

# BHS Peer Leaders Op Ed

October 2020

## Our New Online World

*With school underway, students are dealing with a whole new set of online learning challenges -- but without the gratification of connecting in person with their friends. B-PEN (Brookline Parent Education Network) asked Brookline High School student Peer Leaders what they wished parents understood about the stress of online classes and how they can support them in this “new online world?” Here’s a condensed and edited version of what they had to say...*

Life in online school is anxiety-provoking and exhausting. Paired with everything going on in the world right now, **students are stressed**. In past school years, we’ve discussed how healthy stress can push you to do your best. However, when stress gets unmanageable, it can lead to unproductivity and therefore more stress, creating a detrimental cycle. While the stresses of online school look different for each grade and student, it’s important to know that to some extent everyone is stressed, and it’s important to make sure it doesn’t reach a point where it becomes a hindrance to learning.

In general, we believe the biggest issues for all children right now are:

- lack of time away from the **screen**,
- **cyber safety**,
- and **social isolation**.

In **younger grades**, the issues begin with the lack of in-person social interaction. The K-2 years are so instrumental for learning to interact with peers and navigate a classroom setting. Missing out on these opportunities puts younger students at higher risk of not developing the skills for success in upper grades, making it important for parents to help them find **opportunities to interact with peers** in a safe way.

Another major issue is **increased screen time**. If you believe your child is spending too much time in online school work, reach out to the teacher/school and request more asynchronous study and non-computer assignments. Children also may be spending more time online recreationally, often because parents are working and unable to monitor their children’s behavior as carefully. While this is understandable, it’s important to encourage **time away from the screen**. (We’ve put together a list by grade of non-screen activities that can be done between zoom classes and during down time - - <https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1zzhlFp3KeTVcFMo0cgz8neOLuivb4vrydUAiYF9qJOw/edit?usp=sharing>)

In **upper elementary grades** and through high school, few students have had cyber citizenship or **internet safety education** this year, a lack that should be addressed

in school and in conversations at home. It is increasingly important to review proper online etiquette and the importance of avoiding scams and clickbait.

Another challenge is that many students are not experienced in self-advocacy in an online setting. If you think your child may be struggling, suggest (and help them, if needed) writing an email to their teacher asking for what they need. This will help them cultivate a good relationship for the return to in-school learning as well as develop the skills for self-advocacy all through school and beyond.

Also, with so many of our social interactions online, we can feel a **disconnectedness**. “When I get off a zoom call or facetime, I feel quite isolated and lonely in a way I have never felt after hanging out with my friends in person,” says BHS senior Arika Freeman-Gritter.

It’s also disconcerting to see yourself all day, making you **self-conscious**. Some teachers may recommend turning off self-view. However, this makes it difficult to know what others are seeing -- is only part of your face showing? Can the teacher see your “thumbs up?”

Based on these everyday struggles, the best thing parents can do is recognize that what we are doing is **mentally hard** and **truly exhausting**. We just need support from our family as well as encouragement. It can be helpful to have a parent remind you that it's okay to take a break and spend some time relaxing or getting exercise outside.

**Brookline High School Peer Leaders, class of 2021**  
**Aditi Shankar and Arika Freeman-Gritter**

*(BHS Peer Leadership program is a class for students interested in public health and supporting the BHS community as well as the community as a whole. For more information, contact social worker Mary\_minott@psbma.org)*