

Parenting Your Teenagers: Character Is Everything

'Doing what is right when no one else is looking.'

BY GAIL SHEFCIK

He was featured in the movie *Race to Nowhere*, and on March 6 Dr. Kenneth Ginsberg, a pediatrician specializing in adolescent medicine at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and author of *Letting Go with Love and Confidence*, spoke about the research he has done on building teen resilience, competence and character. Dr. Ginsberg wove anecdotal as well as research-based information into the packed auditorium at the Sid Jacobsen Jewish Community Center (JCC) in Roslyn. He expressed concern for children in these affluent communities where value is placed on perfectionism and materialism—saying we may be truncating their ability to learn resilience and ways to successfully cope in life. Dr. Ginsberg walked about the room, was self effacing, likeable, and candid, then shifted the focus to parents in the audience, asking, "Do you want to parent for the college bumper sticker on your car or do you want to parent to have a future well rounded 35 year old?" It is personality characteristics, he said, that matter most when talking about lifelong success.

Dr. Ginsberg, again targeting parents, pointed out that too much pressure causes teens to fall apart and be terrified to "think outside the box." In opposition to this, resilience helps teens "bounce back from adversity." It is pain and struggle, he said, that sows the seeds of resilience, and "when we keep our children from learning

to deal with difficult situations we hamper their ability to become resilient"...a skill he reiterated is greatly needed to be successful in life. Therefore, having the ability to navigate life's challenges, be they social, academic or familial, he said, is a skill that stays with children long term.

Some teen behavior that causes concern, the doctor said, results from a child's attempts to deal with painful situations, feelings and stress. Dr. Ginsberg said he has studied "what makes people break" and "when we do not let our child walk through puddles they do not learn how to stay dry."

What helps teens manage stress and fosters resilience? Dr. Ginsberg believes that "playing to the child's strengths rather than magnifying weaknesses" is the starting point. Teens also do well with connection—"when the adults in their lives love them unconditionally, hold them to high expectations and believe in them." Ginsberg's book included a quote on the importance of character: "Doing what is right when no one else is looking." Building character in teens, the doctor continued, and demonstrating character as parents, fosters resilience. Helping teens build healthy ways to cope with the difficulties everyone faces is providing them a lifelong gift. Children with healthy coping skills, he said, "do not turn to the quick fixes that are the fears of many parents (eating disorders, cutting, substance abuse etc...). Thus, many of those behaviors Dr. Ginsberg feels are the teen's attempt at coping with stress. Dr. Ginsberg mentioned in his book that often "overprotected children" do not recover well from stress—it is learning to deal with hardship that breeds resilience.

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— Dr. Kenneth Ginsberg

He mentioned different techniques to help teens deal with stress and to help them learn healthy ways of managing difficult feelings: exercise, sleep, creativity, and building competence in things they enjoy. But most importantly, Ginsberg said, parents need to manage stress in similar ways to model this for their children, and, in the process, to help their teenagers to make the problems more manageable, to learn what triggers the unpleasant feelings, how to actively avoid certain situations when necessary, and, in contrast, how to tackle a problem when needed. Dr. Ginsberg went on to discuss that highly successful people are usually really great at one thing but may also be good at others. He listed "work hard, do well and enjoy it" as hallmarks of a good career.

His concern about the current focus on "testing" versus "learning" was touched

upon. He suggested asking your child, "What did you learn today?" not "What grade did you get?" And asking "Did you play well?" not "Did you score a goal?" Focus on the student's effort, he instructed, not the outcome, adding that when parents focus on perfectionism it kills creativity, creates self-loathing and a fear of failure. Kids that are praised on "effort" keep trying, he explained, and kids that are praised on "smarts" give up.

The evening was sponsored by several groups including the Sid Jacobsen Jewish Community Center (JCC), Manhasset School Community Association (SCA), Jericho Wellness Coalition and the Bryant Library.

Dr. Ginsberg offered a practical tip: When parenting, "turn your parent alarm off" and really LISTEN to your child. Focus on safety when setting limits (i.e. "I do not want you to drive with friends in the car until you have had your license for six months because I love you and your friends too much to risk you getting in an accident. I will drive you where you need to go in the interim while you adjust to driving without distraction"). The focus is on health and safety.

And lastly, Dr. Ginsberg said teaching children to contribute to the world helps them to feel part of the world.

SEPTA Runs Nearly 30 Programs in 2011-12

Manhasset Special Education PTA (SEPTA) is experiencing the biggest year ever since chartering in October 2007. Dedicated to providing resources to the special needs community, SEPTA has provided free expert information, new public resources, and this year alone has created nearly 30 programs for children with disabilities and the gifted/talented.

"It is an amazing accomplishment," Manhasset SEPTA co-President Amy Morse stated at the last official membership meeting. "We are so grateful to everyone who has made this possible from the generosity of organizations awarding SEPTA grants to the business community providing corporate donations as well as all the families that support our fundraisers, and of course the countless children that participate in all our wonderful programs!"

At the membership meeting held on Tuesday, Feb. 28, Manhasset SEPTA directors and executive board reviewed the programs that are running this school year. Nearly 30 programs in total were reviewed with status reports about participating and parent feedback.

Programs reviewed included five school programs such as the homework special support and the gifted/talented eighth-grade research program. Other programs donated to the school by SEPTA include student presentations and drum therapy for the elementary school CAPP program. Manhasset SEPTA gifted \$12,500 to the school district for programs in 2011-12.

Community programs running this year include gifted/talented Chinese Language and Culture, Public Speaking, and the SAT Simulated testing. For the special needs community, including children with learning and developmental disabilities, SEPTA is offering the SNAP play group, Drum/Music Therapy, Meet Me at the Gym training, DJ Dance-Along, Special

Needs Yoga, and Ride a Two Wheeler bike riding workshop. Nearly all of these Manhasset SEPTA programs are free to participants, and have been filled to capacity with interested families from across Long Island.

In addition to all the programs, SEPTA has gifted to the school district Big Apple Circus tickets for elementary school students in the special education classes. It was a wonderful school trip and memorable day for students as they attended a special performance, the Big Apple Circus of the Senses.

The impact of Manhasset SEPTA on the special needs community on the North Shore has been enormous, setting a new standard for organizations servicing students with learning, physical and developmental disabilities as well as the gifted/talented. Creating programs is just one part of SEPTA's effort with the group also providing free expert presentations, workshops, support groups and special education law study groups since chartering in 2007. Furthermore, the group has created the first special needs parenting section in the Manhasset Public Library that contains hundreds of books, DVDs and videos on a wide range of topics for teachers and parents.

Manhasset SEPTA is accepting donations for 2012-13 school programs and welcomes the community's financial support. Please contact Manhasset SEPTA via email at ManhassetSEPTA@gmail.com or by mail at Manhasset SEPTA, PO Box 155, Manhasset NY 11030.

Log onto their website at www.ManhassetSEPTA.org for more information about their services and resources including new programs, free presentations and workshops for 2011-12, and free local resources like the new special needs parenting section in the Manhasset Public Library.

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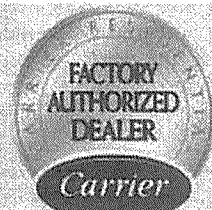
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