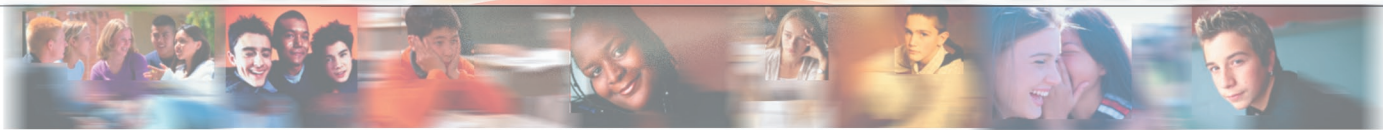


THE RISING STAR



Volume 3 Issue 3

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Feature Article

TALKING TO YOUR TEEN

By Steve Johnson

Mark Twain once said, “When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much he had learned.”

I talk with a lot of parents whose teenagers are in the first phase Twain describes, and they often say things like:

“When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much he had learned.”

“Our child won’t talk to us.” “If I try to have a conversation with her, she’s likely to be Instant Messaging her friends at the same time.” “When I insist he be home for a family dinner, he says I’m ruining his life.”

My answer: You are ruining his life, as well you should, if by ruining his life you mean you would like him to be influenced more by the responsible adults he knows than by his—perhaps more thrilling—peer group.

Make no mistake: We are locked in a battle for influence. Parents and other significant adults whom you have enlisted in the effort to help raise your children are in direct competition with the child’s own peer group in trying to affect values and form behaviors.

All day long your kid is checking in with other people—mostly kids—about decisions he’s contemplating, things he’s thinking of doing, ideas he’s playing with. Your goal is to be one of the people who gets consulted. It’s your job to make significant time in your children’s lives available to spend with family so that one generation can, in fact, influence the next.

their world, their music, the media they like, the technology they access. Whatever your child finds interesting and knows more about than you do is a great topic of conversation. Sometimes I like to make clearly incorrect statements about things they know more about. I’m hoping they’ll feel the need to correct me, and usually they do. You can also try talking about

How much time should that be? You certainly want daily opportunities for significant conversations with your child, which won’t happen unless you initiate them. They are more likely to occur at times when kids want to talk (often on a later time-clock than you might like) and on topics that kids want to talk about.

Adults are used to controlling the content of conversations, and that’s the first thing you’ll have to surrender if you want to have an influence. Here are some concrete suggestions to get those interactions going:

First of all, provide space for your kid to talk and respond. Learn to tolerate more silence, as kids sometimes need longer to formulate their ideas.

Second, ask your kids questions about



things that are intrinsically boring to an adolescent in hopes that your teen will talk about something that interests him or her—if only in desperation.

Third, if your kid won’t talk about his or her life, talk about your life. Try asking teenagers for advice about the world you see. You might be amazed at the freshness of their perspectives.



Feature Article

Talking to Your Teen(cont.)

Finally, the old standbys: Tell family stories, or go do something together. Lots of significant conversations take place when you're watching the baseball game, pulling weeds together, driving, or comparison shopping.

Besides those daily conversations, which are at the heart of parental influence, you need weekly, extended times when the whole family gets together. Family night works well for a lot of people, especially when it gets everyone doing something active, not just watching a movie or TV. Do you go places as a family that your teen would enjoy? When kids are little we go all kinds of places that excite them, so of course they talk to us. As they get older, we stop doing that. Why? Partly because we don't know what those places are, partly because we get older and more tired, and partly because we don't take the time. Take the time.

When your teenager doesn't seem to want to talk to you, remember this: Your kid is being a kid, and you're required to be an adult. It's often uncomfortable. Still, it's essential that you insist on a place in his or her daily life, however embarrassing, irrelevant, boring, or uncool you may seem.

Steve Johnson is the director of character education for the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics. A shorter version of this piece originally appeared in the San Jose Mercury News on April 21, 2004.

RESOURCES

Students Left Behind

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Contact us: ethics@scu.edu

Below is a brief article that discusses zero tolerance. Read the article and then ask yourself the critical questions. What are your thoughts? What happens at your school? Is there something that you need to do in order to prevent this scenario from happening at your school?

Students Left Behind: Is It Ever Okay to Give up on a Child?

The Challenge

Concerns about student safety and learning have led to the adoption of a "zero tolerance" approach to discipline at many schools. But the policy has sometimes resulted in shutting children out of school. In 2003-04, the last year for which statistics are available, 21,501 students were expelled from California schools. What do we owe these children?

What's at Stake

According to a recent study by the group Public Agenda, 85 percent of teachers surveyed believe that most children's school experience suffers at the expense of a few chronic offenders. But what should schools do about these repeated troublemakers? Zero tolerance was intended to ensure that certain serious misbehaviors, such as the possession of drugs and weapons, were completely disallowed on campus. Yet these policies, according to the American Bar Association, too often catch students whose offenses are not serious, such as the possession of a manicure kit or giving a Midol tablet to a friend. The ABA also found inappropriate referrals of these youngsters to the courts, creating what some have called a "schoolhouse to jailhouse track."

Critical Questions

1. How should schools balance their responsibilities to the majority of students and their responsibilities to youngsters

with serious behavior problems? Are there children who do not deserve to be educated?

2. Zero tolerance establishes the same punishment-expulsion-for a variety of offenses. As the ABA puts it, "State laws and school district policies apply the same expulsion rules to the 6-year-old as to the 17-year-old; to the first-time offender as to the chronic troublemaker; to the child with a gun as to the child with a Swiss Army knife." Is this fair?

Zero-tolerance policies have had disproportionate effects on minority students. African-American and Latino students were expelled or suspended in numbers two times greater than their percentage of the high school population, according to a study by the Juvenile Rights Project. The study also found that African-American students were more likely to be expelled or suspended than Caucasian students who had committed comparable offenses. Is this disparity itself enough to call the policy into question?

The views expressed on this site are the author's. The Markkula Center for Applied Ethics does not advocate particular positions but seeks to encourage dialogue on the ethical dimensions of current issues. The Center welcomes comments and alternative points of view.





RESOURCE

Helping Kids and Adults Take Responsibility for Character

By Tim Lickona, Director, Center for the 4th and 5th R's, School of Education, Cortland, NY 13045

This is an article that was printed in *The Fourth and Fifth Rs: Respect and Responsibility*, Volume 10, Issue 2, Winter 2004.

To ensure continual growth in the moral life, we must first know ourselves. We gain this self-knowledge by regularly examining our behavior and reflecting on the kind of person we are and would like to be. We must also sincerely want to become a better person—more patient, more sensitive to the needs of others, quicker to forgive, more willing to admit when we're wrong. Finally, we must ask, are we carrying out our good intentions?

Here are four ways we can challenge students—and ourselves—to strengthen our character.

1. Keep a Character Record Book

Goal-setting and self-assessment are a necessary part of self-improvement. At Benjamin Franklin Classical Charter School (Franklin, Massachusetts), every student keeps a Character Record Book. At the end of the day, students take out these books and write responses to three questions regarding that

will. In the middle section print what you will do, and in the final section print when you will do it. Now set a goal using this will+ what + when formula. For example: "I will clean my room in 45 minutes."

Other examples: "I will get my homework done every night next week." I will do my chores without being asked for three days in a row."

3. Do a Goal-Setting Bulletin Board

A San Diego teacher gives this assignment; "Find newspaper or magazine articles about individuals who set and pursued a goal." Students briefly share their articles with the whole class and then post them on the bulletin board. "This activity," the teacher says, "convinces students that goal-setting helps people succeed in life." During the following week, he teaches students how to set their own goals—for his class, other subjects, extracurricular activities, and life outside school.

4. Set 100 Goals

History teacher Hal Urban, author of *Life's Greatest Lessons*, gave his high school stu-

- U.S. travel
- Foreign travel
- Reading
- Learning
- Spiritual growth
- Creating/making/building
- Service to others

5. Select the 10 goals that are the most important to you. Then write a paragraph on your #1 goal.

Urban comments: "I've had students write to me 10 or 15 years after graduation, sending me their list of 100 goals with the ones checked off that they've already achieved. They say, 'If you didn't make us do this assignment, I never would have even dreamed of most of these goals, let alone achieved them.'"

If we want to nurture young people's growth in character, we must also see ourselves as engaged in the same humble process of trying to become a better person. New research on adult development indicates that adults' character

“ If we want to nurture young people’s growth in character, we must also see ourselves as engaged in the same humble process of trying to become a better person.”

week's virtue. If the virtue of the week were courtesy, the questions would be:

- How have I shown courtesy today?
- How have I not shown courtesy today?
- How will I show courtesy tomorrow?

2. Make Goal Strips

"Goal strips" can help us set specific goals we want to accomplish within a specific period of time. Michele Borba, author of *Building Moral Intelligence*, explains:

Cut a 3"x12" colored paper strip for each goal. Fold the strip into three even sections. On the first section, boldly print the words I

dents an assignment he called "100 Goals":

- Write at least 100 goals, more if you wish.
- Divide them into categories. You can choose your own categories based on your interests. Here are some you might want to consider:
 - Career
 - Family
 - Things you'd like to own
 - Fun/adventure
 - Self-improvement
 - Major accomplishments

qualities are not static. Some adults become wiser, more patient, more giving over time; others become more selfish. The challenge for all of us, at every stage of life, is to stay on the moral journey, keeping in mind the words of Eleanor Roosevelt: "Character-building begins in infancy and continues until death."



REFERENCE LETTER (from The Bristol Pilot)

Program equips kids with life skills

By Katie O'Toole
Bristol Pilot Editor

Some kids know exactly what they want to be when they grow up. Others have an idea or a dream and just need a little push and some guidance to give them the confidence they need. That's right where the Rising Stars program comes in.

In its second year in Bristol Borough, the Rising Stars program consists of a two-week summer session that offers valuable social and life skills to students at a crucial time in their mental and emotional development. The kids are benefiting from it and the Bristol Borough School District is taking notice. That's why they've helped to fund the program this year and there's also interest in making the program mandatory for high school freshmen.

Quintessence, a Yardley-based company specializing in helping organizations to set goals and get positive results, introduced the Rising Stars program to the area last year. Several Bristol-based business and organizations



KATIE O'TOOLE/BRISTOL PILOT

Rising Stars program participants Michael Favoroso and Jackie Picklo, both sophomores and Bucks County Technical High School and Bristol High School respectively, practice offering compliments to each other as part of an exercise.

were interested in the program when they learned of it and wanted to bring it to Bristol, according to Peter LaChance, president of the company.

Students can participate in the program if they are interested and guidance counselors are also asked to submit a list of students who could benefit from the program's material.

"There are high achievers in the program, there are A students and there are C students. They're all great kids," said LaChance during a session last week, held at the Margaret R. Grundy Memorial Library.

This year's program has 17 students, with Bucks County Technical High School guidance counselors David Sine and Lisa McWilliams as facilitators. Sine and McWilliams underwent training last year to be qualified to teach the course. Students are also exposed to the advice and guidance of representatives from the program's sponsors who visit the sessions. Last week, the kids met with school district Superintendent Dr. Broadus Davis, Gene Williams, executive director of the Grundy Foundation, and U.S. Congressman Mike Fitzpatrick, who shared with the students some of his experiences in Washington, D.C., and

in Iraq. "[Visits from the sponsors] opens kids' minds as to what they can do in the future," LaChance said.

The students also hear feedback from peers who attended the program the previous year. Dr. Davis said he was so impressed with the program last year and noticed that the number of kids interested in taking the program this year has increased.

"Kids are giving up their time to be here," he said. "The program is already growing, it's more than doubled since last summer," said LaChance. "Next year we're hoping to have 40 students from Bristol Borough."

Davis added that he's interested in making it part of the ninth grade curriculum within the next few years. "You can have your math course, your science course, your English course; but if you don't have life skills, people skills, you're not gonna make it," Davis said.

Last week, Davis spoke to the students about attitude. "If you don't have a good attitude, nothing else functions. You must come into every situation with a positive attitude because life is that tough. The things you are learning [in this program] are going to help you in life," Davis said.

Gene Williams of the Grundy Foundation encouraged the students to follow their dreams. "Stay true to who you are and become passionate about what you want to do," he said.

Besides the sponsors and the school district being interested in the program, the students actually participating in the program can't say

Waxmonsky said he took the program to "figure out how to develop a stronger work ethic so I could figure out how to achieve my dreams. I definitely think it was worth it to sign up."

Sophomore Jessica Soto said she thought the program was just going to be about leadership, she said, but she's "developed more self confidence and I'm learning about myself instead of about somebody else."

Nikki Mosco, also a BHS sophomore, said she wasn't sure what she'd learn in the program but it's helped her realize that "whatever goal you set out is attainable."

Sponsors for this year's program include First Federal of Bucks County, Fidelity Savings and Loan Association of Bucks County, Wal-Mart, Bristol Rotary, Rohm and Haas, Arkema, Tri-State Telecommunications, Bristol Borough School District and the Grundy Foundation. LaChance stressed that the program wouldn't be possible without the sponsors' generous donations.

enough about what it's done for them.

Brendan Corrigan, a junior at Bristol High School, thought his life was already heading in the right direction and that he "didn't need any help." He took the program anyway and "furthered myself with the things I've learned about life, attitude and goals. This is stuff you won't learn in school," he said.

BHS Senior Carl



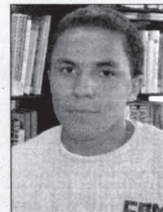
"This is stuff you won't learn in school."

Brendan Corrigan



"A goal you set out is attainable."

Nikki Mosco



"It was worth it to sign up."

Carl Waxmonsky



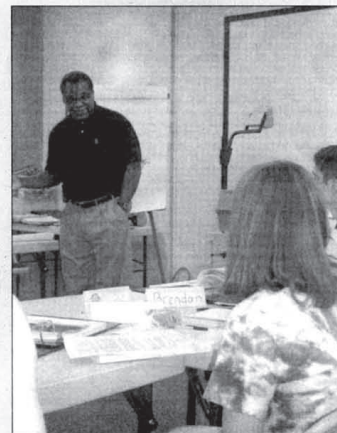
"I'm learning more about myself."

Jessica Soto



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Rising Stars facilitators David Sine and Lisa McWilliams lead an exercise on building a credit history.



KATIE O'TOOLE/BRISTOL PILOT

Bristol Borough School District Superintendent Dr. Broadus Davis encourages the students to have a positive attitude in all they do.



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