

Spring 2009 8th Grade Parent Meeting
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Questions, Issues, Concerns in Parenting our 8th Graders as They Approach 9th Grade

How do we keep them going during these last few weeks of school, when they don't want to work any more?

At school we have to manage their behavior as well as keep up their academic motivation. If students are accepted into private school, then they sometimes feel that they don't have to work. If the weather is too warm then that makes it more difficult to keep their minds on work. So what can we do?

- We need to continue to set expectations and limits.
- Pep talks that it's only 30 (or however many) more school days and that they can do it
- Reflective listening that you understand that it's hard to keep their minds on school, but that they've done well all this year and you expect them to end up the year responsibly and with decent grades
- You can always contact teacher(s) to deliver the "stick with it" message, too

What will the social scene be like when they are freshmen in high school?

- High school is a big transition time for all students. When they start high school they will all be looking to find their places. The friends that they initially attach to may not be the friends that they stick with
- Think of kids as needing an anchor. Some may find it with friends from Del Mar. Others may quickly meet new kids from classes or extra curricular activities. Some kids are greater social risk takers and more confident socially, so they may make new connections sooner than other kids. Remember to keep your home life consistent and stable; that's the best anchor when everything else is new and uncertain
- Sports and other extracurricular activities, such as clubs are important and effective venues for making new friends
- Kids may well be exposed to pressures and more risky behaviors and feel that since they're in high school they have to engage in them or have license to engage in them – don't give up on supervising them and trying to find out what's going on
- There may be pressure to have a boy or girl friend

How do we maintain communication with them?

- It's important to give kids space when they first get home from school; they likely will not be ready to talk with you
- Ask specific, instead of general, questions (not – how was your day)
- When kids provide information, don't react with judgment. Just say "oh," and they will probably offer more information
- Have some alone time with your child; take a walk together, drive together
- It's important for kids to have other adults to talk with besides you – older siblings, uncles, aunts, other kids parents; They may be more willing to share information and concerns with someone else than with a parent

Difficult discussions that may/will come up in the future: drugs, sex, drinking

- There is no universally accepted response to "did you do drugs, when you were young?" Of course, if you didn't then you have your answer. But if you did, you have a choice of being honest or avoiding telling the truth.
- It is important to find out why your child is asking, so just listen or make non-judgmental responses like, "I'm wondering if you or some of your friends have been confronted with making some difficult choices about that."
- You can respond with your own experiences ranging from "yes, I did, and I really regret doing some very stupid things like that," to providing information, like "I understand you're curious, but I get very concerned because I know that the judgment part of the human brain is not fully formed until age 25, and I don't want you to limit your brain power." Research has shown that the younger kids start to do drugs, particularly as teenagers, the more likely and quicker they can become addicted.
- Strongly emphasize health and safety issues – not driving with anyone who's been drinking or taking drugs. It's not too early to say that your willingness to let them get a driver's license will depend on their responsible behavior at parties and with friends during the next two years.
- Go Ask Alice is a powerful book that shows the effects of drugs.
- With any of these activities, particularly sexual behavior, have kids reflect on their sense of self, their reputations, and pride. Give them permission NOT to put excessive pressure on themselves to fit in.

Some positive things to keep in mind as your children enter high school:

- Everyone is in the same boat; it will be a new and exciting experience for everyone.

- There will be many new positive activities for them to try out – new sports, clubs, cheerleading, etc. Encourage that kind of healthy risk taking.
- Enjoy their increased cognitive skills – high school kids are really interesting; they get much more socially adept, able to express their opinions, and comfortable in their skins

A couple of helpful suggestions for the beginning of school:

- Encourage them to meet “old” friends for lunch the first few days or weeks, so they won’t feel alone
- Prepare them (if they’re going to Redwood or Tam) to do without laptops – retrain them to use paper and pencil planners for assignments

GOOD LUCK!