



Brookline PARENT EDUCATION NETWORK  
informed • involved • connected

## PARENT NETWORK NEWSLETTER

FALL 2010, VOL. 25

### Special Issue on Teen Transitions

As the new school year gets underway, teens have the opportunity to reinvent themselves. They are a year older than last September and facing new classes, new classmates, new teachers, maybe a new look, a new attitude... All these changes represent a fresh beginning and a new developmental milestone, but with these changes come new expectations -- for you and your kids. Teens will be looking for more freedoms and more privileges, which entail greater responsibilities. Read on...

#### TALK ABOUT CHANGES...

As teens look for more freedoms and privileges this new school year, it is an ideal time to reevaluate and communicate your expectations, adjusting limits and clarifying family rules. Find opportunities to discuss your values about concerns such as:

- Homework, academic integrity
- TV and internet time/content
- Curfews
- Hanging out
- Communication policies (like calling when you change locations)
- Substance use (tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, prescriptions and OTC drugs)
- House parties
- Sexual activities
- Social values
- Household responsibilities (chores, errands, cleaning, etc.)
- Financial responsibilities

Every family has its own "social norm," and every teen is different. The important thing is to talk to your teen often. Clarify expectations and consequences and keep the lines of communication open.

For more suggestions, check out B-PEN's ["Setting Limits" tip sheet.](#)

#### ALSO IN THIS ISSUE...

[Teens Talk About Transitions](#)

[B-CASA Forum on Teen Driving Oct. 28](#)

[New Smoking Rules at BHS](#)

[Peer Leaders Win National Award](#)

#### [Resources](#)

**B-PEN (Brookline Parent Education Network)** helps parents navigate the social, emotional and developmental challenges affecting today's teens and pre-teens – common challenges that can lead to risky behavior. An outreach initiative that collaborates with Brookline school administrators and PTO's, the organization's goals are to facilitate parent connections:

- \* with other **parents**,
- \* with school and town **resources**, and
- \* with helpful **information** via written/electronic materials on a wide variety of teen concerns.

For more information, contact B-PEN coordinators  
June Harris ([jharris@brooklinema.gov](mailto:jharris@brooklinema.gov)) or  
Karen Campbell ([kcampbell4@brooklinema.gov](mailto:kcampbell4@brooklinema.gov)) or visit

[www.B-PEN.org](http://www.B-PEN.org)

## TEENS TALK TRANSITIONS

What would you say is the greatest cause of anxiety for your high schooler as he or she transitions into a new grade? Social unease? Making the sports team? Or grades, study habits and college applications?

Our discussion with Peer Leaders at Brookline High School revealed an immediate consensus: the greatest stress identified by juniors and seniors comes from **heightened academic expectations**. The increased work load of a new grade is accompanied by the pressure of college approaching, the sense of competition this imposes, and – as the stakes are raised – conflict with parents over homework.

What can parents do that would make this transition easier to navigate? The Peer Leaders – 30 juniors and seniors – called for less interrogation and pressure from their parents, a greater respect for their ability to manage their own workload, sensitivity in discussing and planning for college, and a need not to be compared to their peers.

Even freshmen and sophomores often experience increased academic pressure at the beginning of the year, pressure most commonly observed by parents during homework time. So what can parents do to be supportive? Peer Leaders suggest:

### **Academic Support**

- Gauge the needs of your own child and figure out what homework approach works best. Some kids want minimal parent involvement; others need or appreciate some guidance.
- Accept that your child knows how much work he or she has to do.
- Don't interrogate or intrude on the process ("Can I read your paper?") If you have strong academic expectations, voice those up front. But remember -- this is more about your child than about you. Keep perspective.
- Don't discuss schoolwork in a way that is implicitly judgmental of your student's efforts, and be careful not to compare them to other students or siblings.
- Check in when your child's doing homework, but be supportive, perhaps asking, "Can I get you anything?" One teen says, "It's good when they bring tea and snacks then get out of the way."
- If your student seems overwhelmed with work and staying up too late, perhaps suggest going to bed and getting up early the next morning.
- Acknowledge his or her burdens while trying not to add to them – and sometimes, when you're tempted to speak up, experiment with staying quiet.

For juniors and seniors, the pressure of day-to-day work is exacerbated by the preoccupation of college preparation, which is their leading "hot button" issue. Peer Leaders recommend the following:

### **Talking About College**

- Either let the student bring up the subject or broach it gently in conversation: "What are you thinking? Where are you interested in going?" If you initiate the conversation mid-to-late sophomore year, it can still be fun and light, before the pressure of standardized testing.
- Don't talk about college too often or indiscriminately. Consider scheduling periodic college chats and not bringing up the subject unless your teen wants to talk about it. Encourage other family

members not to broach the subject of college too often.

- Be careful not to impose your criteria without understanding your child's point of view.
- Don't say "We don't care where you go as long as you find a good fit" if you don't really mean it.
- Talk about other kids' experiences in a way that adds to the pressure. "The most stressful aspect is the competition, always being compared to other kids," one Peer Leader maintains.
- Keep college visits low-key and enjoyable. "On vacation, we went to see two colleges. I thought that was fun, looking around and figuring out myself what I wanted to do. It was good to start off like that."

## B-CASA FORUM OCTOBER 28



**Brookline Coalition Against Substance Abuse  
Invites You to a Special Power Breakfast**

***Coffee and Conversation:  
"Teen Safety Behind the Wheel"***  
**Thursday October 28, 7:30 to 9:30 a.m.  
Brookline High School, MLK Room**

Did you know that motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for American teens? And teens have the lowest rate of seat belt use, yet the highest rate of risky driving (excessive speed, following too close, etc.)

As more and more young drivers get behind the wheel, it becomes important to explore ways to create and reinforce community norms for responsible driving. This forum is dedicated to brainstorming ideas for safe driving habits that deal with such issues as cell phones and other distractions (radio/iPod, too many passengers, etc.) seat belts, speed, driving under the influence (alcohol, drugs, marijuana), eating while driving, accepting rides from drivers under the influence, the importance of adult role modeling, etc.

B-CASA invites students, parents, teachers, health care professionals, and community leaders to join us as we brainstorm ideas for addressing teen driving safety. The goal is to devise an action plan that sparks awareness and prompts parents and teens to talk frankly, and often, about safe driving practices. Please RSVP to Mary Minott, [mminott@brooklinema.gov](mailto:mminott@brooklinema.gov)

*Food provided by BHS Culinary Arts Program.*

## NEWS IN BRIEF...

### **NEW SMOKING RULES AT BHS**

Grabbing a smoke at Brookline High School is getting harder under a new smoking policy introduced this semester. In two significant changes, freshmen are not allowed to smoke at all, and the smoking area available for 10th-12th graders has been restricted to four "off campus" benches opposite the Schluntz Gym. The new policy opens up most of the benches in front of the school to non-smokers, allowing students, staff and visitors access to the main building without having to pass through the smoking area. The new policy was instigated in response to last Fall's "Conversation and Coffee: Teens and Tobacco" community forum and followed up with pressure from the Peer Leaders, a group of about 30 juniors and seniors working with substance abuse prevention staff. Concern was validated by the school-wide Student Health Survey of 2008, which revealed a correlation between smoking cigarettes and moving on to alcohol, marijuana and other drugs. [Read on...](#)

### **PEER LEADERS WIN NATIONAL COMPETITION**

The National Organizations for Youth Safety (NOYS) and The Allstate Foundation awarded \$1,000 to B-CASA and its Peer Leadership program at Brookline High School for excellence in bringing safe teen driving to the Brookline area. The Peer Leaders' chapter of SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) organized a day of awareness for BHS students filled with workshops and discussion groups followed by an evening program on teen brain development that drew more than 200 parents and students. Award money will be used to support this year's SADD program and train SADD Peer Leaders. [Read on...](#)

## LOCAL RESOURCES

### BROOKLINE SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION PROGRAM

Brookline High School and the Brookline Public Health Department provide comprehensive, confidential alcohol, marijuana and other drug evaluation and support services to Brookline youth and their families. Services are free and provided by clinical social workers **Mary Minott**, LICSW, and **Hope Schroy**, LICSW. Both are specialists in the developmental and substance abuse issues of adolescents.

For more information, or to make an appointment, contact Mary Minott at 617-713-5155 or [mminott@brooklinema.gov](mailto:mminott@brooklinema.gov)

## WEB RESOURCES

For B-PEN's list of valuable "**Internet Resources for Parents**," visit our website at:

[www.B-PEN.org](http://www.B-PEN.org)

In addition to resource lists, B-PEN.org also offers:

- downloadable **Tip Sheets** on a wide range of parenting topics
- details on upcoming **events**
- **news**
- a Parent **Blog**
- **Parent Network Newsletters** on themes ranging from "Teens in Cyberspace" to "Prescription Drug Abuse"

To sign up for B-PEN's quarterly "Parent Network Newsletter," visit <http://www.bhs-pto.org/email.htm>  
Karen Campbell, editor ([Kcampbell@brooklinema.gov](mailto:Kcampbell@brooklinema.gov))