

The following was written by Lori Gradinger as part of her blog and can be accessed on her website at <http://www.courageouscommunication.net/121/121>

## “Teen Stress: Tools for Thriving and Surviving”

Last night I went to an excellent panel presentation for parents on Teen Stress. The presenters were 3 Clinical Social Workers; Sue Eastgard from Youth Suicide & Prevention, Vic Larson from the counseling department at University Prep in Seattle and Ron Feinberg, in private practice on Mercer Island.

Here is what I learned:

### **KIDS & ADULTS HAVE SIMILAR STRESSORS**

- Ask yourself (or your child) what your child is stressed about
- Ask yourself what behaviors let you know your child is stressed
- Ask yourself what you are stressed about
- Ask yourself (or your child) how you act when you are stressed

The point is that often, we are stressed about the same things and we show it similarly (shouting, pouting, withdrawal, sleeping, swearing, poor eating habits).

**Our kids are watching how we cope with stress.** If we are concerned with their coping skills we need to first look at our own and make sure we are modeling healthy behavior. Can we make the shift from a standard of perfection to an expectation of competence? Kids feel a lot of pressure from parents to be perfect. Can we make time to LISTEN to our kids? They really want to be heard (just like us).

### **SKILLS FOR a KID’S LIFE**

1. **Make and Keep Friends**
2. **Identify and Manage Feelings;** kids can usually articulate when they are BORED and PISSED OFF but they are not able to identify disappointed, hurt, rejected, sad....we need to help them develop their capacity to recognize and manage these feelings
3. **Dealing with Distress** in moral, healthy and legal ways
4. **Problem Solving with an understanding of Consequences**

### **FIGHT OR FLIGHT**

The nervous system has a similar response to being excited about something (going on a first date) and being really worried about something (going on a first date or taking a test). Both situations can trigger the fight/ flight reaction. What makes something **STRESSFUL** is our **perception of control**. So, one of our jobs as a parent, is to help our kids identify what piece of each situation they have control over.

#### **COMMUNICATION TOOL: the 4 questions**

1. **What do you see going on here?**
2. **What does it mean to you?**
3. **What are your options?**
4. **What do you want to do?**

- These questions allow you to listen to your child and help them solve their own problems. This allows them to develop a sense of control which leads to an increased ability to reduce and manage their own stress.
- These questions are the replacement for giving advice, freaking out, criticizing, dismissing and panicking in response to things our kids tell us.
- Timing is important if you want to talk with your teen. Most kids do not want to talk after school (when most parents are primed and ready for a big check in about the day). Kids want to talk late at night after they have eaten, napped, done some homework, talked with 10 friends and resolved the issues of their day. Of course we are on our way to bed at 10:45pm.....but do what you can to be ready when your child is ready. You never know when they will want to chat next.

#### **BIG VS. SMALL** (as a stress management tool)

We need to decide what issues are important and what to 'let go of.'

Next time you are trying to decide how important something is (dirty room, flunked test, car accident, mean to friend) ask yourself:

- **Is it fatal?**
- **Is it permanent?**

#### **A WORD ABOUT PRAISE**

There are 2 distinctly different ways to praise your child:

1. **"This report is really interesting. You are such a natural at organizing your thoughts and writing them in an interesting and clear way. I wish I had your skill."**

OR

2. **“This report is really interesting. It looks like you spent a lot of time thinking about this topic and organizing your thoughts. I am impressed you were able to take a complicated subject and make it understandable. You really worked hard at this and it shows.”**

Research shows that kids who are praised the first way get frustrated easily when things become difficult for them. They expect things to ‘come naturally’ and when they don’t, they are less able to cope.

Kids praised in the second way understand that they got a good outcome because of something they did (worked hard). So if something more difficult comes along they know what to do.....work hard. This allows them to feel in control of things.

#### **IN SUMMARY (my words)**

Here is how we can best help our kids manage their stress:

- **Reduce and manage our own stress**
- **Listen, listen, listen**
- **Help kids identify and talk about their feelings**
- **Choose our battles really carefully**
- **Help them figure out what part of any situation they have control over**
- **Praise them so they believe they have the capacity to handle difficult situations**
- **Stop thinking/ talking/ expecting ‘perfection’**

This entry was posted on Thursday, March 5th, 2009 at 9:20 am. You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can [leave a response](#), or [trackback](#) from your own site.