Nursing Notes for August 26, 2020

Greetings, Aldo Parents:

As we figure out ways to keep ourselves healthy during the Covid-19 pandemic, we’re discovering that it may not be enough to simply “avoid the virus.” Limiting travel to essentials (however we define that word), cutting back on human contact, avoiding public gatherings (which include our classrooms, alas!)—it all adds up to altered plans, increased isolation, and what some of us call “Nature Deficit Disorder.”

With our traditional high-school backpacking trips on hold, and time-honored Aldo programs turned into “virtual Min-Villages,” “virtual Fridays Out,” & “virtual Community Orientation,” many staff—and doubtless parents as well—are wondering how we can get our students off their screens and outside into the sunshine. Although teachers have by design limited Zoom screen time to four hours per day, we aren’t able to create organized outings for students—so you may have overheard some of us on the Zoom screen encouraging our students to “go outside and play!” during their 15-minute breaks & 90-minute lunch periods.

This is where we on the Aldo staff need parental input. Staff are requesting that parents team with us to encourage students to undertake regular exercise—preferably out-of-doors—by being gently encouraging. (Physical Education is another matter, as exercising is a course *requirement*.) At the same time, we know that parents define parameters about where and when their children can exercise—and those parameters differ from family to family. For instance, some families may have a member with vulnerable health, so they may have stricter rules about where students can exercise. Many family members are at work during school hours, so they may limit their child’s exercise to evening or early morning hours when parents are around. The point: We teachers don’t want our assignments, or our frequent urging (and in one case, a schoolwide treasure hunt) to conflict with family rules. We want to team up with you to encourage healthy exercise in this strange time.

Maddy Alfero, the school’s Director of Experiential Education and a high-school physical-education teacher, includes these items in a parental permission slip for her course; perhaps all parents, whether their child is enrolled in Physical Education or not, might review these guidelines for “leaving the screen behind”:

* *I give permission for my child to participate in outdoor ALCS activities with or without my presence in the house.*
* *I give permission for my child to travel during school time by bicycle or foot to locations that I (the parent) have deemed safe.*
* *Students with prescriptions for inhalers must keep an inhaler with them and be able to contact medical help in the case of an emergency.*
* *I understand that many of the courses at ALCS require participation in out-of-class activities per the mission of the school and will make sure that I (or a designated family member or friend) am available to assist in the event of an emergency.*

“Going outside to play” won’t meet all our new health challenges, of course, but there is considerable data to support the importance, both physically and psychologically, of leaving the screen behind. Playing the guitar, visiting grandparents, knitting, cooking—all of which often occur indoors, of course—are good for our health as well. Maybe the real message is: The screen has its place in education—especially right now—but we need to leave it behind when we can.

As a final note, I would like to invite parents to join one of the school’s very active committees, SHAC—that is, the School Health Advisory Committee. We meet the first Wednesday of the month to support and find constructive way to improve the health of students in particular and the school family in general. Right now one of our key missions is to incentivize healthy behavior during the pandemic. We’re working on a “virtual health passport,” for instance, and we’re always looking for more innovative ways to get our students to “go outside and play”—safely—and to undertake new and healthy pursuits. Contact me at jmcintosh@aldocs.org if you are interested in joining us at our next SHAC meeting on September 2 at 4 PM.

With kind regards,

Jim McIntosh, RN

School Nurse & SHAC Chair