



the
WASHINGTON
SCHOOL for GIRLS



“**Peacemaking** is the heart of school counseling. By teaching students to resolve conflicts with empathy and understanding, we empower them to create safer, more inclusive environments where every voice is heard and every student can thrive.”

INDIA WILKINS
WSG School Counselor

PEACEMAKING: A PATH TO EMPATHY, SAFETY, AND GROWTH —

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As a school counselor at Washington School for Girls (WSG), I witness daily the emotional complexities our students navigate. Recent findings from the Center for Disease Control reveal a concerning reality: nearly 3 in 5 U.S. teen girls felt persistently sad or hopeless in 2021, with 30% seriously considering suicide. These statistics underscore the critical need for mental health support tailored to young girls, and I am dedicated to fostering a nurturing environment where each student can thrive.

The Intersection of Peacemaking and Safety

At WSG, we believe that peacemaking and safety go hand in hand. By teaching our girls empathy, we empower them to understand and navigate their emotions. Emotions themselves are not inherently negative; rather, it's our responses to them that can lead to challenges. Through a solution-focused approach, I encourage students to reflect on their experiences: “If you could go back, what could you have done differently?” This question fosters self-awareness and promotes personal growth.

A Safe Space for Expression

Every student deserves a safe space to express her feelings. I value the importance of open dialogue and emotional expression. Whether it's through one-on-one sessions or group discussions, I encourage girls to articulate their thoughts and feelings. When a student mentions a Bible verse or spiritual teaching, I embrace the opportunity to incorporate those values into our conversations, respecting their individual beliefs while guiding them toward emotional resilience.

Navigating the World Through Their Eyes

My approach is inherently person-centered. I strive to understand the world from each student's perspective, helping them navigate their unique challenges. By fostering an environment where they feel seen, heard, and valued, we create a community that supports mental wellness. This holistic approach integrates not just academic success, but also spiritual and emotional well-being, recognizing that each aspect is interconnected.

The Role of Spirituality in Healing

At WSG, we leverage the profound wisdom of faith to encourage resilience and compassion. Our Social Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum integrates opportunities for prayer, serving as a cornerstone for students seeking solace and guidance. This spiritual connection not only helps in moments of distress but also facilitates self-discovery, enabling girls to explore their identities and aspirations.

An inspiring example of this occurred when two students used scripture to resolve a conflict. Their ability to draw from spiritual teachings illustrates the power of faith in promoting understanding and empathy among peers.

Looking Ahead: A Commitment to Wellness

As we move forward, our commitment remains unwavering: to nurture the spiritual, mental, and physical wellness of our students with compassion and dedication. We aim to empower our girls to chart their own paths, embracing resilience and self-discovery along the way.

Together, we can create a community where every girl feels supported in her journey. By fostering empathy, embracing emotional expression, and integrating spiritual wellness, we are equipping our students with the tools they need to navigate the challenges of adolescence. It is a privilege to walk alongside them on this journey, guiding them towards a future filled with hope and empowerment.

In the ever-evolving landscape of mental health, let us continue to prioritize the well-being of our young girls, ensuring they feel safe, valued, and ready to face the world.

What connections do you find between Ms. India's perspective and values important in the Holy Child tradition?

The Washington School for Girls was founded in 1997 by women from three organizations who recognized that many girls in Washington, DC's Wards 7 & 8 were not receiving an equitable education. Using the power of collaboration and the unique strengths of each of their organizations (the Religious of Jesus and Mary, the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, and the National Council of Negro Women), they founded the WSG in the basement of an apartment building. Since then, the school has grown to serve up to 130 students in grades 3-8 on two campuses in Southeast Washington, DC, and has graduated over 300 alumnae who have gone on to attend a wide variety of high schools and colleges.

Ms. India Wilkins is a school counsellor who plays a crucial role in guiding students to be thoughtful, compassionate, and intentional peacemakers