

# Katie Neighbours

## Upper School Counselor

“Creating for students a ‘hub’ dedicated to meeting their (mostly non-academic) needs helps demonstrate both to students and our greater community how much we value these needs and the subsequent services provided to meet those needs. Ashley Hall is more than just a school; it is a community comprised of individuals who genuinely care about students and want them to be the most healthy and happiest versions of themselves. We are already doing so much to address the social-emotional needs of students through our ongoing Wellness programs and initiatives, and the creation of the SLC is simply a demonstration of that priority.



The consistent and continual care for students’ mental health and emotional well-being is always a priority, even more so during the pandemic. I’m not necessarily doing anything differently, other than making sure that even our distance learners know that they can continue to access mental health support even though they are not here on campus. I check-in with students via email and conduct counseling sessions via phone or video conference.

I think one of my biggest challenges has been finding ways to keep students, particularly our senior class, motivated and positive. It is normal and understandable for them to focus on the things that they are missing out on or traditions that they have been looking forward to that are now being reimagined or done differently. I want to help them reframe their disappointment and find the silver linings, but it is challenging. I think the mentality of ‘we’re all in this together’ is helpful; I seek to be an empathetic listener while also encouraging them to lean into their roles as student leaders on this campus.

Regarding silver linings and innovations: I believe this pandemic has forced all of us to reexamine our priorities and values. I know that personally, I have changed some of my focus and have rethought about what really matters to me, both personally and professionally. We also have had to become more creative in terms of our campus traditions and ‘how’ we do things. If we keep our focus on the joy that comes from being together in person as a community, we are reminded that we are resilient and can overcome any obstacle.”

## 4 WAYS TO Support TENSE, STRESSED, OR ANXIOUS TEENS

- Validate emotional experiences.** Parents and other adults tend to want to problem solve as much as possible for their child; however, sometimes teens simply want an empathetic listener. Actively listening (listening to understand versus waiting for your turn to talk) and helping teens identify their emotions, while also validating those emotional experiences, can be incredibly effective in calming intense feelings while allowing teens to feel heard and understood.
- During this time of many unknowns and uncertainties, providing clear communication is helpful.** Communicate with your teen as much as you can regarding upcoming events and expectations. Get their input and give choices when possible. If you really don’t know something, it’s ok to say that too. Talk through the emotions that can bubble up in uncertain, stressful, or nerve-wracking situations.
- It’s fairly common for teens to lash out when they are tense or stressed.** Parents and caregivers can often be the recipients of intense emotions. When your teen is upset or if you can feel your own emotions rising, give yourself and your child permission to walk away. Taking a break and coming back to finish the conversation when the emotional intensity has decreased can lead to fewer conflicts.
- Practice gratitude.** It can become easy to focus on the negatives. If possible, try to actively identify three positive things every day!