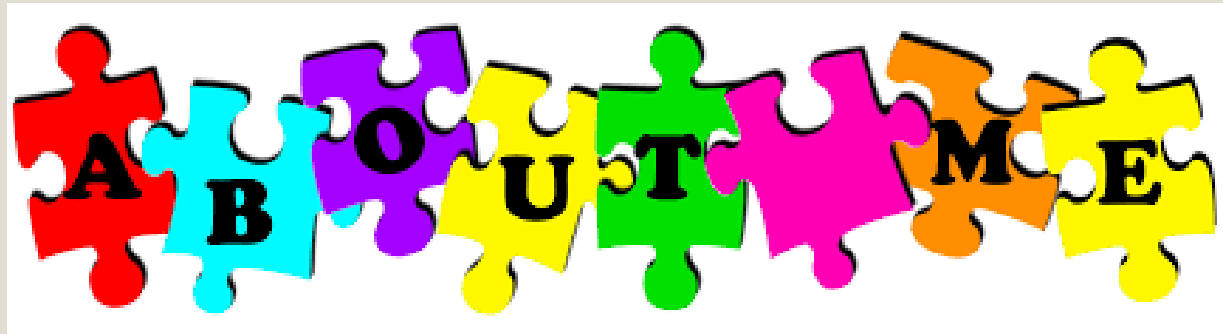


# EFFECTIVE SCHOOL COUNSELING

HOW TO FEEL CONFIDENT WHILE WORKING IN TODAY'S SCHOOL SYSTEM

# All about Me:

- I am an LCSW, and received my MSW from Rutgers University
- I work as a school counselor/ social worker in a k-8 building with about 800 students
- This is my 10<sup>th</sup> year in education, but I have worked in substance abuse, domestic violence, the crisis ER and courthouses.
- I also practice privately
- I am a mother, wife and avid reader, who loves television and movies as well as pizza and wine (though not right now). I also like to talk, so I apologize in advance for my corny personality and my overuse of clipart
- If you have any questions after today or want to chat you can reach me at [stella.siciliano@yahoo.com](mailto:stella.siciliano@yahoo.com)



# About you!

- Get to know the people at your table: What district are you from? what is your job title? How much do school districts suck at mental health (just trying to get the inevitable out of the way)
- Make a list of things you hope to discuss today, jot down some specific scenarios we can all help with.
- Share some things on your list
- I want to know: Who is a social worker? Who is a school counselor? guidance counselor? psychologist? administrator?
- Welcome all, no matter what your title, we are all in the business of helping kids and complaining about apples and trees, helicopters and steps 😊



# Your space:

- You need to be just as comfortable as the person visiting you (so don't be afraid to put your spin on the office)
- Its ok to share some personal information (hang family photos, pet photos, meaningful quotes, posters of things you like.)
- Space is often times an issue, so make the best of it- throw pillows on the standard school chair, framed quotes on the wall, a nice coat of calming paint, bean bags, a small rug, string lights. (5 below, the dollar store, target etc...)
- Fidgets, stress balls and art supplies are a must (keep a tray of stuff kids can grab from during a talk. Kinetic sand in a tray is always a winner, as is squishy's, a rubix cube or silly putty)
- Food (who wouldn't talk, work or jump on one foot for a snack) \*\*\*\*
- If you do get a good budget, or can get help from the PTA, then splurge on some arm chairs or a small couch, giving kids a soft, comfy place to sit can really help open up a conversation (or even offer the occasional nap after a panic attack)
- Where is the desk facing? How many seats do you have?

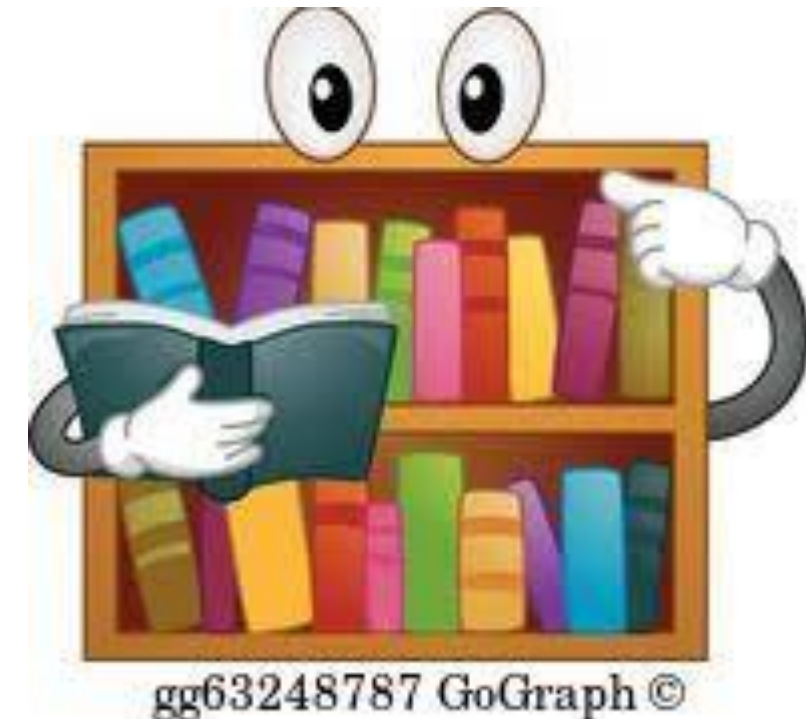
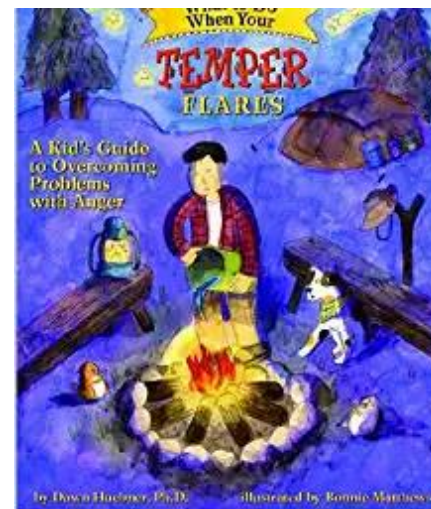
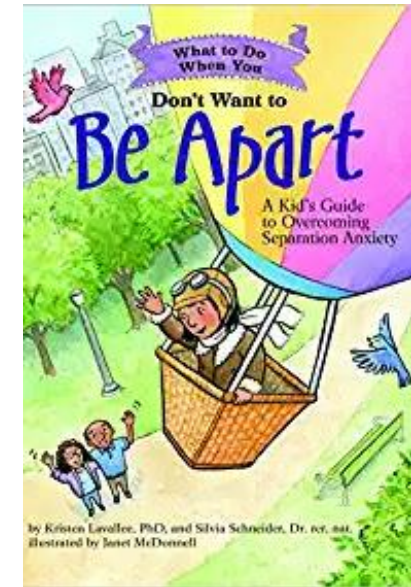
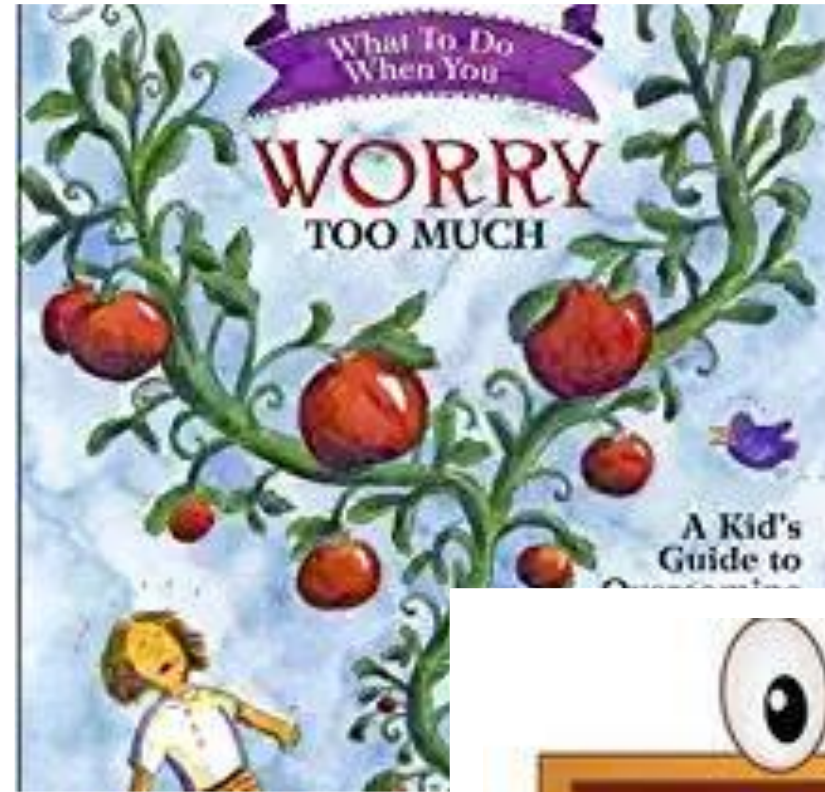


# Some examples



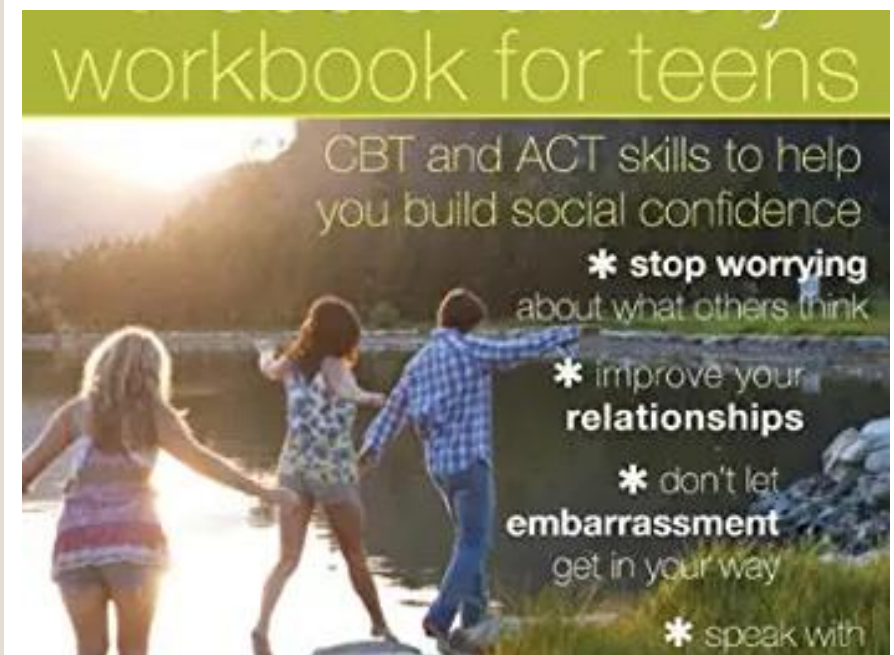
# What's in your library?

- In most counseling offices there is some version of shelving, so what's occupying those dusty shelves?
- General rule of thumb: Always be the first reader of any book you plan to use with kids.
- **Some great resources:** "What to do when" books- great for elementary kids (you can focus on certain chapters, but these are great for weekly sessions with a few chapters at a time. These are also good for worksheets/activities and to loan out for parents to work with their kids and gain a better understanding of the issue as well.)



# Continued resources...

- Some great middle/ high school workbooks: you can find these on amazon as well they all say “an instant help book for teens,” at the top. These are also good for a loan out, but I would definitely read through them first.



# The rest of your shelving...



- How the internet killed the book shelf, but helped you de-clutter
- The shelves hold plants and fidgets too
- Don't get overwhelmed, sometimes less is more
- Binders to have: Crisis plans/ teams, Counseling resources in the area/ pamphlets, any committee you are on should get its own binder.
- Organization is the key to remaining calm: but its all about what works for you and your day.

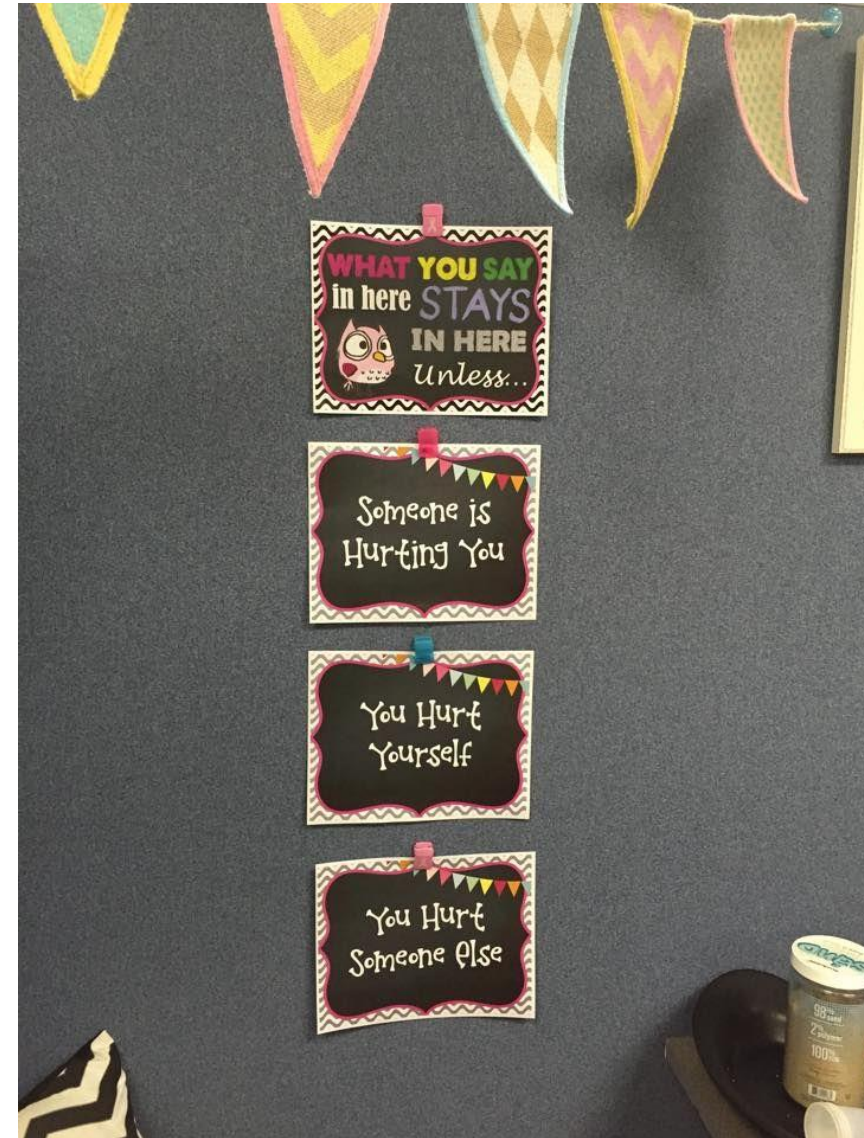


# Record Keeping

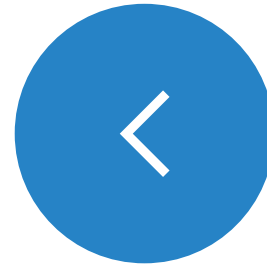
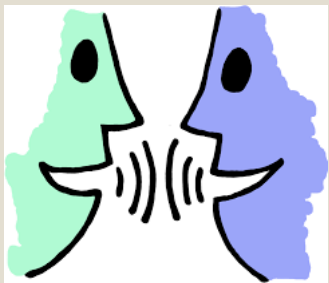
- The most important office supply: Locked file cabinet (the bigger, the better, because the files will add up).
- Let's review: Office visit log, Incident reports, Case note, clinician note, release, log of releases, log of send outs, log of DCPP calls, **if it isn't written it doesn't exist.**
- KISS. ASSUME.
- If it is written it does exist, so choose wisely
- Electronic v handwritten
- Folders in your computer
- Helpful supplies: notebooks, post its, black pens, phone message books with carbon copy, calendars, file folders, labels

# Confidentiality

- I choose to follow a blend of- the ethical principals of my license, best practice, what's best for my students and the policy of my district
- When to tell and how to do it
- Helpful tips to avoid total breach of trust
- Why age matters, kind of, sometimes
- What about administration and teachers?
- Talking to private counselors.



# Communication with parents/ staff and admin



LESS IS MORE



EMAIL V  
PHONE CALLS



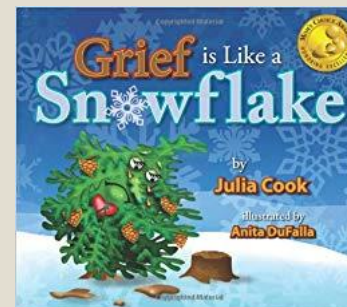
DOCUMENT  
EVERYTHING

Common issues for  
each age level:

## **Elementary school**



- Recess issues
- First experience with death of a loved one



- First experiences with “mean kids”
- School is still a new and exciting place
- What if you don't like your teacher and they are your only one?
- Do you have any you want to share?

# Common issues: **Middle School**

- Transition to middle school
- Hormones!!!!
- Drama!!!!
- Understanding and noticing things that are happening at home, which inevitably filter into school: divorce, substance abuse and addiction, family illness and mental illness
- Relationships
- Suicide/ Self-harm
- Time management
- Misuse and overuse of social media
- Did I miss anything?



# Common Issues: **High School**

- Transition to high school: no one cares that you have a helicopter mom
- Take middle school problems and add to them, plus add inferred independence and the expectation that you are more responsible
- Work load and expectations
- Substance use/abuse/ addiction
- Relationships: dating violence
- Sexual harassment/ assault
- College is looming

## The role of the school counselor



- **You are not the disciplinarian**, but you will hold your kids accountable, because structure is good and they really do like rules
- **You are not the administration**, but you will make important decisions that sometimes administration may disagree with or you need to fight for
- **You are not a teacher**, but you will definitely find the teachable moment in many conversations
- **You are not their parent**, but damn you want to take so many of them home with you and adopt them.
- **You are human too**. But we will get to self care later!

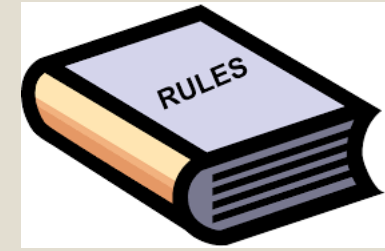
## **Risk Assessments: Suicide, Self-Injury, Child Abuse and Substance Abuse**

- This being a serious topic, lets chat first:
- Do you think the school system in NJ is doing enough for child and adolescent mental health? Why/ why not?
- How is your district currently handling students who report feeling suicidal?
- What does 'mental health send out' mean to you?
- Discuss if you feel suicide risk assessment training is appropriate for school employees.
- Should guidance counselors, school counselors and school social workers all have the same training?
- What kind of training is your district offering for risk assessments?

\*\*\*We will be spending a few slides on this, because I do feel this has unfortunately become a large part of our jobs.



# Rules to Follow



- Never leave a student unattended before (on the way to your office), during or after (while waiting for a parent) an assessment.
- Even the quietest, least likely child can spook and try to leave the building or hide in a bathroom and hurt themselves. So always have a way to get in touch with your main office during an assessment.
- Never lie to a student about what your doing or deciding. Even the little ones will feel a breach of trust when their parent shows up to get them and they don't know why.
- Try not to react emotionally to students stories. Remember that they are looking to you for a reaction/ comfort/ help and if you are crying, cringing or 'wtfing' the less honest they will be. (you may get a very exaggerated or very held back story)
- Always tell your administrators. Other than them needing to know, you may need them in the aftermath of a send out and definitely for a re-entry.
- Its never to late to change your mind.
- Never let a parent sit in on any assessment. (or really anything other than a pre-determined parent session)
- Be familiar with your district policy on suicide, self-injury, substance abuse and Child abuse reporting
- DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT
- **IS THERE ANY YOU WANT TO ADD?**

# The Assessment: for threat of suicide

- The questions you ask and the way you ask them are very important.
- Be direct and do not sugarcoat, no matter how old the child is.
- Always say “kill yourself,” instead of “hurt yourself.” Hurt can take on many meanings, kill has one.
- The main factors you are assessing risk in are: Ideation/ Plan/ Attempts/ Access to means, Future oriented thinking and Other: things that may increase risk if one or more categories are not high risk, as well as things that may decrease risk.
- Important forms: send out form/ re-entry form, follow up form.

# Now What: Activity



- Please use the STACEY form to act out an assessment.

**ONE PERSON WILL BE STACEY, THE OTHER THE ASSESSOR, THEN PLEASE SWITCH**

- Pay attention to how you feel while asking certain questions and note how you made your decisions.
- Do not discuss your individual decisions until both people had a chance to complete their assessments. You can then work on your send out form wording together.
- When you are Stacey, feel free to add to your story or throw in some curve balls.

# When to send out and when to hang in there?

- Sometimes this depends on how well you know the student and their history
- **We all know the students who-**
  1. **Say things for attention-** how much are they willing to do for that attention
  2. **Say things to get sent home-** you can call their bluff or teach them a lesson
  3. **Say things as a manifestation of their disability-** you need to know their disability and if a risk assessment is necessary or not, involve a case manager if possible.
  4. A reminder about confidentiality: You are within the four walls of a school NOT a hospital, private practice or home.

# Questions to know the answer to:

*because someone will ask*

- Where do your students get sent to? In my district its to any licensed mental health professional
- Who pays for this send out? The parents insurance or out of pocket, some districts pay for each send out or have a psychiatrist on contract who comes in certain times a week or month (which causes an issue if the student has to wait for them)
- What is required for the student to get back into the building? The signed form and a re-entry meeting. What do you guys do in your district?
- You can practice some confidentiality here. The parents do not need every detail of what is bothering their child, use what you write on the form. Sit with them without the student, then with the student and make sure everyone understands what happened and what needs to happen.
- If you need to then have someone sit in the meeting with you, usually an administrator. Understand this may make the student and/ or parent uncomfortable, so it depends on the situation

# Coming back in: *re-entry form and meeting*

- Lets review the form: **Remember the following**
  1. What your write is being read by the parent, your administrator if they get a copy, the accepting physician and anyone else the parent shows it to (possibly the internet).
  2. Have a list of resources ready to hand the parent
  3. Make a copy for yourself after the parent signs it
  4. Explain that without this form they cannot come back to school (explain if anyone else needs to review the form, which may hold up the return)
  5. Hospitals will not sign school forms and some therapists wont either (what to do?)
  6. The re-entry meeting should take place first thing in the morning.
  7. It should be with administration in their office.
  8. You should have releases ready for signature so you can follow up.
  9. You should be ready to read the paperwork and ask any questions before allowing the student to return.
  10. Remind the student that you are proud of them and know this may have been scary, but you are here for them.
  11. Help the student navigate making up work, talking to teachers and other students.



# You did not send out:

- Presumably you have still spoken to a parent/ guardian about your concern.
- Does your district require a follow up form?
- Is it just for your eyes?
- How can you track what's going on with this student in case you need to report back or have a timeline?
- Check in, check in, check in
- Check in some more
- If it was a "joke," "just a story for class," "I didn't mean it that way," or "I draw like that as an outlet."



# Self- harm

- Self- harm is not a sign of suicide (or is it).
- Types of self harm (cutting, scratching, picking, burning, carving).
- Lets review our self-harm assessment sample : know what to look for and ask
- Procedure to follow each time (nurse, admin, etc...)
- When do you send out for self harm?
- when to contact parents/ guardians?
- What are some alternatives to cutting?
- Same rules apply for send out and re-entry for self- harm



# Substance Abuse

- What to look for and when to be concerned
- What to tell staff( before, during and after)
- Procedures
- How to talk to parents
- Who else may need to be involved
- Important papers: parent responsibility sheet, drug screen verification form, referral to the nurse, checklist.



# Child Abuse: DCPP

- Important things to know: who needs to call and what to tell the student
- Lets review a helpful form
- Who to involve?
- Remember as hard as this is for you, it is scarier for the child
- Lets remember: Try not to react emotionally to students stories. Remember that they are looking to you for a reaction/ comfort/ help and if you are crying, cringing or 'wtfing' the less honest they will be. (you may get a very exaggerated or very held back story)
- Do you always need to call?
- Do you call the parent? *But what if I have a great relationship with the family?*
- Visits from DCPP, what is your role?
- Follow up's: your duty

# FAQ'S:

be ready for the parents, they are coming, sometimes with pitchforks



- You are saying my child has to be seen by a mental health professional, so shouldn't't you pay for it?
- I cant take off work, I'm not coming? Now what?
- But you know Jimmy, he says this all the time, I don't think this is necessary, Now what?
- I cannot believe you spoke to my child without me, they are 7, you cannot do that. Now what?
- After DCPP has surprised them at their door: Why wouldn't you call me first? Are you going to call every time now? Who else knows?
- Your turn? What do you want to know?

# Character ed, SEL, school wide programs, lessons

- What are you responsible for at your school? Make sure you set boundaries, you cannot do everything (even though you already do)
- Resources: NJ state website, tolerance.org, Njbar Foundation
- Some good programs and grants: SCTP Rutgers climate grant, Sandy Hook Promise grant, NJTSS grant.
- Weeks of...why are they all in the first two months of school
- Assembly programs: how do you find them and who pays?
- Lessons: do you push into classrooms on a regular basis? Do you follow a curriculum? Where do you get your lessons/ ideas from?



**SELF CARE:** *as usual  
its last and hopefully  
we have time for it*

- What even is self-care
- Make time: I promise, it's there
- Compartmentalize
- But I love my job!

# Lastly: I am here if you need me!

**Stella Siciliano, LCSW**

- I love to help my fellow social worker, therapist, school counselor, human...so please feel free to reach out with any questions.

**Stella.Siciliano@yahoo.com**

