

At the ParentNet meeting for grades 5-12 held March 15, 2018 in the Farmhouse, we had a great discussion on the following topics:

- ❖ Dealing with challenges associated with time management, organization, and the balance between extra-curricular activities and academics.
- ❖ Managing the impact and influence of technology in children's lives

In addition, these notes include links to some great parent resources from Mrs. Karen Firminger, and her notes from a Grade 9 Mom's Christmas Coffee last year.

Time Management and Organization - Challenges and Solutions

Situation: *When I open Veracross, I often see a "sea of red" NTIs. This is frustrating because I know my son did their homework and simply forgot to turn it in. My son has a test tomorrow, but the night before realizes that he forgot to get the corresponding textbooks to study. My upper-schooler has become a walking zombie (and is taking me for the ride!) trying to multiplex across sports activities, jobs, homework, friend's parties, and so on, and there doesn't seem to be a way out. How do others organize and manage time efficiently across a multitude of seemingly important activities, with a roller-coaster ride of ups/downs?*

Discussion:

Help children visualize their schedule: A parent suggested that a simple way to help kids visualize their schedule is to put it on a whiteboard—create a table with 5 columns, with each column representing a day of the week, and rows representing time slots starting from after school to bed time. Have the child write down their activities in those time slots, inclusive of homework assignments, test preparation, activities, and any social events. Once done, ask the child whether their schedule is realistic (inclusive of its impact on family members!)—very often it isn't. In such a case, help the child make any adjustments, and then they should commit to it. That is, they "LOOK AT IT, BUY INTO IT, GOTTA DO IT!" Having a week-long schedule that they can see helps them visualize how a soccer game the next day may impact their ability to finish homework for the following day and adapt faster. In other words, helping kids become more aware of their routine will make them feel more empowered and confident, and drive success.

Adapt styles based on what works for your child: Different kids are motivated and get organized in different ways. One parent used a Glam Planner, which their daughter personalized with stickers to make it interesting. In doing so, parents found their child more often referring to their planner, which then helped them stay organized. Another family found that what worked for their son was to write down activities on sticky notes on the drive back home, and then transfer it to their whiteboard once home. Yet another parent put a whiteboard in their child's cubbie and for the first few weeks, wrote down the various reminders so that their child got more help to get into the right habits. By utilizing techniques that appeal to your child, you are honoring what your kids are wired for, thereby increasing chances of success.

Regularly monitor progress: Once a schedule is in place, it is important to monitor how the child is progressing against it. One technique a parent followed was to help the child visualize progress. On a whiteboard, draw three columns with the first column representing the backlog of all things to be done for the day, the second column representing the activity in progress, and the third column

representing work that is done. As kids see their backlog gradually move into the completed list, they gain confidence and happiness. For more details on this activity, please refer to the previous ParentNet meeting notes (which took place on 11/2/2017) where this was discussed extensively

Reflect on the week's schedule: During the week or for a certain duration, avoid the impulsive reaction to change the plan if your child is not being able to follow it. Instead, find a way to go through with it even if hard. For example, if a child starts an activity, then let them go through with it for 10 sessions before you choose to make a decision to quit. At the end of the week or after a certain duration of time, have a discussion with your child on what's going well/what's not, and empower them to change their plan—if that results in them quitting an activity, know that it is OK to do so, given the priorities of everything else at hand.

Time-box efforts: One of the parents remarked that their daughter would spend an inordinate amount of time striving for perfection on her assignment or activity, which would then have a ripple effect on everything else. The parents determined that the right path here was to time-box activities (for example, say that a given activity must be completed within 1 hour) to help their daughter prioritize how time got spent.

Find a good support circle of friends and resources: Ensure that your child has a great friend's circle who keep each other honest on school work. It was noted that children of this age are more likely to listen to feedback from their peers rather than parents! In other words, have a "kidnet" where kids learn from each other's best practices. There was a general observation that girls seem to be more organized than boys, and that having a parent's circle that is inclusive of a classmate that is a girl is quite beneficial 😊 In addition, as a parent, be aware of the resources kids need to be successful. One example a parent noted was that they keep physical and/or electronic versions of the textbooks at home so that their son has a better chance of keeping up with their schedules even if they forget books at school. Another parent strongly recommended subscribing to the school calendar feed, as it is kept up to date with information on homework, class events, and tests.

Be flexible: One parent noted that we as parents need to show flexibility to help kids meet their schedules. For example, if there is a dinner party social event, perhaps it is OK for the child to miss it in favor of other activities. In general, understand that despite best intentions, you and your kids are over-committed, and that there will be a need for flexibility to keep in balance.

It is OK to fail: One parent suggested that we as parents need to get comfortable letting children fail in the short term at something, because it teaches valuable lessons. Children being able to associate hard work and organization with getting good grades is a lifelong lesson, which will be tough to internalize without kids experiencing failure first-hand. Especially for middle-schoolers, failing now and improving is not as disastrous as something similar happening in college.

Managing the Impact and Influence of Technology

Situation: *Technology seems to have overtaken our family lives, and not always in a good way. Our children have a distracted night's sleep because they receive text messages on their phone in the late hours of night. Our children have too much screen time, and it is not clear what apps they use, games they play, or content they are view. The age our kids want and get phones is dependent more on peer pressure than it is on what we as*

parents desire. Our kids go to their friends' house where we have little control over what they watch on Netflix as the values may differ across families. How can we manage across all this?

Discussion:

Establish ground rules based on your family values: There were a variety of ideas on this point, and the eventual goal was come to consensus with your children on regulating the use of technology. For example, one parent has a rule that their phones cannot be in the bedroom at night, and must be charged outside the bedroom. Another parent mentioned that their children cannot use YouTube at their friend's house or watch content/play games that is beyond a certain rating, and encouraged their children to ask game/content ratings. Another parent told kids not to share passwords out. Having such clarity over what the family rules are also gives children confidence and clarity to then express their limits to their friends as well when needed. Of course, kids love to test such boundaries (discussed in third point below), but knowing what the boundary first is necessary.

Help create a safe online and social environment for your child: Once ground rules are established, as parents we need to make it easy for children to not break those rules. One parent recommended putting filters in the browser or the internet router to ensure kids could not easily get access to inappropriate content. For group settings, a parent established a simple code word that their child could use in settings where they didn't feel comfortable (any time a ground rule was being broken). For example, say the word is "inhaler", then the child could call home safely in front of others and say "Mom, I need my inhaler", and the parent could then come and pick up the child (and check the surroundings) if needed. Yet another parent noted that they establish a rating for the phone itself (such as PG) to allow the phone to enforce appropriate usage. One parent noted that they allow iPad usage for targeted activities only. In other words, as parents, we need to do our part to help our kids be safe and regulated with the use of technology in their daily lives.

Shine a light on problem areas: It goes without saying that most kids explore and test the boundaries. One parent noted that it was important to precision question your child. For example, their son noted that the whole class had watched a certain movie (which was beyond the rating established as part of the ground rules). Upon asking "how many children", the parents realized that it was just 1-2 kids, and then the parents could re-educate on shared values. Another parent noted that you could use apps (such as Moment or Quality Time) to get an update on how (and how long) kids are using their phones per day/per week. Parents can then look at this together with their kids, which helps the child understand their potential overuse of devices and helps the children understand that their parents are aware of their online activities.

Great Resources

- *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World.* <https://www.amazon.com/Deep-Work-Focused-Success-Distracted/dp/1455586692>
- *How to be a High School Superstar* <https://www.amazon.com/How-High-School-Superstar-Revolutionary/dp/0767932587>
- *A Smart Girl's Guide: Digital World: How to Connect, Share, Play, and Keep Yourself Safe* (American Girl) <https://www.amazon.com/Smart-Girls-Guide-Digital-Yourself/dp/1683370430>



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- *Guy's Guide to God, Girls, and the Phone in Your Pocket: 101 Real-World Tips for Teenaged Guys* <https://www.amazon.com/Guys-Guide-Girls-Phone-Pocket/dp/1624169902>
 - Note to Self – Bored and Brilliant Podcast <https://player.fm/series/bored-and-brilliant>
 - Screenagers Tech Talk Tuesdays – Growing up in a Digital Age. Gives insight on how to empower kids to best navigate the digital world. <https://www.screenagersmovie.com/tech-talk-tuesdays/>
 - Qustodio - parental control software – easy and simple ways to manage and supervise kid's device use and find out how many hours are spent on various Apps too! <https://www.qustodio.com/en/>
 - Mobicip – set up and enable on your family's mobile devices and computers. You can remotely manage settings, monitor internet, app usage, set age-appropriate restrictions, and time limits. <http://www.mobicip.com/>
 - Covenant Eyes – Internet Accountability and Filtering (Service) – equip your conversations, protect all your devices, and block the bad stuff. <http://www.covenanteyes.com/>
 - Axis: Faithbased - online site resourcing parents to disciple and transfer legacy to their children as they face life's questions and challenges. <https://axis.org/>
 - Parenting Teen Summit – a conference providing practical advice from Christian leaders and authors on how to disciple your teens into lifelong faith in Jesus. <https://parentingteenssummit.com/hope-encore-homepage>



Notes from Grade 9 Moms' Christmas Coffee (12/8/2017)

Please find some excellent notes below from a Christmas Coffee last year!

- Supporting our teens during finals or other times come in many ways. Here are a few ideas:
 - Bring in your teen's favorite drink during their study time OR while he/she is studying
 - Heat a blanket in the dryer and place over your teen
 - Be available during the teen's study breaks for a chat, snack, game, walk, etc.
- Time Management:
 - Ask your teen what their plan is for tackling their studies. Time boxing helps students work within the time they allocate for an assignment or study session.
 - It is good for all to understand the impact of perfectionism. Learning that some things require excellence and some things require just a "good enough" effort. This is part of learning to prioritize.
 - For those high achievers it can be helpful to have them calculate what they have to get on their final to get the grade they desire. When a student realized that they only needed to get a 55% on a final, their stress level decreased!
 - Scrum/Kanban for families <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9--ZFcbA04> (something that was going to be shared but ran out of time.) Interesting time management system used in manufacturing. This can be applied to students too!
- Stress:
 - Some kids don't really know what questions to ask or where they need the most help. Most teens who say they are stressed don't know why they are feeling this way or how to change it.
 - When your teen starts seeing the "red blinking light" of anxiousness and negative feelings they may not be equipped to help themselves regroup and calm themselves. We can suggest that they take a break but sometimes they don't feel they can.
 - As parents we can first show them empathy. Then we help talk them down by helping them replace their negative thoughts with positive insight. Perhaps we ask them to list all their tasks. Then we come along side of them and show them how to prioritize.
- Cell Phones:
 - Kids and adults are being distracted with the constant stimulation of cell phones.
 - Manage phone time: we need to "be the parent" and make helpful family rules to have the phones in a common area in the house and not in with the child while studying. If they need to check their phone, then they can come into the family environment to do so....this helps to alleviate isolation and for us to be available for them.
 - Some families charge their phone in a centralized area to ensure a sound sleep and set up good phone habits.
 - Dopamine is a huge reward and how it affects the brain and emotions, makes social media addicting.
 - Be aware that there is easy access to inappropriate images on phones. This issue impacts both boys and girls whether sending pictures or receiving pictures.
 - We need to help our teens be mindful of how they manage their time and when to disconnect. The gift of boredom leads to emotional well-being and creativity.



- Some research is showing excess video gaming is creating a generation lacking empathy.
- Challenge our kids to be without their electronics – take a 24-hour challenge or a 2-day challenge or push it to 5 days without a phone! 😊
- One family is getting their son a cell phone and asked for resources how to set their teen up for success with owning a phone. Christy Brady-Smith wrote an article on how to approach healthy cell phone usage!
<https://www.naturenurtureknowledge.com/new-blog/2015/10/19/drowning-in-social-media-sink-or-swim-doesnt-work>