



The Early Middle School and Middle School ParentNet meeting was held in the Farmhouse on November 2, 2017. We had a great discussion on the following two topics:

- ❖ Managing peer pressure associated with grades and other accomplishments
- ❖ Managing peer pressure associated with screen time

In addition, we also discussed other issues such as managing excessive screen time and managing homework time. Towards the end of the meeting, we were in for a special surprise—we had a demonstration on an effective time management technique for children, tried and tested by one of the parents!

Managing peer pressure associated with grades and other accomplishments

***Situation:** My child feels a degree of insecurity in his peer group—he compares his grades with those of others frequently. He thinks 100% is the only number that matters when it comes to results, and that 99% is a failure. At the same time, kids seem to be gearing friendships based on performance – academics, sports, etc. One of the parents also noted that their child transitioning from a Montessori environment (where grades didn't matter) to the school environment was resulting in some degree of insecurity. Finally, a mom (also a teacher) noticed that kids who were academically advanced in regular classrooms felt overwhelmed when they were placed in a gifted program (as the level of competition suddenly increased). How do we deal with such situations?*

Discussion:

Focus on your inner strengths: One of the moms suggested that we can help children understand the strengths they have been blessed with, and tell them that they do not have to try to be someone they are not intended to be. This might help kids realize that there isn't a need for them to compare themselves with others (and have an identity crisis), because they already have the needed strengths and should strive to continue improving themselves (as opposed to worrying about their peers).

Embrace a growth mindset: One mom noted that she showed a [video](#) (please note that this may not have been the exact video), on growth mindset to her kids, and found it helpful. An important part of this thinking is that your mindset influences your learning and future success. Specifically, a fixed mindset assumes that your abilities are fixed and unchangeable, while the growth mindset notes that your abilities can be improved through practice. With the growth mindset, failure is a chance to learn/improve, and obstacles are a chance to experiment and solve problems.

Show self confidence in being an outlier: One of the moms noted that kids, over time, figure out where they fit socially. During this time, kids should be encouraged to show wisdom, compassion and courage, even as an outlier. In addition, we should encourage our kids to celebrate the unique qualities of their peers.



Don't stress too much about the report card: For kids that worry too much about grades, one mom noted that she stresses more on the behavior aspect of the report card as opposed to the actual grades. This helped take the parental pressure off and create less anxiety.

Managing peer pressure associated with screen time

Situation: When it comes to phones and electronic gadgets, my family's rules differ from those of my children's friends. The same holds for movies where his friends want to watch a PG-13 movie while we want to wait on it. How do we deal with situations when his friends and their parents have rules that are more relaxed than ours while not putting our son on the spot?

Discussion:

Prep your child: Talk to your children about what you consider appropriate versus not. At the same time, prepare an exit plan for your child to exit an unavoidable situation gracefully. One of the moms noted that her son ended up at a party where the group wanted to watch a PG-13 movie (which was inappropriate for her family). Her son called her and told her about the situation. She then called the host, who graciously agreed to have the group watch a Cougars game rather than the movie.

Involve yourself in the choices they make: Monitor and get involved with the children as they are figuring out how to spend their time during a playdate or a party. For instance, if they want to do Karaoke, then tell them that you'll pick the songs; if they want to play video games, tell them that you'll pick the game and the duration they play for; if they want to watch a movie, tell them you'll help pick the movie. One of the moms noted that she was bold enough to ask the kids to give their phones to her so that the kids would play with each other while they were together. Do this with utmost love, confidence, and humor.

Be bold and state your family rules: State your rules directly to the children and parents who come over. In the same way children come to respect your differences in school, such as being allergic to peanut butter or being a vegetarian, you will find that other family's children are remarkable at internalizing rules of your family at home as well, and finding ways to have fun within those constraints.

Help your children introspect about their friendships: At times, you will find that your child wants to hang around a group of friends, but that their value system is completely different from yours. For example, one of the moms noted that her son's friend was belligerent about watching inappropriate YouTube videos during a sleepover, and wouldn't really listen to even her son asking him to do something else. She talked with her son about whether he really enjoyed their time together, and her son came to the realization that his time was better spent elsewhere. In other words, help your kids introspect on who they really enjoy spending time with and why, and whether that conflicts with family values. They just might make the right choice!



Managing excessive screen time

Situation: One of the moms noted that her child uses a screen for everything, including for doing homework and for reading books. This excessive screen time is highly undesirable, and she wanted to significantly reduce the time.

Discussion:

Limit the time: Tell your child about the impact of excessive screen time, and manage the amount of time she spends in front of a screen.

Utilize the main computer: At times, kids spend a lot of time in front of a computer while not being productive. Utilizing the family computer allows you to keep an eye on the work she is doing, and prodding her along as needed.

Managing homework time

Situation: My child does not have a good grasp of all the work that needs to get done for the next day at school. He also does not have a good sense of how much time he should be spending on the work he currently is working on and stays up late, or whether a play date he is on will interfere with getting all the work he needs to get done.

Discussion:

Create a To-Do list: Create a list of To-Do's together with your child, and help prioritize and order the list. If homework is the top priority, make sure that it is the first thing that gets done before anything else.

Encourage your child to take ownership: Try not to take a short-term view and solve the time-management problem for your child. It is okay for the child to fail at the task they needed to do, as it gives an opportunity for child to reflect on his/her mistakes. Once they take ownership of the problem, they are much more likely to follow through. One of the moms noted that her son had an independent research project, which was broken down into tasks spanning several weeks. Together with their child, they created a timeline for completion of the project. What they found is that their child got diverted and participated in lots of extra-curricular activities and spectating sports, which caused him to miss his timelines. They were tempted to correct their child, but they let him fail instead. After that, they talked with their son, who introspected and noted that he needs to reduce the time spent in social cheering during school games. Taking such responsibility solved for the time management problem in the long-run.

Make homework time "interesting": One of the moms noted that she gives her children two choices around homework – do it after school or do it after dinner. She creates an ambience around homework (lights candles!) and is around them, to transform homework time into quality time that she spends with them!



BONUS! An effective time management technique

We learned a simple and an effective project management technique called Kanban from one of the parents. Thank you for sharing! The technique relies on getting children to physically “see” all their tasks and the progress they are making. It works as follows-

1. Have a whiteboard or any blank surface, and divide it into three columns.
 - The first column shows the set of tasks the child needs to do
 - The second column shows the task that is in progress
 - The third column shows the set of tasks that are completed
2. Ensure tasks are about 20 – 30 minutes in length (no more than 60 minutes).
 - If the work to be completed is larger, then break it down into task sized chunks
3. Get a set of sticky notes (such as Post-It notes), and have the child write down the tasks—each task on a separate sticky note.
 - Have the child stick all the sticky notes on the first column on the whiteboard, such that all of them are visible
 - Don't look too far ahead into the future (start with just that day's work) as to what tasks need to get done
 - If there is a project that requires tasks over days, then breakdown the project using many sticky notes and place under the project title in the to do column
 - The in-progress and completed columns will be empty to start with
4. Have the child move one sticky note (one task) from the first column into the in-progress column. Do not move more than one task at a time.
 - The child stays completely focused for those 20-30 minutes on getting that task done
 - You can help your child figure out which task they should execute on first
5. Once the in-progress task is done, the child moves that sticky into the completed column.
6. Repeat step 4 and step 5 till all the tasks for the day are complete.
7. Have a daily 3-minute check to discuss what went right and what needs to change.
 - Also, be flexible to keep the task list dynamic in case priorities change.

The reason the technique works well is because the child creates the visual of all the work that needs to be completed (empowering), chooses the task to work on without getting distracted by all other work, and feels a sense of accomplishment to move tasks into the completed category. One mom noted that dopamine is released when you finish a task—it can be emotionally satisfying to move a task to the finished column, and may encourage repeat performance!

This technique also builds a sense of confidence in children to know that they did not miss any work that needed to be done, while having a clear picture on how much work remains.

Give it a try and let us know how it works for you!