

Making the Most of High School Introduction

By: Leigh Hanbridge

Good evening and welcome to our 9th and 10th grade night program. This program will consist of a short introduction followed by a parent-panel moderated by Mrs. Grauer. We feel that the best people for you to hear directly from, are parents who have had children that have progressed through Metuchen High School and gone off to college, so the majority of our time tonight will be hearing from our panel. Before I turn it over to Mrs. Grauer, I would like to address a couple of very important issues that the counseling department has noticed an increase in among our students over the last several years.

I recently read an article about this current generation, termed Gen Z, also sadly referred to as the “loneliest generation”. Research has recently revealed that a record number of high school and college students are experiencing mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. From what we have experienced, the two biggest causes of this are social media, disconnecting our children instead of connecting them, and our children’s inability to cope with stress as a result of the older generations over-involved, fix-it style of parenting.

In the counseling department, we spend a great deal of time working with our students on managing mental health issues such as breathing techniques, finding ways to calm down such as listening to music and coloring, guided meditation, and problem solving strategies. We do not operate on an island though, and really need your assistance in helping send the same messages to your children.

In his speech during Meet the Teacher night, Mr. Peragallo touched on the importance of encouraging independence in your child because high school is their time to learn how to be resourceful and be their own advocate. As a counseling staff, we could not agree more. I am sure that all of you have heard of the term “helicopter parent”, or even the new term “lawnmower parent” which entails parents who micromanage their children’s lives in an effort to shield them from hardship, and give them a perceived advantage in an increasingly competitive world. I know that as parents, we all worry about our children; it

comes with the job. We think about the friends they have, their grades in school, and even their safety. When we don't trust our child to make the right choices, or allow them to deal with the consequences when they don't make a good decision, we are in essence, disabling them in the long run because they are not learning from their experience. Every mistake that we make as human beings is a lesson, but if we don't permit our children to make mistakes, they don't learn.

I would like to introduce you to a new term I like to call the "empowering parent". The empowering parent nurtures independence in their child and supports him or her through difficult challenges keeping in mind that overcoming struggle and dealing with the ramifications of our actions helps us all grow. As your child works his or her way through high school you will be exposed to a great deal of information related to the college process, but tonight as you hear from our "seasoned" parents I ask that you remember these key tips to successful parenting that will help your child develop into a competent and confident individual.

Tip # 1: Stop fixing the problem

By fixing your child's problem you actually don't allow them to admit they even have a problem to begin with. If you are completing assignments for them, or emailing teachers on their behalf, they don't realize that this is actually an issue they need help with. For example, if your child forgets his or her homework on the kitchen table, and you drive to the high school to drop it off in the main office to be picked up, what do they learn? They don't learn to make remembering their homework a priority the next time unfortunately. When we take over their tasks at home, or bail them out when they get in trouble at school, we aren't allowing them to face the consequences of their own actions. This in turn means, they aren't recognizing how to avoid making the same mistakes in the future. I think we can all agree that resourcefulness is a key component to success in the real world, and the only way to truly learn that, is to be in a position to need it.

Tip #2: Allow your child to make their own decisions

When we allow our children to decide things for themselves, we are empowering them to be confident and independent. For example, what clubs and activities they take part in, what courses they want to enroll in, and what they want to do as a career. Your children's lives are their own and if they aren't invested and happy with their environment, success will not happen, no matter how badly you as the parent want it.

Tip #3: Pay attention and listen

While it may seem like a simple tip, being present with your child and really listening to their desires, and fears, is one of the best things you can do as a parent. I recognize that as parents, we all have goals we want to see our children accomplish but when we lose sight of their immediate needs, and whether they want the same for their own life, we are putting a wedge between ourselves and our child. Listening to your child encourages independent thought and critical thinking, and it also helps avoid imposing your opinions and desire for them.

College officials are saying that more and more high school graduates are coming to their schools ill-prepared to deal with the college environment. We are seeing students transfer out of college as a result of this. When children are empowered, they realize their capabilities and learn valuable life skills. When we allow them to deal with the natural consequences of their poor decisions, we essentially are helping them learn how to make better ones. When they recognize the need to personally ask for help, solve a problem, and advocate independently, they become happier, more successful human beings.