



Dr. Mel Levine Spring Lecture at the 92nd Street Y

BY LISA G. HUFFINES

The teenage brain was the focus of Dr. Mel Levine’s spring lecture, “The Essence of Adolescence,” at the 92nd Street Y. Contrary to popular belief and some prior research, the brain remains very elastic during the teenage years, Dr. Levine said. In a talk equal parts science and practical advice, Dr. Levine explained what happens inside the adolescent brain and offered suggestions for how parents—and schools—can shape its development.

A pediatrician, best-selling author and lead researcher on learning and developmental issues, Dr. Levine is co-founder of All Kinds of Minds, a non-profit institute for the understanding of differences in learning, and a retired professor of pediatrics at the University of North Carolina Medical School. NYC-Parents in Action sponsored the free lecture on April 17, 2008.

The scene: a Manhattan teenager’s life. Dr. Levine described adolescence as a time of new pressures, which include, at school, ever-rising demands for productivity and efficiency; an explosion of detail in the curriculum; and pressure to “credentialize” or package oneself as a strong college applicant. Dr. Levine bemoans the focus on college as an ultimate goal, as well as schools’ overemphasis on rote learning. Knowing how the brain is growing and changing not only may help teenagers succeed under the pressures they are feeling, Dr. Levine hopes it will also help parents and educators widen their teaching focus to include important life skills that academic curricula often ignore.

Dr. Levine discussed three areas of brain function that are important in the teenage years. First, and perhaps most critical because it occurs almost solely between ages 11 and 20, is specialized myelination. Myelin is a white substance akin to a coat of insulation. Nerve pathways that are insulated, or myelinated, become faster and more efficient. During the teenage years the body is myelinating nerve pathways at a rapid pace, but there’s an important catch: it chooses only those that are used the most. And it “prunes” nerve pathways that are not being used.

Dr. Levine bemoans the focus on college as an ultimate goal, as well as schools’ overemphasis on rote learning.

The implications are obvious, and profound: the teenager who plays video games several hours a day myelinates a different set of nerve paths than the child practicing piano. And the teenager who habitually responds to adults with grunts and one-word responses is pruning away his verbal elaboration abilities.

Secondly, the prefrontal cortex, too, is still developing during adolescence and beyond (possibly until around age 35). Dr. Levine compared the prefrontal cortex to an orchestra leader or coach: it allows us both to preview possible consequences of our actions and to inhibit responses while we consider alternatives. Thus it is critical to life skills like planning, organization, and brainstorming. Like most brain functions, it can improve with conscious effort, Dr. Levine said. Look for areas in which your child is a good previewer, he advised, because that’s where you’ll find her talents. Mozart, he pointed out, never used an eraser. More broadly, Dr. Levine believes kids “need things on their preview screens”—for example, a child over age 11 should have an answer when someone asks what she wants to be when she grows up.

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PRESIDENT'S Letter

Winter 2009

This fall we heard the word “change” very often from our Presidential candidates. In that context, change was something promising, the fresh approach needed to address many of the issues facing our country. At the same time, with the turmoil and decline in the financial markets, we confronted unwanted changes. Many New Yorkers are feeling the impact of those changes.

Nonprofit organizations are preparing for the effects of the economic downturn, knowing that supporters may prioritize their contributions. We at NYC-Parents in Action are taking this opportunity to examine our own priorities, so the changes that we may experience will coincide with changes we want to make.

Below, and copied on our Web site, is a brief survey. We will use your responses to help us determine how to shape our offerings going forward. If you choose



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to respond to the survey online, please visit www.parentsinaction.org, and click on the box marked “survey.” If you choose to respond in the form below, please record your answers and fax the form to (413) 843 0362 or mail it to us in the attached envelope. (Although this is a donation envelope, you may use it to send in this form alone.)

We will collect the names of all respondents, and as a “thank you,” we are offering tickets for a family of four to see *Shrek the Musical* at our benefit performance on April 19, 2009 at 3:00 p.m. We will award one set of tickets for every 200 surveys received, drawing the winners on February 1, 2009.

The original stated mission of NYC-PIA was “Effective Parenting is Substance Abuse Prevention.” The founders believed that information on

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NYC-PIA SURVEY

Please check the boxes that apply—

1. I am a parent with a child or children in grade(s):
 K-4 5-8 9-12
 2. I have attended a NYC-PIA discussion group in the past 3 years Yes No
(If no, see question 3)
 - a. Please estimate how many parents in the grade attended:
 Fewer than 25% 25%–50%
 More than 50%
 - b. Which statement best describes your attitude about PIA meetings:
 I always attend I attend if convenient
 I don't attend
 - c. Which statement best describes your feelings about recent PIA meetings:
 A good opportunity to connect with other parents and share information
 Time not well-spent
 3. If you chose not to attend, why not?
 Not interested No time
 Similar activities are offered at my school
 4. I have attended a NYC-PIA seminar such as:
 Panel discussion Keynote speaker
 Teen Scene
 5. I have found information in the newsletter to be:
 Relevant and helpful
 Similar to information available elsewhere
 Not of interest to me at this time
 6. I visit the NYC-Parents in Action Web site (www.parentsinaction.org):
 Never Rarely Often
- Name _____
- Address _____
- _____
- Email _____

Let's Talk About Spring Break

BY CHARLANNE ZEPF BAUERLEIN, L.C.S.W.,
and TESSA KLEEMAN, L.M.H.C.

Popular culture gives teens the message that Spring Break is sexy and cool, but the reality they encounter on the trip does not always match the fantasy cultivated by advertising and reinforced through the high school grapevine. Here is an account of what occurred on an actual Spring Break trip:

Three girls came in to the counseling office to confide their worries about a friend. Something had happened during Spring Break that they found difficult to talk about. One girl took a deep breath: "One night we were all at the beach... she met this guy and said she'd meet us back at the hotel... We were all like 'What??' because our plan had been to stay together... This was not the only guy she hooked up with. She was smoking pot the whole week and basically hooking up. She would say she was fine but we all thought it wasn't like her and it was dangerous."

Upper School seniors do not often talk openly with parents about what occurred on a Caribbean Spring Break trip unless there is serious trouble. However, some teens do talk behind the counselor's closed doors about what happened that did not feel good.

Spring Break as packaged today is a commercial venture, and we as well as our teens can get sold a bill of goods. Web sites advertising Spring Break trips offer your teens "The Biggest Parties," the chance to "Party like a Rock Star," or to "Dance with the Devil." Popular activities offered on Spring Break in the Bahamas may include a Booze Cruise, where teens can easily drink to excess; opportunities to get high and have sexualized contact with strangers; and Wet T-shirt contests. When your teen begs you for a Caribbean Spring Break, carefully consider him/her in these situations and ask yourself some hard questions: Are you and your teen comfortable with these activities? Are you signing off on a Spring Break trip because you do not want to deal with a

Freedom Institute, founded by Mona Mansell in 1976, is a resource center for individuals and families affected by alcohol and drug dependence, providing assessment, intervention, treatment and care. In addition, the Institute provides a comprehensive prevention and education program for young people through their work in independent schools.

fight if you refuse? Will your teen be able to resist the pressure to join an activity he or she is not comfortable with? If an expensive Booze Cruise and hook-ups with strangers are not something you want for your teen, begin a dialogue saying, "I don't value what the Bahamas beach vacation offers. I don't want you to spend a week getting drunk or high or being sexually available to people you've just met. Let's talk about this."

When we meet with parents on the topic of Spring Break, they report relief at learning that they CAN say no. One of the best ways to partner with your teen in examining the pros and cons of a Caribbean Spring Break is to invite communication: with your teen, and with other parents. Be prepared to listen calmly and then discuss the arguments teens typically present in favor of the trip. Be prepared to call and share information with other parents.

Your teen may plead that Spring Break is a "tradition" and that "seniors have always done this"—a view often backed by advertisers who claim it as a "rite of passage." Spring Break is not a "rite of passage" in the standard sense. In traditional cultures, initiation into adulthood occurs within a sacred space and in the presence of extended family passing on the community's values. Spring Break promoters are interested in profit, not in transmitting cultural inheritance. Tell your teenager, "I don't buy into what the business of Spring Break is selling and I'd rather

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Bruce Breimer on Preparing Our Kids for College

BY SUSAN FISHER

College counselor extraordinaire Bruce Breimer, the Principal Emeritus of Collegiate School, spoke to parents at NYC-PIA's annual benefit luncheon on October 2nd on "Preparing for College: The Real Deal for Our Kids." As the mother of a high school senior, I can say I am enlightened and calmed. No, we did not come away with tricky strategies, the home phone number of the Harvard Dean of Admissions, or even the "magic number" for a donation to assure Ivy League admission. Instead we were given something much more valuable; peace of mind and instructions to relax, as the task is our children's challenge, not ours.

Our task is to let go— not with abandon, but with the message that applying to college is a process of exploring independence.

Mr. Breimer's meta-message to parents was that at the heart of the college selection process is the growth experience that occurs as we help our child to discover his/her emerging adult personality. If parents and child go about this rite of passage with "integrity, discrimination, and personalization, a good match will emerge." With that in mind, Mr. Breimer has called himself a College Guidance Counselor, not a College Placement Counselor. The distinction between these two titles places emphasis on the importance of helping our children make a critical decision, with guidance but without autocracy. "We" are not applying, only our child is applying! And "we" do not have to be satisfied, rather, our child has to say, "This is my choice, and I am ready to govern my own life." So "we" have been officially relieved of having to live in tandem, and that should diminish the frustrations that ensue if we try vicariously to achieve a difficult goal through our teenager. Our task is to let go— not with abandon, but with the message that applying to college is a process of exploring independence. Communication between child and parent is critical, but ownership of the process belongs to our children.

Mr. Breimer began by dispelling some of the prevalent myths that fan the flames of parents' concerns. He then segued into how he advises going about visiting colleges and lastly, he fielded a variety of questions ranging from summer activities for students to the critical elements in an application, including the admissions essay.

Myth#1: The prognosis for getting into a top college in today's environment is quite bleak. In addition, coming from NYC is a huge disadvantage as there are too many qualified candidates from this area.

"Not true," said Mr. Breimer. In the last eight years, top colleges have increased their enrollments of NYC students. If the search process is conducted properly, families find there are many well-established, highly respected colleges yearning to accept our children. NYC independent school children are "no risk" to colleges. Our students arrive with strong academic backgrounds, are good writers, have good study habits, and are accustomed to a high level of intellectual stimulation.

Myth #2: High SAT scores are a huge aid in getting into the college of one's choice.

"SAT scores don't place you in a college, rather SAT scores are the means to eliminate you," said Mr. Breimer. One has to reach a certain threshold to keep one's application in the running, but beyond that, there are many more important factors including: grades, course of study, teacher recommendations, extracurricular activities (sports, music, community service) and examples of personal values (essays, recommendations).

Myth #3: Where you go to college is the most influential factor affecting your future career.

"The pragmatic value of the undergraduate degree has fallen significantly; invariably it's the quality of the graduate degree that determines who gets hired," asserts Mr. Breimer. Long gone are the days of getting into a top graduate program simply on the strength

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BRUCE BREIMER

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of a college's well-known name. Graduate school is a meritocracy, and applications to graduate programs will be judged on performance in college, not on the college itself.

Myth #4: Summer activities should build one's resume.

"Adolescents need to decompress from nine months of intense activity and stimulation," advised Mr. Breimer. Simple relaxation over summer vacation can be a good thing. Purchasing a meaningful experience in the form of a teen trip to an exotic place that includes community service is not impressive if it isn't relevant to whom the child is. If a child can have a summer experience that actually relates to his/her interests, then this should be pursued.

How to Visit Colleges

Ideally, it is best to visit a college in session, when one can see it in action. Mr. Breimer believes that the most important factor in selecting a college is to identify the "distinctive ambience" of each school. Visitors should ask: Who goes there? Is this a school where I would be comfortable? What are the values here? He recommends spending a night on campus, either with an alum from one's high school (preferably not a

freshman at the college) or with a student arranged by the admissions office. Parents can serve as chauffeurs and sounding boards, but should not be part of the interview process. It is the child's experience, and the more we can refrain from interfering, the better.

How to Write a College Essay

College admissions officers read 35-40 applications a day! Therefore when writing about oneself avoid subtlety and nuance. "Write with a velvet hammer," instructs Mr. Breimer. Don't overuse the word "I," but it is critical to have your reader come away with a sense of who you are, what you value, what makes you special. If you don't have a notable course of study, mention activities or courses that you look forward to taking at your target college.

In conclusion, Mr. Breimer, who attended Yale over 40 years ago and who served as college counselor for the Collegiate School's 1,750+ students, is in the position to observe, "The only way you can go to a school you don't like is by applying to it." Let your child take ownership of the college application process with your safety net at the ready, and it will be progress in the development of a responsible, mature adult. ●

Train to be a Discussion Group Facilitator

Are you looking to "give back" the support and shared experience other parents have given you during the child-rearing years? If you are, here's a way:

VOLUNTEERS WANTED!

NYC-Parents in Action provides facilitated discussion groups free of charge to NYC independent schools. To serve an increasing number of requests for discussion groups, we need to train parent volunteers from as many schools as possible. **We are looking for parents who are articulate, comfortable speaking in groups, and have an interest in parenting issues.** Our goal is to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and concerns among parents and to create a comfortable communications network that will be in place through lower, middle and upper school. Facilitators receive professional training, and become an integral and valued part of the NYC-PIA community. If you would like more information about becoming a discussion group facilitator or about our upcoming training sessions on February 4, 6 and 11, 2009, please call NYC-PIA at (212) 426-0240 or e-mail facilitation@parentsinaction.org.

Julie Ross Offers Techniques for Negotiating the Tween Years

BY SALLY SHERWOOD

In the 1938 MGM classic, “Love Finds Andy Hardy,” a confused young Judy Garland wistfully laments that “I’m too old for toys and I’m too young for boys; I’m just an in between.”* Seventy years have passed, and tweens still find themselves caught in a vague, uneasy world between childhood and older adolescence. Confusing for youngsters and frustrating for parents, the years between 9 and 13 test the emotional resilience of adults and children alike.

Just as tweens undergo an unsettling metamorphosis in their growth, adults need to adjust their parenting style to ease this delicate but necessary transition.

PIA Advisory Board member and Luncheon speaker Julie Ross has made it her mission to help parents and their kids navigate this often turbulent but never dull stage of life with patience, love and understanding. Addressing the audience on November 11, 2008, Ross compared humans to butterflies, which pass through several stages before becoming gentle, colorful insects. Just as tweens undergo an unsettling metamorphosis in their growth, adults need to adjust their parenting style to ease this delicate but necessary transition.

*Edens, Roger, “In Between” 1938, from the MGM motion picture “Love Finds Andy Hardy.”

LOCATION CHANGE FOR Teen Scene 2009

Teen Scene will be held this year at Park East Day School, 164 East 68th Street, between Third and Lexington Avenues, on Monday, February 9 from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.

Most parents of tweens will acknowledge the challenges in maintaining a sense of equilibrium as their children struggle with an evolving sense of self. No longer able to deposit their recalcitrant children in playpens, parents may try more aggressive tactics to get through to their kids. But, Ross cautions, when we command, advise, moralize, dictate, distract, psychologize, negate, interrogate or put down these mercurial young beings, we actually “shake the chrysalis and disrupt a child’s developing sense of self... this transition is more uncomfortable for children than it is for parents as kids grapple with growing independence and a need to differentiate themselves from their parents. Actually they are not that independent or different.”

While as parents we may no longer feel in control, we can certainly wield the power of influence. Ross urged parents to develop four qualities to help transform their parenting style: respect, support, reciprocity and collaboration. When we effectively incorporate these qualities, we offer a foundation of unconditional love, support and acceptance that feeds our children’s self-esteem while diminishing the impact of peer pressure.

Parents who support children in a healthy manner cultivate a relationship of mutual respect. “What matters is not necessarily the context but the manner of communicating,” advised Ross. Productive communication paves the way to a more peaceful transition for parents and children.

She offered the example of a 12-year-old girl who wanted to walk alone to gymnastics practice. Asked by her concerned mother to call and advise of her safe arrival, the daughter repeatedly “forgot.” The mother wrestled with her daughter’s failure to live up to this bargain; she felt exploited and angry but realized that the issue was about independence. Her daughter was embarrassed to call home in front of her friends. Initially tempted to wield her “control” and withdraw the privilege, the mother instead chose “reciprocity,

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DR. MEL LEVINE

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The third brain function Dr. Levine addressed is what he calls “cognitive working counter space.” Like a chef, the brain must constantly perform numerous tasks at one time. To write a paragraph, for example, a student must call upon memory for the subject matter as well as all relevant rules of punctuation and spelling; use her creative functions for the proper turn of phrase; and employ graphomotor skills to operate the pencil or keyboard. This is easier, of course, if some of these tasks have become “automated,” i.e., requiring little effort—or “counter space”—from the brain. Dr. Levine listed five “counter space expanders,” factors that make complex brain functions easier, and five “counter space constrictors,” which complicate and slow down brain function. To the extent parents can foster the expanders and minimize the constrictors, our children become better learners.

Expanders/Constrictors

- **Automatization vs. Slow or Labored Processing.**

A first step in helping a middle schooler with math is to make sure he has “automatized” his multiplication tables so that hunting down “7 times 8 is 56”

doesn’t hog counterspace for a complex algebra problem.

- **Intact Functions vs. Dysfunctional Components.** If a child struggles to produce legible handwriting, work on it, try therapy, or switch to keyboarding.
- **Meaningfulness/Resonance vs. Incoherence/Irrelevance.** People learn best when they care about the subject. Obviously, parents cannot control the content of school curricula, but they can find ways to relate what a child is learning to his interests and passions.
- **Efficient Strategy Use vs. Absent/Forgetful Strategies.** By the time kids reach adolescence they should have some sense of their cognitive strengths and weaknesses and strategies for dealing with them. The unorganized child should be keeping a written schedule; the easily distracted child should be working in a quiet space without e-mail.
- **Equanimity vs. Anxiety/Preoccupations.** Academic success is intimately linked with emotional health.

While all this information can help us to support our children academically, Dr. Levine cautioned that success in school is a poor end goal. (Getting into an elite college is an even poorer one.) Dr. Levine worries that, by requiring too much memorization and overvaluing written test-taking skills, our schools are overdeveloping a limited set of neural pathways to the exclusion of more important life skills. Ironically, it’s sometimes the best students, the natural rote learners, who rely on these skills the most and find themselves unprepared for life after school.

Dr. Levine listed a number of skills that parents and teachers should focus on:

- **Concept formation.** A student “gets” a concept—photosynthesis, say, or “family life”—when she can articulate its critical features, name some prototypes of the concept and rate their “typicality.” This is an acquired skill, and it can be neglected

PRESIDENT’S LETTER

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child development in the form of seminars and publications, and the communications network of discussion groups, would equip parents with tools to help their children, as teenagers, avoid risky behaviors including substance abuse.

In keeping with the NYC-PIA charter, we provide our services free of charge. While much of our work is done by board members, the cost of administering our programs has increased as our work has expanded to offer more discussion groups and Internet communications. In order to use our resources wisely, we ask you to help us focus on what is most important for us to do.

Thank you for helping us change and grow. We wish you a happy and healthy 2009. ●

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DR. MEL LEVINE

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when a child has a list of facts she feels she must memorize. Used deliberately, though, conceptualization can be an antidote to rote learning. Students who form and understand concepts well gain deeper understanding of what they learn. They also reduce the burden on memory that rote-heavy curricula impose.

- **Oral language skill.** Give children opportunities to join articulate conversations and debates. Insist that they use full sentences.
- **Evaluation skills/complex decision-making.** Evaluation—of an issue, a product, a career opportunity or a person—is ideally a careful, conscious step-by-step process. Look for teachable moments where you and your child can carefully assess options or gather information upon which to base a decision, and talk through each step.
- **Creative thinking/brainstorming.** Both require forms of suspension—suspension of bias, suspension of self-criticism and peer pressures, suspension of reliance on the “usual” approach. Creative thinkers are able to produce a “blank slate” upon which

to project new ideas. This is a skill that can be practiced and improved.

- **Organization/project mentalities.** For a very select few, organization and time management come easily. For the vast majority, staying organized requires constant vigilance through adulthood. Needless to say, our preteens are still developing these skills and there is much parents can do to help.
- **Athletic skills.** Mastery of one’s body appears to be a basic human need. Athletic skills are an obvious way we fill this need, but dancing, playing musical instruments and painting are others.
- **Cultural/intellectual appetite building.** In the quest to credentialize for college admissions, many teens fill their calendars with “have-to” activities. Happy adults enrich their lives by following passions and interests for their own sake. Help your child discover hers. ●

Dr. Levine is no longer associated with All Kinds of Minds. Should you have an inquiry or wish to contact Dr. Mel Levine, the best method is via e-mail at info@drmellevine.com

—NYC-PIA 2009 Family Benefit—

A PERFORMANCE OF
SHREK THE MUSICAL

SUNDAY, APRIL 19, 2009 3 PM BROADWAY THEATRE

This highly anticipated show has great early reviews and is pure family fun!

The Family Benefit, our largest annual fundraiser, supports all of NYC-PIA’s programs throughout the year. These programs, which include PIA’s Seminar series, PIA Newsletters that reach 26,000 families and Facilitated Discussion Groups held in 44 NYC independent schools, are offered free of charge. Every year the demand for these important services grows. By supporting us on April 19th you will directly help us serve this community.

For more information or to order tickets, visit our Web site at www.parentsinaction.org

SPRING BREAK

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invest in something for you that I feel good about or believe in.”

Teens may plead that four stress-filled years of hard work deserves a reward. Here is where parents get caught up in the Spring Break fantasy. Who wouldn't want to give their teen “the best memories of senior year?” We are easily led into our kids' view that they have worked so hard and done so well that we owe them a fantastic vacation. Rather than succumb, this is your opportunity for frank, loving communication.

We are easily led into our kids' view that they have worked so hard and done so well that we owe them a fantastic vacation.

Acknowledge and praise your teen's achievements, but point out that attaining academic goals carries intrinsic rewards that ultimately build more confidence and satisfaction than a ticket to the Caribbean. Graduating from upper school and going on to a stimulating college experience are tangible outcomes of their efforts. Parents can support their teens by saying, “I'm so proud of you. I want to celebrate your achievements in a healthy, safe way.”

Offer to discuss options for Senior Spring Break. There are plenty of ways teens can honor their time together without going to “Party Island.” Many schools organize a senior class trip designed to mark the end of their years together, or offer community service trips during spring vacation. Some families choose to use Spring Break for a last family trip before college, and many parents have helped their 12th grader plan trips with friends to places other than the Caribbean beach scene. Suggest your teen and her friends go online and research alternate destinations with which the parents may feel more comfortable. Call the parents of your teen's friends and discuss the options. You may hear more support for alternative ideas than you imagined. And keep in mind that only some of the senior class goes on a “typical” Spring Break trip, as the costs are simply prohibitive to many

families. If your teen claims you are the only parent saying no, know that this is simply not the case.

When your teen says, “But you said you trust me” keep in mind that trust is not the issue here. Explain to your teen, “It's unrealistic to expect you to go to the Bahamas on Spring Break and not be affected by the social climate.” It is an issue of stamina, not trust, when we send kids into a situation where they have to guard their physical boundaries vigilantly.

If your teen is upset with you, you can empathize with his anger and disappointment, saying “I know you're really angry at me and that's okay. I'm doing what I believe is best for you.” One way to withstand the negative reaction your child may fling at you is to know it won't last forever. You will find that your child will eventually reach an age, maybe twenty, when the reality of Spring Break becomes clearer. As one college senior said, “It is disgusting.” Until then, it's up to you to be the sensible adult and model for your child an ability to resist hype that goes against your family's values.

One final word of caution: accompanying your teenager is no guarantee against trouble. Parents can't prevent bad outcomes by sitting in hotel rooms while their children party below. One young woman confided to a Freedom Institute counselor that she ended up drunk with a guy she had met at the hotel's club. After enduring his persistent cajoling, she said she reluctantly performed oral sex on him because “he wanted to have sex, but I didn't want to; I felt bad doing nothing, so I did other stuff.” She said her mother was in their hotel room, thinking her daughter and her friends would stay together. The student tearfully took a deep breath and said, “Well, at least I made it back by curfew.”

In our experience, the surest way to prevent a scenario like this is to avoid a Caribbean Spring Break altogether. It is never too early to have a conversation with your teen about the risks of Spring Break—both as a listener and as a parent with insight to share. ●

JULIE ROSS ON THE TWEEN YEARS

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where everyone in the relationship has specific needs.” The mother needed to know that her daughter was safe; the daughter needed her independence. Articulating both her need and that of her child, the mother successfully “collaborated” with her daughter to enlist her cooperation. Instead of calling, the child could text her mom. If that didn’t work, the mother would then revert to accompanying her daughter to practice.

When we engage in this supportive behavior, we maintain our positions of authority while nurturing self-respect in our children and curbing defiance and rebellion. After all, one can’t successfully “hug a porcupine” without soothing its quills. ●

Executive Director of Parenting Horizons, an organization devoted to enriching children’s lives through parent and teacher education, Ross has authored numerous books and articles, appeared on network and cable television, and worked with such groups as PIA, The Parents’ League, Board of Jewish Education and NYC public and private schools. Her most recent book, “How to Hug a Porcupine: Negotiating the Prickly Points of the Tween Years,” offers practical techniques for optimal parent to tween communication.

NYC-Parents in Action, Inc. invites speakers to present their opinions and expertise on specific topics. Their opinions and comments are not necessarily those of NYC-PIA.

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WINTER 2009 ISSUE