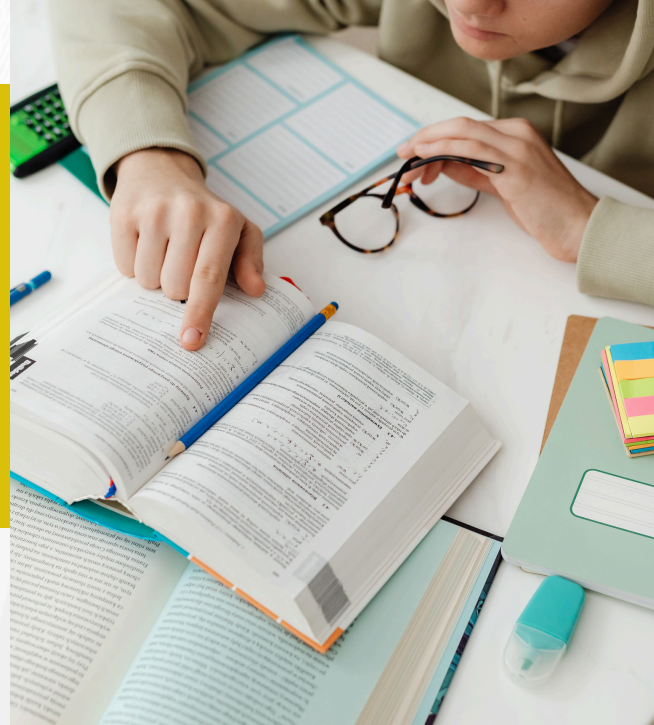




# INSIGHTS ON ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

FROM YOUR DIVISION DIRECTORS AND  
COUNSELORS



## HELLO!

The end of winter can feel bleak and long at times. So, we thought this month might be a good time to focus on something very important during hard times - mental health and resilience.

With rising rates of anxiety, depression, and stress due to academic pressure, social media, and uncertainty about the future, many teens struggle to cope with setbacks and challenges. One key part of addressing these mental health challenges is building resilience and grit — the ability to adapt to inevitable difficulties, manage emotions, and develop problem-solving skills. By strengthening executive function skills like emotional regulation, cognitive flexibility, and task initiation, teens can gain tools to navigate stress more effectively and build confidence in handling life's challenges.

We work hard to prioritize our students' mental health and growth. We encourage you to reach out if we can do anything to support your child individually.

*Danielle Wattleton-Anderson, Lia Gerety, Lauren Garrett, and Kate Smith*

## HIGHLIGHTED ARTICLES ON MENTAL HEALTH

"Mental health" does not mean "always feeling happy".

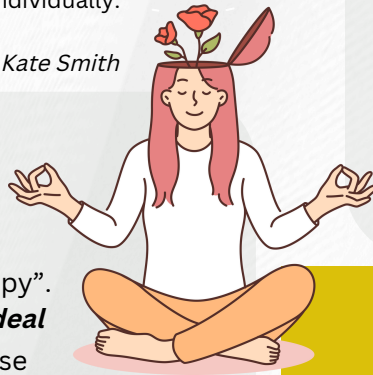
***Strong mental health is about having the tools to deal with the ups and downs of life.***

In our ("our" because we are guilty of it too!) desire to protect our kids from hurt, we often rob them of chances to build resilience.

The following article explores this idea more: **Why Letting Kids Fail Helps Them Succeed**

Our December newsletter focused on screentime and social media. It should come as no surprise to any of us that these things have an effect on mental health. On one hand, it can help us connect to one another. On the other hand, it can divide us and isolate us. Explore this article for further discussion.

**Social Media and Teen Mental Health**



## AT A GLANCE

- 1) HIGHLIGHTED ARTICLES
- 2) UPCOMING CHANCE FOR PARENT EDUCATION- BOOK CLUB
- 3) RED FLAGS TO LOOK OUT FOR
- 4) EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING TIPS
- 5) WHAT ABOUT ME?



## OPPORTUNITY FOR PARENT EDUCATION

Don't miss the chance to participate in our next Parent/Counselor Book Club!

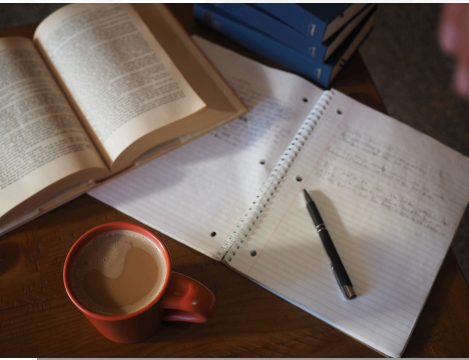
**April 2nd @ 6:00 (Teams)**

***The Screentime Solution: A Judgement-Free Guide to Becoming a Tech-Intentional Family*** by Emily Cherkin

Looking for more reading? Here are some books we recommend:

***The Anxious Generation*** by Jonathan Haidt

***The Emotional Lives of Teenagers*** by Dr. Lisa Damour



### Mental Health Red Flags

*It is hard to be a teenager. While a bumpy ride is to be expected, and good for growing resilience, there are some behaviors to look out for. If your teen is experiencing three or more of these symptoms, we encourage you to reach out for help.*

1. Problems with Sleep and Fatigue
2. Slipping Grades
3. Lack of interest in activities they have generally enjoyed
4. Poor self-care
5. Self-medicating with drugs and alcohol
6. Excessive moodiness (more than a typical teen!)
7. Changes in eating behavior, weight loss, and obsessive body image concerns
8. Increased anger and aggression
9. Self-isolated and withdrawal
10. Low self-esteem
11. Excessive secrecy
12. Expressing hopelessness or worthlessness
13. Self-harm

At Altamont, we are invested in our students' mental health. Mrs. Garrett (Counselor for the Upper School) and Ms. Smith (Counselor for the Lower School), are available for the following:

- regular student meetings addressing mental health concerns
- parent consultation/concern support
- support in navigating social/academic/mental health challenges
- providing referrals for mental health resources in the community
- ....and more! Don't hesitate to reach out:
  - lgarrett@altamontschool.org
  - ksmith@altamontschool.org



## EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING TIPS - CARING FOR YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Executive Functioning skills are the skills that we use on a daily basis to make decisions, problem solve, manage our emotions and impulses, and organize our thoughts and tasks. These skills are crucial for success.

Our Executive Functioning skills have a direct link to our mental health. Here are a few EF skills, how they relate to our mental health, and a strategy to build the skill.

### Emotional Regulation...

helps manage stress, anxiety, and frustration by allowing you to respond to emotions in a balanced way.

To improve this skill, you can **practice grounding techniques** — such as the 5-4-3-2-1 method—to bring yourself back to the present moment when feeling overwhelmed.

- Name 5 things you can see
- Name 4 things you can touch
- Name 3 things you can hear
- Name 2 things you can smell
- Name 1 thing you can taste

### Task Initiation...

reduces procrastination and feelings of overwhelm by making it easier to start tasks, which can boost confidence and reduce anxiety.

To improve this skill, try the **5-Minute Rule**: Tell yourself you only have to work on a task for 5 minutes—after that, you can stop if you want.

Why it works:

- It lowers the mental barrier to starting.
- Once you begin, you're more likely to keep going.
- It shifts focus from perfection to progress.

### Cognitive Flexibility...

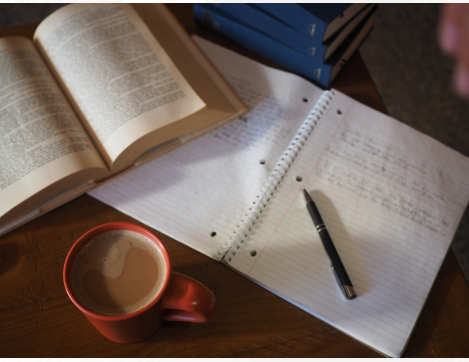
supports resilience by helping you adapt to changes, shift perspectives, and problem-solve effectively.

To improve this skill, try reframing challenges as opportunities for growth using the **"What else could be true?"** technique.

When faced with a setback or frustration, pause and ask yourself:

- "What else could be true about this situation?"
- "What is one possible positive outcome from this challenge?"
- "How might I handle this differently next time?"





## *But wait, what about me?* Parent Mental Health

Being a parent is HARD. Parenting affects your mental health, mental health affects your parenting, and all of it affects your kids' mental health - no pressure, right?

The U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek H. Murthy, recently published an advisory about the current state of parental stress and well-being (**Parents Under Pressure**). In it he states that “[in his] conversations with parents and caregivers across America, [he has] found guilt and shame have become pervasive, often leading them to hide their struggles, which perpetuates a vicious cycle where stress leads to guilt which leads to more stress.” If “we know that the well-being of parents and caregivers is directly linked to the well-being of their children”, then this should be of utmost concern to us.

Consider this statistic from data collected in 2023:

- 33% of parents report high levels of stress in the past month compared to 20% of other adults.
- 48% of parents say that most days their stress is completely overwhelming compared to 26% among other adults.

So, **how can you care for yourself while also striving to be the best parent you can be?**

### **Common stressors that parents experience:**

1. Financial strain/economic instability
2. Time demands
3. Children's health
4. Children's safety
5. Isolation/Loneliness
6. Navigating technology/social media
7. Cultural pressures
8. Children's future



### **How you can care for yourself:**

1. **Don't neglect your own self-care.** Make sure you get adequate sleep, that you eat well, and that you remain active. It is hard to prioritize yourself amid the demands of parenting, but even small investments in yourself can have an impact.
2. **Know that you won't always get it all right.** Be compassionate and forgiving to yourself. You do not need to be perfect to be the parent your child needs.
3. **Don't parent in a vacuum.** The saying “it takes a village” exists for a reason. Surround yourself with other parents and/or caregivers of your child who you can lean on and confide in.
4. **Don't be ashamed to ask for help.** It is impossible to know everything you need to to be a parent. Let your village help you.
5. **Seek support if you need it.** In order to care for our children, we must also care for ourselves. If you need to seek mental health support, resources are available! You are welcome to ask Mrs. Garrett or Ms. Smith for referrals with no judgement.