

__THE BOTTOM LINE__

“THE UNIQUE CHALLENGES OF FRESHMAN YEAR”

B-PEN's recent *Freshman Scenario Parent Meeting* explored some of the unique challenges BHS 9th graders commonly face, asking parents to collectively brainstorm strategies for a variety of situations they may face with their teens -- “*What do you do when your teen...?*”

The biggest takeaway is that communicating – whenever and wherever you can – is key, clarifying family values/expectations and reinforcing support, trust, openness, and discretion. Parents do make a difference! (B-PEN's *What are BHS Teens Really Up To?* provides recent stats and local resources -- <https://tinyurl.com/BHSteens>)

KEY PARENT SUGGESTIONS:

Friends and Healthy Relationships:

Kids are undergoing a lot of social changes. If your teen is feeling left out, encourage extra-curriculars and activities outside of school groups. But if they're spending a lot of time at home, it may not be a concern, but rather that they need some extra downtime – enjoy your time with them while it lasts and make home welcoming for them.

Freshman Social Pressures:

As unsupervised house parties with alcohol ramp up, give your teen the resources to make good choices (i.e., facts about substance use impact on judgment, risking athletic/performing arts privileges, etc.) Reinforce “with freedom comes responsibility.” Talk about respect and consent. Ask them “What would you do if...” and consider a no-penalty face-saving code word they can text you when they need you to get them out of an uncomfortable situation. (You can then call them and say, “I need you home right away.”) Set reasonable curfews and ground rules, like “no parents, no party.” (Call the parents if you're unsure). Know where they are at all times -- build toward trust, but you can track phones, if needed. Set meaningful consequences for infractions. Get to know your teen's social group – have them to *your* house, and help create the class norms. BHS has peer support networks, like Junior Mentors, Peer Leaders. Also encourage relationships with at least one BHS adult – teacher, coach, club advisor—and possible another adult relative/friend.

Marijuana/Vaping

Vaping is rampant, and marijuana use is on the rise. If you find evidence of vaping/marijuana, confiscate any paraphernalia (even if they say it's not theirs) and talk frankly, but non-judgmentally about health concerns (facts, real world scenarios), legal/school risks, family consequences. Give them permission **NOT** to bow to peer pressure.

Social Media/ Time Management

Many kids are on devices nearly constantly, affecting mental health and school responsibilities. If digital lives seem to be problematic (addiction is real!), limiting access may help with some, but

not all. (“Unplugging” at night is a recommended practice.) Consider the root causes of device dependence. If schoolwork becomes an issue, communicate with teachers, guidance for additional support.

Stress Management

Anxiety and grumpiness can be signs of stress, which we all experience. Take it seriously – some Brookline kids are hospitalized for depression. Encourage your teen to confide any issues, possibly guiding them to consult an adult -- guidance/social worker, therapist, etc. Try to determine the source of the symptoms. (In addition to social pressures, schoolwork often is very stressful freshman year. If they come to you with a “friend’s” problem, make sure they’re not covertly talking about themselves.) Generate possible solutions together. Model and encourage positive coping strategies – exercise, sleep, nutrition, mindfulness, humor, creative outlets, job/volunteering, etc. In calm times, talk about ideas for dealing with moments of overwhelming stress, so you’re not managing it in the moment – “When you feel like this, how can I help?”

Dating/Sexual Relationships

As teens are exploring their identities, they are bombarded with sexual content and mixed messages, and sexual harassment/assault is an ongoing issue. Communicating information, values, and expectations to girls as well as boys is critical. (Having the conversation doesn’t encourage the behavior, but rather opens up trust.) Reinforce respectful behavior. But go slow – be curious, not reactive if you hear of questionable behavior or language. Make it personal – “Would you say that/show that/do that in front of your grandmother?”

DECEMBER 12 FRESHMAN PARENT MEETING, 7-8:30 p.m., Public Health Dept. Denny Room
Freshman class parent meetings this semester have been so informative and engaged that B-PEN and Parent Educator Hope Schroy are offering an informal info session/discussion Dec. 12 to continue the conversation. We’ll address some of the top issues concerning freshmen parents, from marijuana and setting limits to dating and social media. Please join us!

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