

Parent Update

The Unique Challenges of Freshman Year

The February 2021 Freshman PTO zoom event facilitated by B-PEN (Brookline Parent Education Network) and featuring the BHS Peer Leaders gave freshman parents/caregivers an opportunity to “meet” one another and explore some of this year’s special challenges, from screen time issues and balanced limit setting to missed opportunities in a year critical to social/emotional development.

A brief **Peer Leader video followed by a Q&A** offered insight into what students are commonly struggling with now --

- **Isolation** - few opportunities to connect in person, and it’s hard for students to form relationships with teachers and reach out when they need help. Encourage socially distanced gatherings and connections.
- **Mental health** -- at all time low, but kids often put feelings aside to plow ahead. Check in and make sure they know that you are there for them. If a teen says they depressed or really stressed, don’t take it lightly.)
- **Screen time overload** - 5-6 hours in online school then 1-2 hours for homework. They may need extra screen time for entertainment, to feel social, interact with friends/family. Lighten up on limits. But for balance, shut off screen/phone 30 minutes before bed. Consider reading a book to transition to sleep mode.
- **Time management** – recommend trust, patience, and leeway vs. constant reminders about academic responsibilities. Set up dedicated work space to encourage learning mindset. Set goals at the beginning of the week -- lists, agendas, and color coding can be helpful tools. Occasionally print out assignments/work on paper to get a break from screens. Keep an eye on long term goals – we all need something to look forward to.

Two different breakout room sessions allowed parents to share concerns and strategies directly with each other. Below are the key takeaways.

Breakout Round 1 – Isolation

- Put yourself in your kid’s shoes – empathize.
- Communicate with intentionality - more listening, less prodding.
- Consider the nourishment found in isolation – reflection, creativity, self-motivation, etc.
- Prioritize two things that really matter to your child (like “health” and “happiness”) and put everything else aside. Let go of some expectations, trying not to add to kid’s anxiety.
- Social/emotional development is more important than academic achievement right now.
- Try to facilitate opportunities for safe socializing and outdoor activities. (One parent hired a nephew to lead soccer clinics. Another rented Larz Anderson Skating Rink.)
- Spend time together as a family – cooking, movies, walks, etc. Create a pleasant environment with good snacks and a sense of team spirit.
- Make dinner a daily milestone.

- If your child is having trouble making new friends, revitalize friendships from prior years – online games together, bike rides, skating, etc.
- Lighten up on device limitations.
- BHS may be initiating more clubs, so keep tuned for that.
- Brookline Teen Center is a great resource.
- The Deans are looking into possible solutions for the awkwardness of in-school lunchtimes

Breakout Round 2 – Limit setting and good habits

- Fewer limits encourage independence, but maintain concept that choices have consequences.
- Set up basic structures/habits at home, like coordinating bedtimes. Consider technology monitoring/limitations that are built in (wi-fi turned off at a certain hour, no devices at dinner, restrictive apps, etc.) and avoid argument each time. Model healthy device use.
- Build family habits and values collectively – compromise, negotiate to get buy-in.
- Don't micromanage academics - focus on love of learning rather than grades.
- Sleep – hard to get kids off screens at night, but regular bedtime between 10-12 generally considered best.
- Exercise – encourage movement (dance, hoops, walking the dog, etc.) especially if you can be outside. Consider modeling good exercise practices and do things *together*.
- Minimize exposure to news.
- ***Good enough is the new good!***

Coda – The common challenges of 9th grade are heightened this year by COVID, and we have no playbook. But we are all in this together, learning as we go, trying to make new connections amidst isolation. If you'd like to continue to communicate with others in the freshman class, we encourage you to sign up for the PTO directory at <https://bhsptobrookline.membershiptoolkit.com>. Once you create a Membership Toolkit Account, you will have access to the Directory.

BHS Prevention/Intervention Team is available to provide confidential guidance, information, and resources for any non-academic concerns (mary_minott@psbma.org, gabrielle_dean@psbma.org). In addition, www.B-PEN.org offers a range of tip sheets, opportunities, news, and resources.

www.B-PEN.org

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