



Brookline PARENT EDUCATION NETWORK

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PARENT NETWORK UPDATE

NOVEMBER 2017

SPECIAL ISSUE ON

Managing Senior Year Stress – For You and Your Teen

On Nov. 14, the Senior Class PTO sponsored a program for parents on managing the stress of senior year. This is a time when students are applying to college or making other post graduate plans while balancing their academic workloads and perhaps also stepping into leadership positions with teams and clubs that have become a vital component of their extracurricular activities. That stress can take a toll on family life as well. What are parents concerns, and what do parents need to understand about their kids' concerns? How can parents and teens get on the same wavelength and strengthen communication and support? And what are some effective strategies to maintain perspective and keep calm and collected amidst the pressure – for parents as well as their kids? The panel presentation and discussion involved BHS Peer Leaders, Dean's team, parents, and Social Worker Mary Minott. Some takeaways from the presentation...

THOUGHTS FROM THE DEANS

Interim Dean Lisa Redding and Interim Associate Dean Brendan Kobus set the tone for the evening, reminding parents that both they and their students are undoubtedly feeling a mix of feelings, ranging from excitement and anticipation to anxiety and maybe a little panic. After all, big changes are starting to take place. Because every teen is different, there can be a huge spectrum in how families deal with stress and prepare to launch their seniors into the next phase of their lives. Parents' feelings and attitudes can often feed into their teens' own strong emotions, compounding the drama at home. But being aware of this issue and sensitive to how our teens are struggling can make a big difference.

The credo at BHS is "With freedom comes responsibility," and the Deans encourage parents and students to make spreadsheets and lists to get a handle on the college application process. Naviance can be very helpful in keeping track of what needs to be done and when. (For transcripts, the school needs the request in one month before the deadline, and it's helpful to do this on the early side to avoid overloading the system.)

But don't hesitate to reach out to Deans and Guidance for any questions or concerns. Consider the school a partner in this process. "You're not alone! Call and let us know how we can help." We know that sometimes it seems like the college process is a great "sorting," but our kids are not done yet. Some take linear paths, some more circuitous. Both are valuable. Reward the hard work and know that great experiences are coming!

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Guidance webpage for deadlines, timetables, resources, etc. - <http://bhs.brookline.k12.ma.us/guidance>

ASSESSING THE SITUATION

BHS Prevention/Intervention Team social worker Mary Minott explained the importance of understanding what students are experiencing in their senior year, when, according to the most recent student health survey, stress levels can be quite high. As parents, we can often tell when our children are stressed, but it is sometimes difficult for them to articulate to us how they are feeling, and they sometimes hesitate to share – either not wanting to concern us or not wanting us to bug them. For many, self-esteem is tied into college plans, and this is a lot of pressure. College rejections can feel

devastating, so helping build resilience is very important. And as seniors prepare to make the big transition from live-at-home children to independent young adults, the family dynamic can experience a lot of push/pull – teens keeping parents at arm length one moment, wanting to be coddled and taken care of the next. As parents and teens navigate this balancing act, It is important find ways to maintain perspective -- for ourselves as well as for our students.

PEER LEADERS SPEAK OUT

Three BHS Peer Leaders from diverse backgrounds offered insight into what seniors are experiencing as they struggle with balancing school, college preparation, extracurricular activities, and family.

Some of their strongest points included:

- Know your teens – what they want, what they need. Respect their personality, how they function and process information and experiences, and what they may (or may not) find helpful from you at this stressful time. Make sure you're all on the same page. Communication is key – find a style/time that works, maybe outside the house, But DON'T attempt heavy conversations in the car, where we can feel trapped.
- Model healthy behavior and coping mechanisms, and offer to facilitate for us – food, exercise, sleep, media use, etc.
- Help us ENJOY this last year of high school. Family outings/rituals can be comforting.
- Keep in mind that while some of us may apply to college, others may decide on a gap year or an alternative path.
- Understand that the competitive environment at school can be very intense, no matter which path we choose.
- Take cues from us about how much to talk/not talk about college. Some teens, especially those from other countries, may need to talk a lot at home and school to get advice on what to do. But for others, the constant talk about who's applying where can drive us crazy. (Many families say they answer those ongoing questions by simply saying, "We're not talking about that," or "We're having a moratorium on the college frenzy.")
- Some of us may be hearing about early decision soon, which ramps up the stress for all of us – rejection letters can be really hard, but when friends get in early, it can also put pressure on the rest of us.
- Remind us that we can have a good experience wherever we end up, that chance plays a big part now in college admissions. Some of us are applying to nearly a dozen schools.
- Some of us might like help setting up appropriate criteria for choosing colleges where we might be most successful – not just prestige, but class size, accommodations (if needed), overall culture, location, etc.
- Some of us may need help with keeping on top of deadlines, reminders, check ins, etc. Others may totally own the application process with help from school sources.
- Help us break things down, if needed – to do lists, periodic meetings with guidance, reminders.
- We may want to have an honest conversation about finances – the costs of college are looming over many of us as a big worry. We're concerned about balancing admission to a more affordable college with the possible cost of a dream school requiring big loans. Help us sort this out.
- Don't nag! But when we want to talk, BE AVAILABLE. Make time to listen to the little dramas of the day.
- But if we don't want to talk, try to respect that we need to start asserting some independence. Recognize that this is scary for us – a year from now, we won't be seeing our families every day. Sometimes frustration and irritability are just fear and anxiety.

Check out the Peer Leaders' list of "Senior Students' Tips to Parents" -- http://www.b-pen.org/uploads/2/9/2/9/2929884/seniors_tips_to_parents.pdf

EXPERT PARENT-TO-PARENT ADVICE

(Suzanne Slattery, the parent of a senior and a psychologist with long-term work experience in higher education, offered a heartfelt talk about her own experience that was peppered with excellent advice.)

Parents of seniors can begin to feel stress much earlier in the high school years - often starting in junior

year - that intensifies as Fall semester of senior year approaches. For some parents, the stress can be about college testing and getting their student to study, for others it can be about finding time and resources for college visits, or the college application process including where and when to apply - early action or regular decision? And not to mention all the financial worries and corresponding paperwork. If the student doesn't seem ready for college, there can be questions about getting a job, learning a trade, or taking a gap year. Parents should be reassured that BHS offers a wealth of support from teachers, staff and counselors. The guidance office can arrange regular meetings with a student or with a parent and student together to be sure that the student is on track.

Its important for senior parents to remember to try to model healthy coping as best they can during this stressful time. Here are some thoughts about helping you and your student with the transition:

- When it comes to college choices, majors or career paths, parents may have a long-held vision of their student's future. Part of accepting our kids is finding the balance between encouraging, supporting and allowing them to be themselves.
- Depending on your student's strengths, you may need to step in or back off when it comes to getting things done. This may be the time when your student needs more help or more independence. Talk to your student about what feels like support and what feels like pressure.
- Remember to find time to take care of yourself and manage your own stress in healthy ways: Are you eating right, getting enough sleep and exercise, and finding time for fun and relaxation?
- Ask your student what you can do to help - maybe arranging a weekly meeting to limit talk about college or the future, offering to make them an afternoon or evening snack, or lightening their load of chores for a bit.
- You might also help your student find ways to relax by putting a puzzle out on a table, having a family movie night, going out to the gym together, making a pizza or baking something together.
- Ask yourself what else your student needs to learn before they go - how to prepare a meal, do their own laundry, manage a budget - and find some time to teach these skills without time pressure.

Finally, there can be a lot of societal expectation for students to know exactly what they want to do and to apply to a big name school, but remember, its all about finding the right match between a student and a college or a postgraduate plan. If you're feeling the pressure of competition, a great book to check out is "Where You Go is Not Who You'll Be: An Antidote to the College Admissions Mania" by Frank Bruni. In addition, parents can sometimes feel pressure that they have to tell others where their student is applying or what they are planning - but its okay to keep it quiet until a decision is made. When you feel most stressed or worried about the future, remember to breathe deeply and bring yourself back to the present moment, take a walk and look at the trees or the sky, or try lying down on the floor for a bit - a great place to rest and get a new perspective!

PEER LEADERS ADDRESS PARENT QUESTIONS

Q: What was the best response by your parents when you didn't succeed in something you'd prepared hard for?

A: A very simple hug and I love you. Tell your kid they're amazing, and let them take the lead, whether they want to talk or need time alone.

Q: *How can we help teens de-stress?*

A: Sometimes it can be helpful to make a schedule to be more efficient. Or I might need help making a list of what have to do, or plan out next two weeks. *Be sensitive to what your child needs to de-stress, which may change from night to night.* It might be constant talking or sitting by myself watching really stupid TV, which is totally valid and important in different ways. Take your child's lead. Video games, shooting baskets, etc. can be good stress release. I sometimes use free blocks at school to do work and give myself little rewards -- if I do an hour of homework, I can sit and relax for 30 minutes.

Q: How does being in a romantic relationship impact college?

A: One friend has a boyfriend applying early decision, but she doesn't know where she wants to go. It's nice to have a friend to talk about the process with, but we're trying not to compare ourselves. Sometimes when students are in a relationship, they decide in the spring not to spend so much time together and spend time with other friends. Prom is a stressor, and there can be hurt feelings unless you're really direct. You never want to string anyone along. (HINT: Most high school relationships don't continue into college.)

NEED SOME HELP?

Brookline is blessed with a wealth of resources, starting with BHS deans, guidance counselors and social workers. For additional helpful information on navigating common social, emotional and developmental challenges, including tips and resources, visit

www.B-PEN.org

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