

Gparents and Special Friends - 11.20.2018

Welcome to Grandparents and Special Friends Visiting Day! My name is Jen Danish, and I am Grace's Head of School.

I think many of us at Grace would agree that this morning is one of our very favorite days of the year. We love to see you in communion with your grandchildren and special friends sharing the Grace experience and a moment in time with each other. We hope that you will enjoy seeing your students up close inside their classrooms today. Before we move on with the rest of the morning, I wanted to tell you a little about our theme for this school year: practice compassion.

Last June, just after our students had departed for the summer, we gathered as a faculty to reflect on the year that had just concluded and to share our thoughts on the year ahead. One of our conversations focused on choosing a theme that would give us a common value for the entire school year. We had a lot of ideas and a great conversation, and what emerged from our thinking was this idea of practicing compassion with students. In an increasingly hostile and reactive world, we were eager to implement a touchstone we could all refer to in our work with students. Building more compassion in our students may very well be one of the key mindsets that will allow them to build better relationships and serve the world they will enter after Grace -- as well as learn to care for themselves in moments of difficulty. At the level of a school community, more active practice of compassion in students allows for shorter periods of conflict and a community that truly cares for one another.

Compassion is not an easy concept for children to grasp. They understand what it means to be kind, surely - but being compassionate requires building a deeper connection to the experience and feelings of another person. It requires some more work on the part of each of us. A great place to start with young children is to learn what it means to do no harm. Beyond that, it requires us to really lean in and learn what a person is experiencing and feeling so that we can relate and empathize at a deeper level.

This morning, I am delighted to share this theme with our grandparents and special friends because you are some of the best teachers of this concept to the children who love you. I spent many hours and days with my maternal grandmother as a young child. Her vision of me and her willingness to both push me to do more and also to look beyond my shortcomings from time to time made her a beloved and invaluable adult in my life. The beauty of our relationships with family and friends who may not see us

every day, or who are one step removed from being our parents or siblings, is that there can be less at stake in our interactions. That means that there can be more room for compassion and understanding to unfold. While you as grandparents may have to play a parental role now and again, most of you are wonderfully freed from playing that role in every moment. You can see your grandchild or special friend apart from yourself and your experience, and you can impart wisdom and model compassion in ways that will persist for years to come.

We are indeed living in a time when there is much to fear. Each of you is therefore an important connection to how our children find grounding and connection. Your interactions both big and small offer comfort and love. May we never underestimate just how important this is in the life of any child.

We hope that this morning offers you a window into the joyful daily routines at Grace, and allows you a chance to connect to the vibrant and engaging life of a Grace Gryphon. Being in your presence this morning, may we be reminded of your love for each of us and may it give us strength and inspiration to strive for excellence as well as deepen our compassion for ourselves and others.

We are so glad you are here.