Family Involvement is the Key to Student Success

For three decades, studies on the importance of family involvement in children’s learning have concluded that:

- All families want to and can help their children learn regardless of their income or educational level.
- Forty percent of parents across the country believe that they are not devoting enough time to their children’s education.
- Teachers ranked strengthening parents’ roles in their children’s learning as the issue that should receive the highest priority in future public educational policy.
- Among students ages 14-17, 48% said they would like to talk to their parents more about schoolwork.
- 71% of urban school leaders felt the lack of parent involvement to be a major problem.

The Role of Families

Interested family members can make an enormous difference in their child’s learning. High school students enrolled in a sequence of challenging courses will prepare them for college and/or career. At a time when many young people feel overwhelmed by the changes in their lives, the real and perceived pressures from their peers, and the change in school environment, parents can offer some focus on the value of education.

Overcoming test anxiety is a “Family Affair”

Test anxiety is a universal term these days. It is actually unusual to find a student who doesn’t approach a big test without confronting a high level of anxiety. Such anxiety can leave students with an array of problems - upset stomach, headache, loss of focus, fear, irritability, anger, and even depression.

- Stressful emotions can leave students unable to absorb, retain and recall information.
- Anxiety creates a “noise” in the brain that interferes with our ability to retrieve information from our memory along with the ability to comprehend and reason.
- Feelings like frustration, fear, anger and anxiety disturb our brain activity, leaving it “out of sync”.
- On the other hand, uplifting feelings, like appreciation, leave the brain synchronized and able to think more clearly.

Helpful hints for successful test taking

Research has shown that providing students with tools and strategies that build both emotional skills and healthy physical habits when preparing for a test can help students overcome test anxiety and the related symptoms. At the same time it is imperative to prepare students to be able to perform well on critical testing.

Helping students identify their feelings will lead to success as well. Giving them the tools they will need to face emotions such as anxiety, self-doubt, anger and/or frustration. Physically, students must practice good habits in order to have enough energy to think clearly over a long period of time.

Tips to share with your child

- **Practice the neutral tool.** When your child has uncomfortable feelings about whether they will do well on a test, practice the neutral tool with them. It is important to catch negative thoughts before they reinforce self-doubt. Each time your child experiences these negative feelings, practice slow breathing, allowing the body to become calm. This breathing may become helpful in days leading up to the test, the night before, or even during the test.

- **The what-if question.** Often times, anxiety surrounding test taking has to do with the negative feelings associated with “what-if” thoughts. Addressing such questions like, “What if I fail?” will help you and your child find out where the anxiety stems from. Have your child write down positive what-if questions like “What if I can remember more than I think I can?” or “What if I can feel calmer than I think I can?”

- **Think good thoughts.** Scientific research has shown that good feelings, like those associated with appreciation, can actually help the brain work better. When your child encounters feelings of anxiety, encourage them to think of something that makes them feel good. Once they think of something, allow them to hold that feeling. Students should try and practice this tool right before a big test.

- **Rest.** Big tests require a lot of energy and stamina so that your child can focus. Make sure your child gets at least 8-10 hours of sleep the night before a test.

- **Do something fun** the night before a test to take your child’s mind off of the test - see a movie, play a board game or engage in a physical activity. This allows the student’s mind and emotions to become more relaxed leading up to the test.
Bullying has been a part of our American Society for years, and most have their own definition of what bullying is. Bullying is all too common and seems to target just about every culture. Girls and boys, as well as men and women are capable of bullying behavior. Research has shown that between 30% and 60% of school children have reported being bullied at some point.

Bullying can be extremely hurtful and is not wanted by those who are on the receiving end. 58% of school children claimed that they chose to stay home from school on at least one day just to avoid being bullied.

The central focus of bullying is the idea of POWER, about big on little, many on few, smart on less smart or older on younger. Almost all of us have probably been the smaller one, the younger one, or had our interests and feelings damaged by someone more powerful.

When dealing with a bullying situation, there are a number of roles one can take, that of the bully, the victim, a peer bystander, school official and/or parent. Traditionally, bullying interventions usually begin with the bully. It seems almost natural to want to “punish–the-bully,” but unfortunately this approach is ineffective. This only adds fuel to the fire, and the bullying cycle continues. Some anti-bullying strategies focus on the victim, with the hope that the victim can learn some effective skills for dealing with bullies.

Though girls can sometime become physically violent, boys tend to be more physical. Girls usually prefer a less physical form of bullying, referred to as relational aggression, which includes spreading rumors, using social exclusion, taunting and other strategies to hurt someone and/or damage someone’s reputation.

Researchers have discovered that we definitely need to do more than punish the bullies and support the victims. Recent research shows that we need to intervene on many levels. It is important that bullies, victims, peer bystanders, school officials, and parents all have a role in the prevention of bullying.

Tips for Parents

✓ Communicate your concerns about supervision, monitoring and consequences of bullying to your child’s school counselor or administration.
✓ Help your children build a social safety network.
✓ Teach your children anti-bullying strategies such as assertiveness and conflict management skills.
✓ Avoid bullying the bully. One of the ways children learn to be bullies or victims is through their own family experiences.

Tips for Understanding Your Adolescents’ Behavior

1. All teenagers take risks as a normal part of growing up.
2. Healthy adolescent risk-taking behaviors tend to have a positive impact on an adolescent’s development. This can include participation in sports, artistic and creative abilities, volunteer activities, travel or running for school office.
3. Negative risk-taking behavior which can be dangerous for adolescents include drinking, smoking, drug use, reckless driving, unsafe sexual activity, disordered eating, self-mutilation, running away, stealing or gang activity.
4. Risk-taking, whether healthy or unhealthy, is simply part of a teen’s struggle to test out an identity by providing self-definition and separation from others, including parents.
5. Red flags that help identify dangerous adolescent risk-taking can include psychological problems such as depression or anxiety.
6. Adolescents offer subtle clues about their negative risk-taking behaviors through what they say about the behaviors of friends and family members.
7. Adolescents look to their parents for advice and modeling about how to assess positive and negative risks. Parents need to help their teens learn how to evaluate risks and anticipate the consequences of their choices.
8. Parents need to pay attention to their own current patterns of risk-taking as well. Teenagers are watching, and imitating, whether they acknowledge this or not.

Parents as Partners

Parents and school counselors have the same objective - what is best for the child. The following are tips for parents looking to build a better relationship with their child’s school counselor:

▷ WORK TOGETHER
Realize the only way to do what is best for the child is to be a team.

▷ COMMUNICATE OFTEN
Don’t be afraid to call or email with questions or concerns. Open lines of communication benefit both sides. Being proactive is better than reactive.

▷ BE OPEN MINDED
Don’t always jump to conclusions about a situation. Stay calm and talk to the counselor before making a snap judgement.

▷ BE HONEST
The school counselor can’t help you or your child under false pretenses.

▷ BE OPEN TO SUGGESTIONS
Try not to be defensive about your parenting. School counselors realize parents are doing the best they can, but we all can learn new tricks of the trade.

▷ MAKE AN APPOINTMENT
with the school counselor when you have a concern. This ensures that time will be spent focused on you and/or your child.