



Parent & Faculty Education Conference THRIVING IN A COMPETITIVE WORLD Menlo School, February 7, 2015

Dr. Laura Kastner Cultivating Life Long Strengths *Attendee Notes*

Opening Remarks:

Dr. Kastner's children went to Lakeside in Seattle where Than was before Menlo. Her most recent book is *Wise Minded Parenting*, which provides practical advice for how to tap our "wise minds" to calmly navigate even the stormiest of parenting moments with our tweens and teens. Dr. Kastner showed a survey of Silicon Valley Developmental Assets then shared three stories:

- A sophomore boy who wanted to quit tennis even though he was nationally ranked.
- A girl had plagiarized and needed to go tell her parents.
- A junior year girl needed to tell her parents that she had a final the next day but really wanted to go visit a depressed friend who needed her help.
- How would we handle these situations?

Seven Essentials that Build Life Long Strengths:

- Secure Attachment
- Self-Control
- Academic Success
- Social Thriving
- Emotional Flourishing
- Strong Character
- Physical Health

Secure Attachment During Teen Years:

- Secure attachment – it takes more than love...
- 2 key words: attunement and responsiveness
Parents need to: "I love you and I behave in a certain way, consistently, that allows you to feel secure." How to do this?
 - Accept your child for how/who the teen is
 - Reliable support, we're interested in them
 - Respect for feelings
 - Genuine interest
 - Allowing for connection when distressed

Keep in mind what adolescents are going thru:

- Identity formation and individualization
- Intense emotions of puberty
- Parents are secure base – teens need to “displace” their normal, negative feelings. Best done *with us!*

Kids are holding it together all day long then they let it all out at home. This is displacement. Parents are enforcers of rules and controller of resources. One of the biggest things going on: brain remodeling and problems with planning.

Brain Remodeling During the Teen Years:

- The Thinking Brain – prefrontal cortex: planning, reasoning, judgment, and impulse control (conscious brain).
- The Emotional Brain – Fear, Desire, Fight or Flight
- During adolescence, while the Thinking Brain is being pruned and remodeled, more “thinking” is done by the Emotional part of the brain.
- Every kid’s brain is being “remodeled” around age 15. Major pruning happens. From “jungles of Borneo to a Bonsai tree!” Continues until 25. More moodiness, arguments, risk taking – this is normal.
- Dr. Kastner hopes that we can help each other as parents by discussing our challenges with wise friends. Crowdsource our parenting! Let’s all admit that we have kids in the middle of the brain curve.

Self Control: Twice as good a predictor of future success as “IQ.”

- In America, we like measures and numbers. We become “cognitively narrowed” in our thinking. So, we latch onto IQ, SAT scores as measures of success. We don’t have a way to measure “character” and “values” which science has shown to be better predictors of health, well-being, safety, success.

How do we enhance and cultivate self-control?

- Practice patience. Have kids sit at table and ask “may I be excused from table?”
- Delayed gratification and routines. If they blow through their budget, is it right to give them an advance on their next payment? They need to experience suffering and pain to learn.
- Techniques for coping
- Balance of support and challenge – not just academic challenges! Many parents are not challenging them with household chores. Teach them to be a good human being.

Success Is:

- Academic success
- Social thriving
- Emotional flourishing
- Strong character
- Physical health

How to motivate your children?

- Computer games are so addictive because there is enough challenge to stretch competence and they provide rewards on the way to mastery.
- Scaffolding when failing to meet goals. Give them enough support to get the reward.

Grit:

- Grit = persistence toward a goal.
- Part of executive functioning skills.
- Involves frustration, tolerance, coping and problem-solving.
- Kids do not build up grit unless they work at skills/activities that they are genuinely interested in, and we accept that.

Authoritative parenting:

- = High warmth, high authority, and psychological autonomy granting (letting them flex their OWN ideas, even if different from our's).
- Parents should try to be mostly positive with interactions, talking, listening, fun, involvement, empathy. 5:1 positive to negative interactions. We need them to listen to us, and come to us when they need help.
- Grades are important, but.... avoiding academic pressure is too.
- Kids who are feeling pressured are more likely to be depressed, anxious and drug users.

Wise Minded Parenting:

- Dialectic of change
- Use best of cognitive/emotional skills to find solutions that work. Emotional Skills + Reasoning Skills. It's a balancing act of change and acceptance. Focus on acceptance first. My child is doing the best he can, given his emotional state, situation... and he needs to do better. Start with acceptance...then can work on behavioral change.
- Kindness and connection first...then problem solve.
- Get the heart rate down, take emotions down, calm your brain. Then you can see the big picture and try to be helpful/effective.
- Do not relate to your child "under the influence" (of emotions, anxiety, etc.) – that literally creates tunnel vision and cognitive narrowing.

The Steps of Wise Minded Parenting:**1) Getting to CALM:**

- Cool down
- Assess your options
- Listen with empathy
- Make a plan
- Slowing your brain, thinking...results in better conversation and your reasoning mind to surface. Remember that validation/acceptance does not mean approval or agreement – it only means you "get it" which they need to hear.
- Your Reasoning Brain by itself is not good either – need your emotional brain/empathy.

2) Filter out "being right." Don't listen with your mouth open!**3) Figure out realistic goals and effective problem solving.****Further Thoughts:**

- Our job as parents is to infuse the "fish bowl at home" with as many positives as possible.
- Family health starts with you! Think of oxygen to yourself then to your kids.
- Parents are the unsung heroes!
- Need lots of time together with our kids, so that we get the low frequency/high value good times!
- A "mindful response" is better than an "automatic reaction."
- Parenting is not always happy or comfortable! If it is, we're doing it wrong.

Q&A

Q: Why do family dinners predict positive outcomes?

A: People who have family dinners are organized - they figure out how to have a dinner, despite calendar challenges and busy lives - which shows dedication, and priority on family time. If we let it go, we lose face time with our kids. They need actual FACE time to build empathy and self-control skills. Persevering on family dinner demonstrates that we as parents can “tolerate” them being moody and negative (at the dinner table).

Q: Teens report that it’s hard to rest and recuperate. How do you advise parents to model rest and recuperation?

A: Establish and keep family traditions (church, dinners, vacations), even if they protest. Might need to negotiate but it’s good in the long run.

Q: What about rewards?

A: Never reward good grades with money. The exception is when kids are actually flunking, in which case rewards can help. Don’t use it unless you have to. If they’re not doing well, provide scaffolding like tutoring. If a kid is really struggling, make homework something that you can do via a tutor. Turn the negative experience into a positive. If your student is 3.0 and above, giving money for grades is a disincentive because they don’t learn it intrinsically.

Q: How can we combat “senioritis,” or should we even try?

A: Seniors are lame ducking. People live through this and it works out fine 99% of the time. Only tell your child once that “schools can recant grades,” don’t repeat it over and over again. This is nature’s way to create more havoc to let them go off to school. It’s very much related to temperament. You know their track record, and you know whether to give them more autonomy.

Q: How should we communicate research findings about teens? Or should we?

A: This would be helpful to discuss within school rather than coming from parents.

Closing

Mr. Rogers came to Seattle Children’s Hospital and delivered this message on love:

“Love is not a perfect state of perfect caring. It is an active noun, like struggle. To love them is to accept them exactly as they are right now.” Go home and do that!