



PROGRAM SUMMARY

2013 PCW Orientation

National Presbyterian School

Thursday, September 19, 2013

Communication Between Schools and Parents:

Starting the School Year on the Right Ear – Effective Communication Between Parents, Teachers and Students

Featuring: Michelle Kreibel – Parent Educator

The Parents Council of Washington (PCW) hosted its annual Orientation Program for Representatives and Parent Association Presidents of its member schools on Thursday, September 19, 2013 at the National Presbyterian School. Board Member Melanie Mason opened the program by welcoming attendees and revealing this year's PCW theme, Communication and Reaching Out: Creating Healthier Communities. Ms. Mason also provided an overview of the programs that will be offered throughout the year including a new Parent Speak event in November, highlighted Representatives' roles as an important communication link between the PCW and school communities to share event information, reviewed materials within the orientation packets including the Month-to-Month Guide, School Liaison list, Washington Parent article about the PCW in addition to discussing key aspects and resources available on the PCW website, the

PCW Facebook page and the monthly Checklist that will be sent by board members to School Representatives.

PCW President Joan Levy then welcomed participants and introduced Michelle Kriebel as keynote speaker of the topic, “Starting the School Year on the Right Ear: Effective Communication Between Parents, Teachers and Students.”

Ms. Kriebel began by asking attendees to discuss a few questions with a neighbor such as what they are most looking forward to in their roles as a PCW Representative, what are they most anxious about their roles. Once everyone shared their thoughts, she asked them if other thoughts that they did not share with the other person were in their heads while they were talking. A few participants admitted that they were focusing on something else during their conversations.

Developing listening skills: Ms. Kriebel quoted from *Fierce Conversations* by Susan Scott: “All conversations are with ourselves and sometimes they are with other people.” She encouraged everyone to think about how we communicate differently with different people in our lives (our children, spouses, teachers, other parents, colleagues) and to understand that there are different patterns and dynamics of our communication. For example, when speaking with our children we tend to be desperate for information often asking questions such as how their day was. 99% of the time, our children do not give the answers that parents are craving and seeking. In some cases, children are not able to express their thoughts and feelings well. It might be painful or difficult to explain which can lead to children interpreting questions from parents as an interrogation. The next exercise to share with a neighbor was to think about a negative script in our lives. Again, participants felt they were thinking of other things during their conversations.

Ms. Kriebel addressed the opposite of talking as waiting to talk... Silence and listening are very different. Changing our mentality to stop thinking about the next issue to discuss with the other person is hard. She once saw a bumper sticker with the saying “Silence is golden. Duct tape is silver.” She challenged everyone to think about the idea of silence the next time you pick your child up from school, to come up with ways to spend some one-on-one time and giving them more control.

- A simple “Nice to see you” or “I missed you” starts positive communication instead of throwing out a bunch of questions. Let the child begin the conversations.
- Other great opportunities to create better conversations with your child include “side by side talking” when we are not fully engaged eye-to-eye and where

children open up while walking the dog, cooking together, in the car or at bedtime. Make time to be around during these moments.

- Remember that we tend to listen through our own filter. Think about what listening means between siblings-sibling dynamics have patterns too.
- Think about what it means to listen and not direct the conversation. Children should lead and direct.
- Listen to emotion and intent. Children do not have words to show expression or use words we wish they would use. A cry for help can be undermined by sarcasm or anger. Parents need to make sure children do not feel silly. Our interactions can at times be too concerned with factual information and not focused enough on what they are really trying to say. Ms. Kriebel shared the following poem by Hafiz: How Do I Listen to others? As if everyone were my Master Speaking to me His Cherished Last Words Questions to ask and other important facts to consider:
 - What do you want from me?... What can I do to help? Children may not want what we think they want. Sometimes they just us to listen, other times they may want advice. Remember that the goal is to help create functional adults that can advocate for themselves
 - Validate, validate, validate feelings... Do not make this about you. Do not discount their pain or feelings.
 - The words you choose matter... Result vs. effort. Make it about the effort, not the result.
- There is a totally different result between competition and collaboration... For many the default is to compete, rather than collaborate.
- FOMO – Fear of missing out... The online world is constantly having conversations internally with children talking to each other. Nobody wants to feel left out of a conversation, a party or an event.

Ms. Kriebel highlighted another passage from the book *Fierce Conversations*. Think of the following analogy: if you only focus on the top part of the piece of wood that you are chopping, you will often just nick it or miss it. When you focus on the whole stump, you will chop through. In terms of conversations, we need to aim through and approach together, not against each other. For more information on the topic of competition vs. collaboration or involved vs. over-involved in teacher conferences, Ms. Kriebel

suggested *The Price of Privilege* by Madeline Levine. Remember that parents and teachers have the same goal. It's not about the grade, but how do we work together.

Another important question to ask ourselves is "Would we want anyone to speak to our child or spouse as we do?" We need to be specific and offer a sharp, clear message. Apologies are important. If we nag, children turn off and nothing works. We need to make children a part of the solution.

In *Fierce Conversations*, Susan Scott explains that all conversations leave a wake like a boat – either positive or negative. We drive the boat and sometimes do not see or care about the wake. We need to focus more on delivering the message without the load.

Book references/resources:

- *Raising Resilient Children* by Brooks and Goldstein
- *The Pressured Child* by Michael Thompson
- *The Price of Privilege* by Madeline Levine
- *LOL... OMG* by Matt Ivester
- *Quiet* by Susan Cain
- *Fierce Conversations* by Susan Scott
- *Masterminds and Wingmen* by Rosalind Wiseman