

LIVING VALIANTLY

Quarterly Parent Newsletter from the Valley Catholic School Counseling Department

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Be Still and Respond with Grace

(Tips for Parents and Educators that will work with all ages)

By Sue Yockey, VCES Counselor

Common Core Standards are on the minds of many parents and educators. From my observations, many public schools in the United States have their primary focus on the intellect. In fact, achievement scores are one of the main sources of data that determine the status of many schools. Valley Catholic School strives to educate the whole child, spiritually, intellectually, culturally, socially, emotionally, and physically. Here is an idea for fostering the intellect whether it is the school's main focus or one of many.

As a professional school counselor, I have learned that a student's intellectual capabilities will be nourished if I stop and respond to the whole child. When I am silent and let the stillness speak, my response is most effective. One time an angry fourth-grader came to my office with a broken spirit, having been called a name he could not even remember. From my inner quietness I knew he needed to walk. As we strolled he talked and after a moment of being still, trusting the words, I said, "I am sorry you were called a name. I'd feel hurt, too." His smile spoke to me of the power of letting children know that they are understood and that their feelings are acknowledged. He said, "Thanks, I am ready to go back to class."

I then went to get the student who had caused the original damage. At first he denied the name calling. After a deep, calming breath and looking him in the eye I simply said, "I forgive you." He had a look of surprise on his face and said with sincerity, "I am sorry. I didn't mean to hurt his feelings." He still was reminded of the need to be respectful. He still wrote a note of apology which included three things that he appreciated about his fellow student. He still was reminded not to do this again. I believe my reminders could be heard and his apology could be sincere because of the power of forgiveness.

Being educators and parents we often shy away from simplicity and try to look smart by pretending we know all the answers. We need only to be still and speak from that place of quiet. To better communicate with children, try these simple steps: Be calm. Take a walk. Listen. Acknowledge feelings. Forgive. Give reminders instead of lectures. Be still. Be still and listen. Listen to the words that yearn to be spoken by the most precious part of our world – the children: those loveable, little creatures who often deny our wisdom but in the end embrace us as their hero.

When I was young I wrecked my mother's car. I came home in tears and I heard my mother take a deep breath. In my fear I thought I was going to get scolded or be given a lecture. Instead, from the stillness of her heart she said, "That is why we have insurance. Are you okay?" My mother was my hero. She taught me to be still and respond with grace. You can teach the children under your care the same. In fact you can use this with your adult relationships, too. The next time you have a confrontation with your boss, co-worker or spouse, try being still, forgiving and responding with grace. I believe that by taking these simple steps we begin a journey toward unifying all people and creating world peace. We start with those that mean the most to us, the children who we care for, our co-workers, family and friends.



"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."

– Helen Keller

In This Issue

- Be Still and Respond with Grace
- Stress & Teens
- Test Taking Tips—Finals Ready
- Resources



Recommended Reading

Building Resilience in Children and Teens: Giving Kids Roots & Wings
by Kenneth R. Ginsburg

The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure & Material Advantage are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids
by Madeline Levine

Smart, But Scattered
by Peg Dawson and Richard Guare

Teach your Children Well: Why Values & Coping Skills Matter More Than Grades Trophies or Fat Envelopes
by Madeline Levine

Yale or Fail: Creating Balance in the Lives of Stressed-out Teens

by Teisha Parchment, VCMS Counselor

As a community, we all share the desire to have children who do well, not just academically, but in life as well. Most parents cheer when their child gets an “A” on a report card and proudly sport the “My child is on Honor Roll at Blank School” bumper sticker on their cars. But, in this quest for high performing children, have we gone a bit off track? According to Psychology Today, teens from affluent homes are showing higher rates of anxiety, depression and substance abuse than inner city youth in the same age group. Many of these issues appear to start in the seventh-grade for teenage girls. Looking at other research, this increase is evident in both teenage boys and girls, with substance abuse occurring more often with boys.

Why is this happening? The increase of anxiety, depression and substance use may be related to the pressures of academia and families who overemphasize achievement. While challenging our children to reach their highest potential is important, it is equally important to create a sense of balance, remind teens that their failures are not personal failures and support them in building other essential life skills that will allow them to be resilient. Here are a few suggestions on how you can alleviate stress and help your child have a more balanced life.

Tips to creating a balanced approach

1. **Focus on the whole child-** When you pick up your child from school, ask them about something besides school or homework. This will allow you to keep the focus on the well being of your entire child and not solely on their academic performance.
2. **Eat dinner together-** With our increasingly busy schedules, it is important to know that there is great impact on academic performance and the ability to adjust for children who are able to spend time eating dinner with at least one parent a few nights per week. Plus, there is the added benefit of family time, rest and proper nutrition.
3. **Measure success differently -** The expectation of acceptance letters to top performing high schools and Ivy League Universities have become the measuring guide for how successful we see ourselves as parents. Try focusing on helping your teen build essential life skills, such as: learning from failing without feeling like a failure; critical thinking; focus; self-control; empathy; and a love for learning that goes beyond being focused on grades. Middle School is a time for exploration. Allow them to explore.

Test Taking Tips

- Start by taking a deep breath and reminding yourself, "You are ready, you can do this, you know the material"
- Read ALL the directions
- Beware of time limits
- Develop a plan
 - Know how you want to tackle the test and which questions you'll answer first*
- Start with the easy questions
 - Skip over any questions you don't immediately know, save for later*
- Mark the questions you want to return to so you don't forget
- Read all answer choices before choosing one
- Narrow down multiple choice answers to increase your odds
- If you start to feel nervous take a few deep breaths to relax
- In True/False questions, qualifiers like "never, always, and every" mean that the statement must be true all of the time. Usually these types of qualifiers lead to a false answer
- Qualifiers like "usually, sometimes, and generally" mean that the statement can be considered true or false depending on the circumstances. Usually these type of qualifiers lead to a true answer
- Brainstorm and organize before answering an essay question
- Check all your answers before turning in the test



Successful people have learned to make themselves do the thing that has to be done when it has to be done, whether they like it or not." -Aldous Huxley

Finals Ready! by Kelsey MacIntyre, VCHS Counselor

FINALS. Just the word alone is enough to cause anxiety, for parents and students alike. As adults we remember our own experiences with final exams, and we've all heard the horror stories of waking up minutes before the exam knowing you can never make it on time. Understanding that this stress can overwhelm the home as students are preparing for finals, here are some tried and true strategies your student can use to face the task with grace and ease.

First, GET ORGANIZED. It is important to plan out your study time early. Know which tests you need to study for and make a specific plan for how to tackle each one. Before you sit down to study each day make sure you have EVERYTHING that you need by your side, so you don't have to waste time going back to get a pencil, textbook, calculator etc. In getting organized it can also help calm you to have these items ready to go **THE NIGHT BEFORE** the test.

Use SMART STUDY SKILLS. Staring at your notes or textbook does not help you memorize the information. To really learn the material, try to use at least two active study strategies for each subject (flashcards, note sheet, sample questions, or a partner to ask you questions). Pretend the study guide is an open book test and write out the answers in more detail than you think you need. Ask your teacher questions since they are the best resource. On the day of the test, only review 1-3 small things that have been hard to remember. It's not helpful to cram any more than that or you could risk losing more information than you gain.

Finally, **TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF.** Breathing is an often underestimated and forgotten tool, when it comes to stress. As simple as it sounds, remember to breathe. Allow yourself study breaks, your mind needs them to fully learn the material. Focus on eating well-balanced meals. A healthy body = a healthy mind. Go to bed at a decent hour; try to get 8 hours of sleep. The extra sleep will help your brain more than extra hour of studying. Most importantly, **BELIEVE IN YOURSELF.** That positive attitude will help you more than you think.

Upcoming Events/ Resources

January 21– *ADHD Parent Support Group: Portland Metro CHADD* meets from 7-9 p.m. at Good Samaritan Hospital on NW 22nd and Marshall. They meet in the Wilcox Bldg., Room #102, to the right of the main entrance .

February 11– *Stressed Out! Impact of Stress on the Adolescent Brain*
You are invited to join other parents and community members for this SSMO Bethany Center Speaker Series at 7 p.m. in Valley Catholic Elementary School Cafeteria with speaker Anita Cservenka from OHSU.

February 19– *Mindful Attention Class for Middle School Boys with Dr. Sandra McPhail*. This is a parent meeting to learn about the upcoming workshop that supports middle school boys with attention challenges to learn specific ways to improve attention through mindfulness practices, including yoga. For more information contact The Children's Program at info@childrensprogram.com.

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