

## PARENT UPDATE

### 9th Grade Parent Meeting 2021: The Unique Challenges of Freshman Year

The most recent Freshman PTO meeting was a special collaboration with B-PEN (Brookline Parent Education Network) to explore some of the special challenges parents are facing this year, from screen time management to marijuana and vaping to safe socializing while we're still dealing with [pandemic issues](#). (Keep your eyes out for another scenario meeting January 25!)

Despite some unfortunate technical difficulties, break-out room discussions gave us the opportunity to meet and chat with one another about some common concerns and scenarios we might encounter with our teens as well as strategies for managing these unique times. Below are the takeaway discussion points plus some helpful information from BHS social workers Mary Minott and Abby Dean as well as the always insightful BHS Peer Leaders.

#### **Where we are now...**

While lockdown postponed a lot of risky behavior, rates of depression among students increased. Now that students are back together in person, they often are both excited and exhausted from all the socializing and being around so many kids all day. They are out of practice at socializing in person and may be getting distracted by friendships at school. They are still getting oriented, so it's made for a challenging transition to BHS, especially for kids who have organizational issues and may be getting off to a slow start. Students, especially freshmen, missed a lot of developmental milestones during COVID. The goal of adolescence is to pull away from parents, which the pandemic made extra challenging. So many of them are just now trying to figure out who they are in relation to family. However, student Peer Leaders believe that most of the freshmen are doing fine and urge parents to be gentle with them. They are feeling a lot of pressure learning to balance school and sports. "When you encourage them to talk to you, don't punish them when they say something you don't want to hear." Take a breath...

#### **Think ahead...**

As parents/caregivers/partners, it is important to think ahead of time about what will we do if confronted with a teen's risky behavior... finding vaping materials, inappropriate texts/pictures, a child coming home under the influence, a parent telling you your child was caught with alcohol, etc. Chances are most of us want to scream or yell, ground them forever, take away all devices ... probably not the best way to handle a situation. Consider now ...

- How do we handle it?
- What are the consequences?
- What should we be worried about? Should we be worried?
- What resources are available to us if we need them?

## Scenario Discussions

**Health & safety concerns while norms are still in flux** - What do you do if your teen gets invited for an overnight stay and you don't know the parents' attitudes about safety -- vaccination status, masks? Are you comfortable with your child taking the T? Going to the movies?

- High vaccination rates in Brookline have helped people feel more comfortable engaging in person, and kids seem pretty comfortable with the mask mandate, which will not be not changing in Brookline any time soon.
- Using the T is acceptable.
- For any kind of gathering/carpooling, don't hesitate to ask if everyone is fully vaccinated – and make decisions based on your comfort level.
- Talk with other parents, and consider maintaining elementary school friend groups or creating new pods with families you're comfortable with.
- If a child has a cold, let kids decide if they want to include them for an in-person event.
- Encourage socializing outside rather than inside.
- Experts do not recommend sleepovers – quality sleep is especially important now.

**Socializing** - what do you do if your child is hanging out after school every day with friends and barely makes it home in time for dinner, what are your concerns?

- Some parents feel there is [still too much socializing on devices](#). During hybrid/remote school this was the primary means of communication and it continues to this day.
- Continue discussions about tech-free time, too much screen time, stop using devices at a certain time of day. (One suggested strategy is turning off WiFi at 10 pm with the acknowledgement that cell phones/data are still working.)
- Aim for consistency, especially in families where teens alternate between two households.

**Healthy habits and behaviors** - what do you do if your child is in a sport/club, staying up late to get homework done and not getting enough sleep. Or is so tired that homework isn't getting done?

- Sometimes when they are on their devices, they are doing homework with friends. As long as homework and chores/responsibilities are handled, let teens manage their time.
- Some teens are night owls. Accept this as long as they are getting themselves up and out on time in the morning. If not, suggest going to bed fifteen (15) minutes earlier until able to get up and out on time.
- For homework issues, can check Canvas and/or reach out to tutorial, learning center and/or classroom teachers, guidance counselors, and ask for their help. You can ask them to check in with your child. (If it's a classroom/course issue, contact the teacher. Otherwise, you can reach out to the guidance counselor or Dean of Students.)
- A parent/pediatrician reinforced the importance of enough sleep, good nutrition, and exercise/movement.

**How do you talk about responsible behavior and social media use?** (Did you know that sexting and racy pictures are considered part of the dating culture? Have you heard about destructive Tik Tok challenges?)

- [The impact of social media](#) is an ongoing conversation, not a one and done. [Keep reinforcing.](#)
- Conversations about respect and [responsible behavior](#) is also a continual process. Make sure to discuss the importance of [consent.](#)
- Discuss protection/condom use **before** a teen is in a relationship and reach out to parents of the partner to make a connection and build a relationship, perhaps discuss curfews, limits, etc. Parents feel better talking with other parents and realizing they are not the only “strictest, meanest or most unreasonable” parent in the community.
- However, if you are calling about seeing a child at a party, a child being under the influence at your house, seeing inappropriate texts or pictures -- be prepared for an unpleasant reaction. (You might consider making a pact with friends you do know...”If you know something about my child or are concerned, please call me and vice versa”...)

**Marijuana & Alcohol** - what do you do when your child wants to hang out on weekends and you’ve heard rumors that kids are [smoking weed](#), [vaping](#) or [drinking](#) behind Florida Ruffin Ridley (Coolidge Corner) or at Fisher Hall Reservoir Park?

- Try to meet other parents and establish an ongoing conversation. Reach out to parents of the children you don’t know and establish a connection.
- Keep track of where your teens are and what they are doing.
- Keeping open communication with teens at this age can be very tricky. Here are some [ideas for good communication.](#)
- Reinforce family values and expectations as an ongoing process. Rather than forbid behavior, help them learn how to say NO on their own. Focus on consistent messages, open communication, clear expectations and consequences, and keep restating.
- Consider role playing with teen – “What would you do if your friends offered you a hit on a vape or a drink at a party?” etc. One parent suggested a teen in an uncomfortable situation like a party with a lot of drinking, they can say they feel sick, and exit the situation. In some situations, kids can say they can’t partake because of sports.
- Consider making your home *THE* hang-out spot, providing a safe place to socialize.
- Be diligent with urging marijuana and alcohol avoidance. Alcohol use usually manifests as binge drinking and risky behavior on weekends. Marijuana is often more casual -- some kids smoke every day, and a lot of parents smoke, which sends a mixed message and can increase access. (Some kids also are accessing through a medical MJ card and sharing with others.) While the majority of students still *DO NOT* smoke, those who do are smart enough to hide it. If you see any paraphernalia, it’s a problem. Reach out for help. Prevention/Intervention Team social workers are Mary Minott ([mary\\_minott@psbma.org](mailto:mary_minott@psbma.org)) and Abby Dean ([gabrielle\\_dean@psbma.org](mailto:gabrielle_dean@psbma.org))

**www.B-PEN.org**

*informed \* involved \* connected*

[www.facebook.com/BrooklineParentEducationNetwork](https://www.facebook.com/BrooklineParentEducationNetwork)

[June\\_Harris@psbma.org](mailto:June_Harris@psbma.org) [Karen\\_Campbell@psbma.org](mailto:Karen_Campbell@psbma.org)