

From the
COUNSELING
DEPARTMENT

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Partnering to Empower Our Kids

This community has depth. It has the courage to make difficult decisions when needed, with meaning and positive intent. This is a community that has humor, strength, energy, and wisdom. As the counselor in the Upper School, I witness our community's empathetic sense in multiple directions. It is a delight to see constant connections of support and understanding being formed within the students as well as parents and faculty. Menlo often becomes a second home for comfort and care with families or individuals in flux. I see deep empathy expressed by this community daily. I witness students striving to take on the most challenging of topics. Repeatedly, our student body seeks to discuss, lead, empower, and enrich this community and the lives of so many to which they are connected. Time and again, these touching moments are what keep me grounded in knowing this is exactly where I need to be at this time in my career.

As the first semester and winter holiday season are both now behind us, many students returned relishing in the

connectedness of family and spirit of the season. That is not always the case for some students, especially those who are eager for healthy family settings with laughter and joy, yet often see their situations falling short of their aspirations. In following the truth of the varied experiences, what I have witnessed time and again, is the authentic magic of connectedness within this

Menlo community. We are supporting each other in our varied life events. On a daily basis, those connections to people and relationships become our foundation. Through every joyful or grief-stricken time, the enduring, altruistic nature of the Menlo community rings true.

February's Parent and Faculty Education Conference is yet another prime example of modeling what our Menlo community eagerly accepts in order to address and continue to nurture the efforts towards healthy and evolving relationships between parent and child. Time with our children is short before they are launched into a world where they no longer return nightly to the comforting place that they call home. This conference has been known to redirect challenging family relationships and be an insightful and replenishing beacon of hope for others.

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In keeping with the theme of facing difficult topics head on, the Parent Education Committee has done a remarkable job highlighting our depth of care and compassion as well as our ambition to be honest and wholeheartedly embrace our diverse backgrounds and challenging life experiences. Hitting tough topics head on—welcoming moments that teach us direct responses towards the right decisions in character development and reinforcing affirmations and exploratory outcomes with parenting—is the route we’ve chosen to take for this year’s conference. Parenting is an adventure and often creates experiences and feelings as if one is exploring uncharted waters, in which control is sometimes perceived as obsolete. This year’s conference will leave you with practical and instructive methods and strategies to keep or develop a more positive and connected relationship with your child. Adults will leave more clearly understanding a child’s direct experience as an adolescent in relation to the world that they are learning to navigate.



To kick off the morning, we will delve into the inner trenches of defining “character” with Webby Awards creator and dynamic speaker, Tiffany Shlain. A filmmaker and author, Tiffany is highly regarded as an internet pioneer in supporting character development overall

and also having that relate strongly to social media and internet advancement. Character in its essence and how to preserve, instill, or enhance it into the very foundation of our children will be our opening focus of the conference. Our efforts will focus on working to tackle target goals of what matters most to this community: the relationships

one has with oneself and their connectedness to community.

The conference’s second speaker, Julie Lythcott-Haims, is near and dear to our hearts. She is a local parent as well as a talented and intuitive professional. With grace and a guiding confidence, Julie will help us explore the emerging culture of the over-involved parent.

She will discuss her own experiences as well as delve into her *New York Times* best-selling book *How to Raise an Adult: Break Free of the Overparenting Trap and Prepare Your Kids for Success*. Julie has recently been engaging audiences across the nation on her recent tour, but for her visit to Menlo, she will share pertinent information that she has yet to thoroughly discuss with larger audiences. Julie will provide some guidance on “preparing our



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children for life, rather than protecting them from it” as our children all move on the path from childhood to young adulthood while at Menlo. Raising two children of her own in Palo Alto and as Dean of Freshman for ten years at Stanford University, Julie is keenly aware of the unique pressures on teens in Silicon Valley. She will encourage us to avoid narrow definitions of success and a “checkboxlist childhood.” She will discuss positive parent engagement and how to shift over time from parental vigilance to fostering independence in our kids. She will provide the framework for the steps needed to develop autonomy, creativity, compassion, and an emerging a sense of personal and global responsibility. Julie will also openly discuss the danger to our children’s mental health when we create what feels like an overloaded life.

Julie will join our third speaker, Ross Szabo, spending time incorporating a combination of their work and will be placing a direct view on the often-muted or considered taboo subject of mental illness. It has, at times, been challenging for our children to fully escape the grieving and deep loss and fear of suicide clusters in Palo Alto



and surrounding areas. This community shares their pain and challenges, in fact, we are likely united with every high school in having concern for our children as they develop into young adults and manage the nuances of this generation of teens. Our students deserve our work and attention on this

topic. We need all hands on deck to continue to enhance and embolden that confident, spirited adolescent and work to nurture and treat the distressed, overwhelmed, and sometimes, yes, depressed adolescent. As a community, we need to keep up our efforts and care while being present for our children without over-managing their lives or creating expectations that are far from their own.

Ross Szabo, who authored the book, *Behind Happy Faces*, will help our audience be present with the current demands and high expectations our children often face in our environment. Ross will proficiently guide us and increase our education and skills to better directly address the needs of our cherished student body. This year we continue to be committed to what is currently on the minds and hearts of our adolescents. The former Director of Outreach for Mental Health Awareness Campaign and current CEO of the Human Power Project, Ross will provide his expertise in mental health and wellness and encourage us to take

preventative steps in our own lives and those of our children to focus on healthy balance and coping skills in everyday challenges. Ross will explore the differences between “good stress and bad stress” and will help us identify healthy coping strategies recognizing the significant individual variability in our developing adolescents.

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Lastly, there is always work to be done as parents, as a school, and as a community to nurture and guide our students towards skillfully managing their own lives. If we are striving for the goals that our children experience joy, develop confidence, learn to skillfully recover from defeat, and lead meaningful lives, this generation of adolescents is bound to discover their own invaluable definitions of success. We look forward to continuing this work with you at the 2016 Parent & Faculty Education Conference: Empowering Our Kids: A Work in Progress. I hope you'll join us.

Joan Bianchi



KnightLine is published in .pdf form on the Menlo School website each month, with an email alert including a link sent to all parents. For questions, please contact Alex Perez, Director of Communications, via email at alex.perez@menloschool.org or by calling 650.330.2001 ext. 2330.

