

## PARENT UPDATE

### **Our New Online World - Strategies for Dealing with Stress, Screen Time, and Social Isolation**

BHS parents have been expressing concern about mental health, increased screen time, and pandemic anxiety and safety for their teens. A recent zoom forum initiated by B-PEN, BHS student Peer Leaders, and the Sophomore PTO addressed new social/emotional family challenges resulting from online/hybrid learning and brainstormed strategies to keep our families balanced and safe.

A [short video presentation](#) by BHS Peer Leaders offered insight into what students are experiencing as they navigate this “new online world” plus their recommendations for parents.

#### **Student insights:**

- Teens are averaging 5-6 hours a day on screens for classes, plus another hour or two on homework.
- The isolation of virtual learning has also impacted academic confidence, since students are not easily able to drop into see a teacher or guidance counselor for help. The added step needed to set up a meeting online can feel intimidating.
- Stress levels have increased significantly, and most are feeling overwhelmed – mental health is at an all-time low.
- Teens worry about their own health and that of their loved ones, as well as concerns about academics, all while feeling socially isolated, which really affects emotional well-being.
- Parental worry adds to feeling stress and pressure.
- Yet, often teens bottle up their feelings instead of finding healthy coping mechanisms.
- There has been an increase in marijuana, alcohol, and other drug use.

#### **Student recommendations for parents:**

- Teens need someone to vent to, so parents should reinforce that they are available to talk and be a resource if needed.
- Check in regularly (but be careful to determine how much your teen will respond to) and don't take confessions of stress and depression lightly -- make sure they know they have your support.
- Give space and trust, but encourage kids to communicate what they need.
- Respect that teens need downtime and privacy - hiding in one's room may be a way teens are setting boundaries. We all need space. But be mindful of isolation that completely shuts down family interaction and may be a sign of clinical depression – we all need in-person connection as well.
- Despite increased screen time for school, most kids also need non-academic time on screens, which are their lifelines and can be a healthy coping mechanism. Social media and playing video games are still important outlets to maintain social connections. Encourage

turning phones off at night, but try to let kids set their own limits, intervening only if media use seems out of control. ([Common Sense Media](#) offers excellent guidelines for screen use.)

- It's also important to find a healthy balance with non-screen activities – playing a sport, finding a hobby, hanging out (safely) with friends and getting involved in community/clubs, staying connected with family (device-free dinners together, cooking, walks, bike rides, day trips (Alltrails app for hikes), cards, video games, movies/TV, etc.) Remind your teen periodically that it's OK to take a break.
- Encourage healthy habits -- diet, sleep, no drugs, spending time in nature, exercise.
- Schedule and routine can be important for effective learning and mental health.
- Know COVID facts to offset incorrect information and rumors – make sure you set firm guidelines for safe social interactions.
- As parents, try to model open-mindedness, resilience, gratitude, good communication, healthy device use, etc.
- Pick your battles, and know when to LET IT GO.
- Express compassion and empathy for loss and frustration – this is a tough time for everyone.
- BHS Peer Leaders also wrote a terrific Op Ed for the TAB that outlines some insights and strategies regarding [“Our New Online World.”](#)

#### **TAKE AWAY...**

the reassurance that you don't need to aim for perfect parenting, but rather GOOD ENOUGH PARENTING. We're all simply doing the best we can do. These are challenging times, and we can acknowledge and grieve together all the losses we're experiencing. But we also need to remind teens that there is light at the end of this long tunnel. Share joy, humor, and compassion.

If you are really concerned about your teen's substance use and/or mental health don't hesitate to reach out. BHS social workers Mary Minott ([mary\\_minott@psbma.org](mailto:mary_minott@psbma.org)) and Abby Dean ([gabrielle\\_dean@psbma.org](mailto:gabrielle_dean@psbma.org)) can help with information, advice, and resources.

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More information can be found at [www.B-PEN.org](http://www.B-PEN.org).

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