

Young Minds Racing Against Time

BY MEG SHERIDAN

It used to be thought that our minds were set in stone—our profile of strengths and weaknesses didn't change much over time—and people were naturally better at certain pursuits than others. Recent research on the brain shows us that the opposite is true; changes occur in the brain as we develop into adulthood. The skills that served us well in elementary school may not be as valuable to us in high school, college, or the workplace. For some individuals, learning presents a race between the developing mind and increasing expectations in academic and work settings.

Dr. Mel Levine, Director of the Clinical Center for the Study of Development and Learning at the University of North Carolina Medical School and Co-chairman of the Board, All Kinds of Minds, spoke to parents of independent school students at a seminar sponsored by NYC-Parents in Action and the Mount Sinai Children's Center Foundation last May. He set forth basic academic expectations for elementary, middle and high school, and for college/career, to demonstrate the various demands on developing minds.

Why do some students, perhaps our own children, who were at the top of the class in fourth grade fall to the bottom half in middle school? Conversely, we may be watching a child struggle in the early grades and hoping he will hit his stride in high school. Or, we might know the former class clown who is now fabulously successful in business. What causes these turns of fortune? The mind that is well suited to a particular set of expectations may have to re-invent itself for each new stage—some minds favor the big picture, while others are adept at detail. The trick is to identify the expectations and make accommodations. In the case of the successful executive, it's getting

somebody else to handle the details while he or she focuses on the big picture.

Dr. Levine discussed some concrete strategies parents can use to encourage their children as they progress towards a successful adulthood.

Learn to recognize patterns

One of the skills that will take a student through school and beyond is recognizing patterns in the face of superficial differences. Encourage your child to ask "what does this remind me of?" and "where have I seen this before?" In math, it can be "how is this word problem similar to one that came before?" Play with rhyming: what would happen to "moose" if I took away the "m"? If a child has a problem socially with friends, ask: "Has this situation happened to you before? How can you deal with it?" Help your child make a list of options rather than doing the first thing that comes to mind.

Stick with it

Some children feel, and some parents promote, that everything should be fun. Developing an interest or skill implies delayed gratification. Don't let your child be a dabbler. If he chooses to play a musical instrument, recognize there are three stages to proficiency and enjoyment: initial learning, several years of practice, and then successful performance, say, with a jazz band in high school. Stage two—the years of practice—is not always fun. The message should be not to quit, but there could be a choice to cut back on the intensity of practice.

Develop a project mentality

Dr. Levine reported that a common complaint of managers is that their young staff members lack time management and organizational skills. Students

Continued on page 11

PRESIDENT'S Letter

Fall 2006

This summer I had the chance to revisit two places, and times, that I loved. I was invited by a life-long friend to an anniversary retrospective at the Westchester beach club where we met as children at day camp. And I went back to my college reunion. Sometimes we find that the landscape we remember from the past proves false when we see it again as adults—the endless lawn and the vast auditorium are diminished. But, in these instances, the places were as beautiful as I recalled, and my memories were vivid.

Looking at photos displayed at the club, I saw the summer rhythm of my childhood. From the time I was six years old, I was free to run around all day with my friends, getting a blistering sunburn that would be slathered with Noxzema. I didn't see my parents until it was time to go home, where I would take off again to ride my bicycle until twilight—no hands, no helmet. On the next journey, to my New England college campus, again I viewed photos and videos. My classmates and I, seeing ourselves with long flowing hair, tie-dyed shirts and bell bottoms, reminisced about college years that were an idyllic pause on the way to Real Life.

Nostalgia is so tricky. Some aspects of life in the Fifties and Sixties were simpler, as I remember them. Other things only seemed simpler through the eyes of a child whose sphere was very separate from the adult world, for whom the newspaper was an impenetrable sea of black and white. My college years were spent, in fact, during a tumultuous political and social period, the time of Woodstock and the Vietnam war. The more I talked to classmates at the reunion, the better we recalled another side of the story. College may have been a safe harbor, but we were suffering through our first relationships, the search for identity and a place in the world.

So I returned from both trips with the understanding that if I experience the world today as more complex and difficult, it's partly because innocence and bravado have been replaced by experience. Becoming a parent has been the antidote to any residual feelings



AIMEE GARN

of invulnerability that lingered from youth. Our children belong to this age of global economy, technology and media, and we can't protect them from all the realities of a competitive world in which childhood bears more resemblance to adulthood than in the past. Our challenge is to preserve the feeling of new possibility, while benefitting from what we've learned.

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Our NYC-PIA theme this year, "Lost in Space: Parenting in a Media-Driven World," will help us explore aspects of this time so we can guide our children through it. As always, we hope that you will take advantage of the parental support provided by our facilitated discussion groups. (Last year our trained facilitators led a record number of groups in member schools.) Our seminars and luncheons will cover many issues—Internet safety, helping children develop skills of self-assertion, dealing with body image, and coping with academic and social stress. We will again present a seminar with Dr. Mel Levine, noted specialist on learning and child development.

Of course, our central mission remains constant: Effective Parenting is Substance Abuse Prevention. Authorities from Phoenix House and The Freedom Institute will address the subject. In our annual Teen Scene, high school students will tell us what it's really like to be a teenager in New York today.

We report on all of our events, and offer additional resources, in our three annual newsletters and on our Web site. This year we will be publishing a new edition of Focus, our parenting guide; check our Web site for details on its distribution. To take advantage of our programs, we hope that you will do two things:

- Save the Guide to NYC-Parents in Action Programs in the center of this newsletter. Note that several

[Continued on page 12](#)

It's Never Just About the Money

BY MARY BETH HARVEY

In a city of great wealth, celebrity worship, and material competition how do we teach our children to value and have the right respect for money?

NYC-Parents in Action hosted a luncheon on just this topic: “What Kids Need to Know about Managing Money.” Nancy Shavel Gabel, Managing Director of US Trust and head of Intergenerational Wealth Planning, and Nancy Samalin, parent educator and author of *Loving Without Spoiling*, spoke on the value of raising financially responsible kids.

How do we empower our children to be financially responsible and self-sufficient? “The first step is to talk about it,” stated Gabel. “People don’t like to discuss money, but we have to.” Money can be a complicated subject for some, laden with its own history of how it was handled in childhood. We owe it to our children to make it a healthy topic.

How do we make children feel okay when they are seeing so much wealth? What about when teens ask “My friends have credit cards, why can’t I?” or “Why can’t I buy the \$170 jeans instead of the \$40 jeans?” Gabel reminded us that our children’s sense of entitlement comes from us—they look to our priorities. Gabel stressed the importance of having a clear set of values yourself so you can guide your children. A family mission statement can lead to a conversation about priorities. Families emphasize different priorities, such as household security, education, travel and philanthropy.

Parents worry about their kids’ financial fitness. A US Trust survey of families found that 61% believe there is too much emphasis on material things; 57% are worried that kids are naïve about the value of money; and 54% are concerned that their kids will spend beyond their means as adults.

Kids incur debt, and worry about it, at an early age. According to Gabel, Charles Schwab Foundation found that one third of 1,000 teens surveyed owe

money to a person or a credit card company; 22% of 16 to 18 year olds owe \$1,000 or more; and 34% get money from debit or credit cards, almost half of whom are concerned about their ability to pay it back.

Samalin echoed Gabel’s focus on setting priorities and recognizing that children are influenced by how we spend and allow them to spend. Parents need to learn to say “no” while helping children understand needs vs. wants. Samalin said it’s easy to fall into the “happiness trap,” but reminded us that our job is to be the “party pooper of their lives.” On the other hand, Samalin cautioned parents not to say “no” if there’s even a tenth of themselves that means maybe. It’s better to say “I will think about it.” Samalin asked parents to have the courage to be “hugely unpopular,” reminding us that a disappointed or unhappy child is not an unloved child. It’s okay to be strict with behavior, she said, so long as you are permissive with feelings.

“People don’t like to discuss money, but we have to.”

Samalin believes that children as young as six or seven years old can learn the value of money from an allowance. Some children divide money into three jars: spend, save, and give away. For older children who have a clothing allowance, write a letter of understanding that makes clear that receipts are necessary; there will be no advances for shortfalls; and that certain types of clothing are appropriate or inappropriate.

If kids run out of money by the end of the week, do not give them more. That’s not how the real world works, and children learn best by consequence, stated Samalin. She told the story of how her own teen exceeded his allowance, did not have a bus pass, and had to walk 45 blocks to school.

Samalin stated, “Love is spelled T-I-M-E and nothing can replace it.” In the end, children might not remember what you bought them, but they will remember the time you spent with them in meaningful ways—listening to them and being interested in their lives. ●

Talking About Sex...Overcoming the 'Ick' Factor

BY VERONICA BENNETT

Why can talking with your kids about sex be so uncomfortable? Now I understand why after attending Dr. Justin Richardson's lecture "Everything You Never Wanted Your Kids to Know About Sex (But Were Afraid They'd Ask)," co-sponsored by NYC-Parents in Action, the Freedom Institute and the Parents League. Dr. Richardson, a psychiatrist and nationally known expert on kids and sex, explained that we are genetically wired to have strong feelings of aversion when it comes to sex and family members. Known as the "incest taboo," these feelings of "ick" are so strong that they actually make it difficult for us to talk about sex with our children. Difficult as it may be, talk we must and Dr. Richardson provided plenty of guidance for giving kids the information they need.

One key to parenting in this arena is to recognize that it is daily observations and events that make up the bulk of your child's sexual education. Another is being able to muster the courage to have many little talks about sex and relationships throughout your child's development, rather than sweating through one "big talk." Dr. Richardson offers four basic lessons.

Lesson 1 — Introduction to the Body

Lesson 1 is learned from birth to age 4 as children discover their bodies and become proud of them. Surprised to witness sexuality in their small children, parents sometimes have difficulty negotiating things like nudity, grabbing or bathing together. Dr. Richardson stressed creating a household that is neither overly puritanical nor overly stimulating. If a child shows by his behavior that a situation is too much, parents should manage the level of excitement by removing the child from the stimulation. For example, it might be time to end bathing with an older sibling. When a child flirts with a parent of the opposite sex, Dr. Richardson recommends finding appropriate ways to be a loving parent. While you don't want to be overly encouraging of these flirtations, he says, you also don't want to create an aversion to

affection by ignoring your child. Lesson 1 is the most important part of sex education, says Dr. Richardson. Its goal is to teach a child that all body parts are good, that physical closeness is safe and wonderful, and that he or she is loveable. Managing early issues such as touching and nudity also prepares parents for later discussions about sex.

Dr. Richardson assures parents that there is no "correct" age for telling children how babies are made.

Lesson 2 — What is Sex?

Lesson 2 deals with children from ages 4 to 8 and their curiosity about how babies are made. In discussing this stage of development, Dr. Richardson assures parents that there is no "correct" age for telling children how babies are made. Unlike exposing a young child to sexual stimulation such as pornography, telling a child the basic facts of life is not harmful. By way of example, Dr. Richardson cites studies that show that American children can typically describe how babies are made correctly by the age of 11, while British children can do so at age 9 and Swedish children can do so at age 7. Answering a young child's questions about sex simply and in a matter-of-fact way also has the advantage of easing the way to later conversations. Some parents worry that early knowledge will encourage early experimentation, but Dr. Richardson says that concern is unfounded. Until children are old enough to view intercourse as erotic, they simply think it is something "gross" that adults do to have babies.

As children approach ages 7 to 10 there is a certain amount of sex play that involves showing and looking with or without some touching. Dr. Richardson says that approximately one-third of girls and one-half of boys will engage in such play, and that it is premised on finding a willing and convenient playmate rather than on personal attraction or sexual orientation. For parents who discover children playing in this manner,

Dr. Richardson advises them to keep a matter-of-fact attitude and to not make the children feel ashamed. When the playdate is over, however, it is a good idea to have a conversation with your child to make sure that no child was pressured into the activity.

Lesson 3 — Expect Puberty

Lesson 3 is all about recognizing the tremendous changes that your child is going through as puberty unfolds and helping him or her through it with support and information. It is best to describe the expected changes before they happen to your child, and there are many good books that can help. It is also the proper time to address sexual feelings and emotional attraction since puberty is when boys and girls begin to experiment with dating. Dr. Richardson says that parents may also want to talk about sexual orientation at this time.

Puberty can make a child feel very self-conscious and not in control of his body, so parents should be sensitive to these insecurities. Dr. Richardson suggests finding ways to support your child; for example, by giving a little slack when it comes to things your child can control, such as wardrobe. By sharing their reasoning behind decisions and infusing home discussions with a democratic spirit, parents can maintain the greatest influence over their adolescents and promote moral development, says Dr. Richardson.

Lesson 4 — Sexual Decision-Making

Lesson 4 involves discussing sex and sexuality with teens who have already gone through puberty. This discussion should cover sexual ethics, or your own philosophy about sex—when it is acceptable, at what age or in connection with what kind of relationship. Dr. Richardson stresses telling your child that sexual activity should always be consensual. He also reminds parents that listening to your teen's opinions while stating the reasons behind yours will increase the likelihood of having a positive influence on your teen. The second important thing to discuss with teens is methods of preventing sexually transmitted diseases

As children enter adolescence, parents may start to worry about when their children will become sexually active. By the time they reach the 9th grade, approximately 35% of students have engaged in sexual intercourse; the numbers increase by 10% for each grade until the 12th grade. According to Dr. Richardson, characteristics of children who wait to have sex include:

1. Thinking that their friends are not having sex
2. Having close friends
3. Being a good student and having plans for the future
4. Having extracurricular activities
5. Having a higher socioeconomic background
6. Being closely monitored by parents as to whom they are with, what they are doing and when they are coming home
7. Having a close relationship with their parents
8. Having parents who tell them that they would like them to wait to have sex

and pregnancy. Consult a book or your teen's physician if necessary, but be sure to give them all the information they need to protect themselves. Once you have covered these crucial aspects of teen sex education, you need not dwell on the details of specific sexual activity, says Dr. Richardson.

After listening to Dr. Richardson, it's hard to make a case for not talking to our children about sex. It's an important part of our children's education, and messages about it in today's culture are becoming increasingly titillating while at the same time politically charged. As difficult as it may be, I would rather be in the conversation with my kids than not. ●

NYC-PARENTS IN ACTION

Participating Schools and School Reps

| | |
|--|---|
| Alexander Robertson School..... | Barbara Burge |
| Allen-Stevenson School..... | Pamela D’Arc |
| Berkeley Carroll School..... | Susan Bargman |
| Birch Wathen Lenox School..... | Amy Sessa, Sandy Berinstein |
| Brearley School..... | Nancy Orenstein |
| Brooklyn Friends..... | Lisa Sack |
| Browning School..... | Lea Bendo LS, MS |
| Buckley School..... | Fran Poole |
| Caedmon School..... | TBA |
| Calhoun School..... | Loretta Daley |
| Chapin School..... | Barbara Knowlton, Robyn Joseph |
| Claremont Prep..... | Gwen Dordick |
| Collegiate School..... | Karen Malik |
| Columbia Grammar & Prep School..... | Chantal Aflalo Weinstein |
| Dalton School..... | Linda Heinberg, Abigail Scheuer Atema LS; Denise Connolly MS, US |
| Dwight School..... | Stefani Langel |
| Epiphany School..... | Catherine Coluzzi-Jacob LS, Kathleen Pharo US |
| Fieldston School..... | Cathy Yesenosky |
| Friends Seminary School..... | Miriam Mayerson |
| Gateway School..... | Eugenia Merkin |
| Grace Church School..... | Camilla Campbell Platt, Ariadne Calvo-Platero |
| Heschel School, Abraham Joshua..... | Alison Granowitz, LS, MS; Merle Wolff, US |
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| Horace Mann School..... | Suzan Kremer |
| La Scuola d’Italia..... | Rebecca Madsen |
| Loyola School..... | Susan Bogutsky |
| LREI School..... | Ronnie Halper |
| Marymount School..... | Karen Kardos, Helen Lynch |
| Nightingale-Bamford School..... | Elena Kissel |
| Packer Collegiate Institute..... | Tara Dixon LS; Patricia Veconi MS, US |
| Ramaz School..... | Judy Abel |
| Riverdale Country School..... | Donna Steinberg Stern, LS Carolyn Cohen Zelikovic MS, US |
| Rodeph Sholom School..... | TBA |
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| Saint Ann’s School..... | Annie Boland |
| Saint David’s School..... | Nancy Hebert |
| Spence School..... | Claire Marx, Tamara Stephenson |
| St. Bernard’s School..... | Maureen Sherry Klinsky, Sheila Aresty LS; Elisa Zachary MS |
| Town School..... | Maria Canale |
| Trevor Day School..... | Sheree Silvee |
| Trinity School..... | TBA |
| United Nations International School..... | Jodi Gumas |
| York Preparatory School..... | Elizabeth Lundqvist |

List complete as of June 2006. Please contact your school and/or NYC-PIA with any additions or changes.

NYC-PARENTS IN ACTION 2006-2007 CALENDAR

“Lost in Space: Parenting in a Media-Driven World”

SEMINARS

Reservations may be placed for seminars by phone to NYC-Parents in Action at 212 987-9629, or by email to seminars@parentsinaction.org except as noted below.

Safety Net: Security Online with Secret Service Agent Kent McCarthy

October 4, 2006, 6:00-8:00 pm
Temple Israel, 112 East 75 Street

*Panelists: Secret Service Agent Kent McCarthy and Daryl Nitke, technology expert and co-founder of HyperCube
Moderated by Barbara Greene*

Street Smart: What Children Need to Know about Personal Safety and Asserting Themselves

October 18, 2006, 6:00-7:30 pm
Temple Israel, 112 East 75 Street

Co-sponsored with Resources for Children with Special Needs and KiDS of NYU

*Panelists: Donna Chaiet from PREPARE; Meriann Taylor, Director of Guidance at the Spence School; Dr. Alan Wachtel; Dr. Jess Shatkin of the NYU Child Study Center
Moderated by Lucy Martin-Gianino*

Starving for Perfection: Disordered Eating and Exercise in Boys and Girls

November 7, 2006, 8:30-10:00 am
Temple Israel, 112 East 75 Street

Co-sponsored with KiDS of NYU

*Panelists: Dr. Melissa Nishawala and Dr. Andrea Vazzana of NYU Medical Center; nutritionist Jodi Citrin; Lesley Jane Seymour, former Editor-in-Chief, Marie Claire
Moderated by Lucy Martin-Gianino*

Last Call: What You DON'T Know About Teen Drinking

December 6, 2006, 6:00-7:30 pm
Temple Israel, 112 East 75 Street

Co-sponsored with Phoenix House

*Panelists: Julie Rosenbluth and Tessa Vining from Phoenix House; Dr. Ralph Lopez; agent from the DEA. Children in the 7th grade and up are welcome to attend with their parents.
Moderated by Lucy Martin-Gianino*

Teen Scene XXI

February 5, 2007, 6:00-8:00 pm
Trinity School, 139 West 91 Street

Co-sponsored with Parents League

*Panelists: Independent school teenagers
Moderated by Lucy Martin-Gianino*

Seminar with Dr. Mel Levine

Week of April 23, 2007 (date TBA)
8:30-11:00 am

92nd Street Y, 92 St. and Lexington Ave.

Co-sponsored with Mount Sinai Children's Center Foundation

Moderated by Lucy Martin-Gianino

LUNCHEONS

To be invited to a luncheon seminar, please contact your School Representative, who will reserve a place for you.

Can We Relate? Author Charlene Giannetti Maps Out the Boy/Girl Scene

November 15, 2006, 12:00-2:00 pm
Temple Israel, 112 East 75 Street

Charlene Giannetti discusses her new book, Boy Crazy: Keeping Our Daughter's Feet on the Ground When Her Head is in the Clouds.

Inside the World of Drug Counselors: How Experts Work with Kids to Prevent Substance Abuse

January 31, 2007, 12:00-2:00 pm
Temple Israel, 112 East 75 Street

A panel of Freedom Institute's counselors will discuss their experiences working with children and adolescents in over 45 of NYC's independent schools

Learning for Life: Helping Kids Deal with Academic and Social Stress

May 1, 2007, 12:00-2:00 pm
Temple Israel, 112 East 75 Street

Panelists: Dawn Goldring, learning specialist, and others TBA

Koren Zailckas, Author of ‘Smashed,’ Discusses a Youth Clouded by Alcohol Addiction

BY SALLY SHERWOOD

She looked like a candidate from Central Casting. You could see her playing the girl next door; the homecoming queen; even the shy, brainy co-ed—but not the wise young woman whose first encounter with alcohol at the age of fourteen sent her on a trajectory of blackouts, depression and risky sexual behavior.

In a mesmerizing, touching and eye-opening discussion of her book, *Smashed: Story of a Drunken Girlhood*, Koren Zailckas revealed the story of her youthful descent into alcohol abuse. As she led a seminar co-sponsored by NYC-Parents in Action, Channel Thirteen and WLIW-21, Zailckas’s sincerity and poise belied the struggles of a young woman still grappling with issues of self-confidence. But for the periodic, reserved glances downward, the 26-year-old author presented the picture of an articulate, self-aware human being who bravely rallied after spending the better part of her high school and college careers careening from one drunken binge to another.

“No one ever told me that alcohol would affect my body differently because I was female....”

Introducing herself with a casual “Hey, gang” to an audience comprised mostly of parents some twenty to thirty years her senior, Koren Zailckas ticked off the litany of the typical experiences that were to prepare her for life: a childhood spent in rural Massachusetts; loving parents and a sibling; friends; and the requisite health-class lectures on the perils of drinking and driving, complete with the appearance of the local police chief, handcuffs in tow.

What the adults in her life failed to mention, however, was that 14-year-olds who first experiment with alcohol are five times more likely to “get hooked” than are those who drink at a later age. In fact, Zailckas noted several omissions in her education

about alcohol. “For some reason, we’re still far more wary of cigarettes than alcohol as an addictive substance...No one ever told me that early alcohol abuse would make me four times as likely to suffer from depression as I grew older. No one ever told me that alcohol would affect my body differently because I was female: we’re smaller, we weigh less and we have more fat in our bodies, less water, and fewer stomach enzymes that break down alcohol to prevent alcohol poisoning.”

As she read a passage from her book detailing her chilling experience with alcohol poisoning at age 16, Zailckas began to recount what she deemed her “real” education in alcohol abuse: “Henceforth, my mother will refer to it as ‘the time I almost died.’ ... Sure enough, it feels like death. On November 9, 1996, I wake up between the tied, stiff sheets of my childhood banister bed in what looks like someone else’s nightgown. It’s a thin, white cotton smock stippled with green, and it cuts off at my knees...it dawns on me. I’m wearing a hospital gown.”

The audience sat transfixed as Zailckas narrated the harrowing saga of a young girl whose eager alcohol intake from a communal bottle at a party caused her to pass out in her own vomit, only to revive in a hospital with no memory of the stomach-pumping and emergency measures that saved her life. Frightened as she was by this incident, it proved to be but one in a series of experiences in the life of a young girl whose feelings of alienation, isolation and shyness were transformed by the power of alcohol.

Shorn of social inhibition by the heady glow of inebriation, Zailckas cultivated the skills necessary to sustain her habit—from smuggling watered-down booze in shampoo bottles to guzzling down gin, vodka or rum in school parking lots and bathroom stalls. Then, suddenly, with the self-awareness of a 23-year-old about to embark on a writing career—she stopped drinking. She found herself bereft of the

Wake Up and Smell the Homework: How to Help Your Kids Help Themselves

November 16, 2006, 7:00-9:00 pm • JCC in Manhattan, 334 Amsterdam Avenue at 76 Street

Sponsored by JCC in Manhattan — Co-sponsored by NYC-PIA

Panelists: Donna Goldberg, Organizational Consultant; Mary Ellen Kail, Coordinator, Learning Resource Center of Columbia Prep School; Patti Sayre, Parenting Expert and Therapist; Theresa Peduto, Educational Consultant, LD Specialist and Director of SPINS (Students and Parents Information Network Support); Milton Sipp, Head of Middle School, Riverdale Country School; Dr. Paul Yellin, National Director of Clinical Programs, All Kinds of Minds.

Moderated by Laurie Gerber, President of Partners with Parents Tutoring Service

RSVP after August 15 to JCC in Manhattan, 646 505-5708

social skills that seemed so easily accessible to a young girl with a drink in her hand. “I felt overwhelmingly shy...right back to being 14.”

Uninsured, she embraced sobriety without the benefit of rehab, counseling or support groups. With the wisdom of hindsight, however, Zailckas strongly urged that people seek help to stop drinking in order to bridge the chasm of lost years and experience that accompanies years of alcohol abuse.

...Zailckas explained that teens can find ways to keep their activities private even with vigilant parents.

Questions and Answers

Questions from the floor predictably explored the involvement of the author’s parents. Zailckas assured the audience that her parents “were there; they were present, they felt omnipresent when I was a teenager.” The offspring of a stay-at-home mom and working father who are still married, Zailckas explained that teens can find ways to keep their activities private even with vigilant parents. Whether she was at a sleepover, a football game or a school dance, spirits were available through the most obvious channels: the family liquor cabinet or a college-age sibling. “I was a miserable little sneak in high school, and then I went to college,” where she called home to report the good grades but not the blackouts. Somehow through all the drinking Zailckas was able to function well scholastically despite an underlying depression that clouded her days.

Her binge drinking escalated during college, where easy access to alcohol was coupled with a seemingly permissive community of adults—teachers, administrators and parents—who “seemed to stand on the sidelines and kind of root you on.” What she perceived as the problem was not so much drinking but a culture that condones and cultivates it.

In an effort to stem the abuse of alcohol among young people, Zailckas offered practical advice for parents:

- Start talking to kids early about drinking.
- Discuss all the risks associated with alcohol intake.
- Tell your child that, like any other drug, alcohol is addictive.
- Explain that large doses of alcohol can stunt brain growth.
- Be aware of the messages that advertisers send your child. To more fully appreciate the scope of advertising or to lodge a formal complaint against an advertiser, log on to www.camy.org (The Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth).
- Alcohol is sold in many forms, including sweetened products resembling juice, soda and lollipops.
- Don’t serve alcohol to minors in your home.
- Encourage participation in after-school activities.
- Consider your own use: Drinking “socially” doesn’t mean you don’t have a problem.

For further info on drinking and drug abuse, log onto www.factsontap.org. ●

Drinking....Cough Syrup??

Some kids are abusing cough syrup to get high, and it’s extremely dangerous. Cough syrup, like many common over-the-counter cold and cough medications, contains dextromethorphan or DXM. DXM is an anesthetic that when taken in excess can create hallucinations, out-of-body sensations and loss of motor control. Slang names kids use for DXM include “Dex,” “Robo,” “Skittles,” “Syrup” and “Tussin.” A DXM overdose alone can be lethal and its dangerous side effects are magnified when DXM is combined with other drugs or alcohol. For a true story of one family’s loss of a son to DXM, log onto to the Partnership for a Drug-free America Web site (www.drugfree.org/Portal/Memorials/What_Signs_Did_I_Miss).

Alcohol Poisoning

Although parents sometimes don't like to acknowledge it, today's high school students—and even kids as young as middle school—are drinking. Unfortunately, many are drinking at levels that can lead to alcohol poisoning. Before your kids head off to the first party or gathering of friends this school year, talk with them about the real dangers of binge drinking and dispel the myth about the safety of “sleeping it off.” Knowing the signs and symptoms of alcohol poisoning, and knowing how to intervene if a friend needs help, can save a life.

NYC-Parents in Action gratefully acknowledges Phoenix House for providing this information. The IMPACT Program at Phoenix House has been serving NYC for more than 25 years, helping teens whose experience with alcohol and other drugs has negatively affected their school work and relationships with family and friends. Trained clinical staff are available to provide assessment and intervention services to teens showing signs of a struggle with alcohol or drugs. To learn more or to get help, visit www.phoenixhouse.org/impact.



What Is Alcohol Poisoning?

Alcohol poisoning is a serious and sometimes fatal result of binge drinking. It happens when the alcohol content in your blood rises to a level that your body cannot break down. It is not the result of drinking bad or old alcohol but rather too much alcohol. If you drink too much alcohol in too short a time period, you can overdose before you even pass out or lose consciousness (this is because the brain hasn't yet caught up with the damage already happening in the body). Trying to sober up with coffee or water won't help.

Many times friends witness a friend in alcohol overdose and know there is something wrong. This may happen to you but you may feel uncomfortable calling for help because you are afraid that you might get into trouble with the police or your parents—or even your friends. Don't worry about getting in trouble; making the call could save a life. Showing that you can take responsibility to help a friend should earn you respect not punishment.

Warning Signs of a Person with Alcohol Poisoning:

- Mental confusion, semi-conscious, or cannot be woken up (by shaking etc.)

- Slow breathing: fewer than 8 breaths per minute; or Irregular breathing: 10 seconds or more between breaths.
- Hypothermia (low body temperature), bluish skin color, paleness.

What To Do If You Think Someone Has Alcohol Poisoning:

- Call 911. Don't worry about getting in trouble or making friends angry, the call could save a life.
- Don't leave your friend alone. Even if he or she appears to be “sleeping it off,” remember that alcohol already in the stomach will continue to enter the bloodstream and your friend will continue to get drunk even after he or she has stopped drinking. A person who has passed out could die.
- Turn them on their side so they don't choke on their vomit.
- If you're not sure if your friend is acutely intoxicated, call a health professional immediately—don't wait for all the symptoms or try to guess the level of drunkenness.

Information provided by Phoenix House

YOUNG MINDS

Continued from page 1

should know how to preview the possible outcome of a problem and develop several avenues for solving it. They should be able to set priorities. When a problem is solved, the student should be able to self-monitor to see what can be learned for next time.

Study right before bed

A lot of consolidation and filing of information takes place during deep sleep. Practice writing letters, memorizing multiplication tables, or conjugating verbs right before sleep and the brain will give the information an instant replay to consolidate it. If your child takes a shower, talks on the phone, or listens to music before bed, he may override the study that came before and remember song lyrics instead of conjugations.

Get enough sleep

Children in the early years of school need nine hours of sleep. This should be non-negotiable; start with the nine hours then work back to schedule the rest of the day's activities. The evening should be used to wind down; avoid caffeine and stimulating video games and television. If your child cannot get to sleep and stay asleep, consider getting an evaluation.

Don't overrate the college experience

Dr. Levine warned parents that entrance to college is over-hyped and that many students suffer a letdown once they are there. Colleges have many students dealing with alcoholism and depression, he said. There is a danger in over-estimating the importance of college. Schools should prepare children for adulthood, not college admissions, said Dr. Levine. Encourage your child to find meaning at college. Prepare your child by ensuring he knows how to learn, how to handle the work load, and how to set aside the tribe mentality of adolescence to see himself as an individual.

Cultivate meta-thinking

Ideally, your child should eventually be able to think about how he thinks. How does he best determine what's significant in a lecture, predict what's on an exam, and prepare a study plan? A common refrain of college students is "I don't get it." Often what they are

saying is that they understand facts but not concepts. A concept is a collection of features that go together to create an idea or category of ideas—like capitalism or endangered species. You can help a child learn how to conceptualize by giving them the details of concepts and encouraging them to see how they integrate. Concepts keep getting built upon; some students struggle because they remain at a very concrete level of conceptualization.

Ideally, your child should eventually be able to think about how he thinks.

One concept that you can explore with an older child is the notion of ambition—what is healthy ambition and how does it help you set goals? When asked if they are ambitious, Dr. Levine says that kids may say they just want to be happy. Adults, on the other hand, might answer that ambition results in the freedom to make your own way in the world.

Children can cultivate a taste for healthy ambition, even though they may be going through a rough patch at school. A new opportunity that allows them to engage a different set of skills is just around the corner. ●

NYC-PIA FACILITATED PARENT DISCUSSION GROUPS

Volunteers Wanted! Dads, That Means You, Too!

Throughout the year, NYC-Parents in Action sponsors parent discussion groups at member schools. The goal is to strengthen connections among parents and create a communications network that will be in place through lower, middle and upper school. The discussions, led by trained facilitators, provide a forum for an exchange of ideas and concerns with other parents. We are looking to train new facilitators who are articulate, comfortable speaking in groups and interested in parenting issues. As part of a special effort to reach out to fathers, male volunteers will be invited to attend a "Men Only" training session.

If you are interested in learning more about facilitator training, or know someone with this interest, please call NYC-PIA at (212) 426-0240.

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Continued from page 2

seminars will be held in the evening, which may enable working parents to attend.

- Register on our expanded Web site, www.parentsinaction.org. You will find links to other organizations, and see video excerpts of some of our panel discussions. There you can also learn about our Access sales program, a new way in which we are supporting our activities while benefiting savvy New York consumers.

All of our programs are free of charge. We rely on the work of a dedicated volunteer staff, and on the financial assistance of parents in our community. Please consider making a contribution to help us with our work. We welcome your thoughts. Please email me at president@parentsinaction.org with your comments and suggestions.

—AIMEE GARN

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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