

**Movie Screening and Best Practices Forum
Landmark Theater/Bethesda Row Cinema
Thursday, December 5, 2019**

Screenagers Next Chapter: Uncovering Skills for Stress Resilience

The Parents Council of Washington (PCW) screened the movie, *Screenagers NEXT CHAPTER: Uncovering Skills for Stress Resilience*, exploring how to help young people thrive in our screen and stress-filled world. To find out more, go to <https://www.screenagersmovie.com/screenagers-next-chapter>.

Below are notes from the moderated discussion following the film, designed to answer attendee questions and provide best practices on the topic. Moderators included Dr. William Stixrud & Ned Johnson, authors of *The Self-Driven Child*. The event was open to parents, faculty, administrators, and staff from PCW member schools.

Dr. Stixrud began the discussion by posing the question, “What did you learn?” The following are comments made by parents in the audience, supplemented by points made by Dr. Stixrud and Mr. Johnson:

- As parents, we have so much control when we do not try to control.
- We should not always try to fix problems.
- Do not be over-involved; we may feel less anxious, but teens feel more anxious.
- Best predictors of mental health – how strong the connections are between the prefrontal cortex and amygdala – and how we can help:
 - Let kids ‘save themselves’
 - Help them build skills
- Open communication starts early when the issues are small.
- Ask teens how THEY want to handle situations? Ask, “What do you think you want to do here?” Let the kids think through their options.
- When kids are in pain, parents are in pain.
 - Parents are only as happy as their least happy child.
- Validation is hard for us because we did not likely have it as children.
- Validation is powerful; acknowledge struggles they are having without solving them.
- Validation is important:
 - “What I got from you is this...” Parrot back what they are thinking.
 - Good parent effectiveness training book (from 1962).
 - Discipline ourselves to not talk kids out of what they are feeling.
 - Is your comment trying to calm YOU instead? (“You shouldn’t feel like that.”)

- Teens are wired to be emotional: “You are 14, it’s your job to be emotional.”
 - Be in tune with their feelings.
 - Hormonal imbalance causes emotional moments.
 - Determine what is natural and what is not normal.
- Anna Freud studies:
 - Different culture now.
 - 20 years ago most kids were fairly happy and had good relations with parents.
 - 59% increase in episodes of depression since 2011 (statistic from movie).
 - Could sleep deprivation cause problems? (authority in movie says absolutely).
 - Hours of sleep down, anxiety/suicide/depression is up.
- What is the cause of issues? It could be a little bit of everything .
 - One change, first step – GET MORE SLEEP!
- Stress is contagious, but so is calm.
- After puberty, peers become like crack cocaine. Thinking about other kids increases dopamine in their brain. Peers become so much more important.
- Peer tutoring is helpful. Kids learn better from older kids than from adults.
- There is a lot of influence and power in peer support.
- Local independent schools are starting student led mental health clubs – students looking to help themselves.
- Groups help students feel as though they have more control.
- Parents can ask, “I have an idea. Do you want to hear it?” rather than giving unsolicited advice.
- Parents need to model behavior. Be vulnerable. Let them see that you have issues too. Teach them that it is natural to talk about things that are hard. Be more open.
 - This shows them that people are allowed to have a bad day. We can return to a normal state. Resilience is being able to get back to normal.
- Be sensitive to subtle variations in OUR OWN feelings.
- “I worked with someone today and I’m not sure I was able to help them.” “It’s probably unrealistic to think that I can help everyone.” (Stixrud) MODELING is huge.
- Lisa Damour (PCW Fall Speaker) commented that people experience stress when trying something new or testing limits. It can be unpleasant. This is a natural, healthy experience helping to build greater capacity going forward.
- Parental emotional language is lacking; many just focus on making kids happy.
- There are negative connotations associated with emotions other than “happy”.
- Emotional coaching vs. Emotional denying.
- Ned Johnson recommends the 2015 Pixar movie “Inside Out” (about emotions).
- Today’s movie is called “Screen”agers – we live in a world of technology:
 - Ask the question, “Is my screen making me happy?”
 - Boy in the movie decided screen was not making him happy and called a friend to meet outside to go skate boarding. It was a good feeling to answer “no.”
- Parents have too much screen time too!
 - Families need “radical digital down time”; carve out time free of technology. (Sunday morning before 1pm). Kids want this too!
- Parents make rules, but kids must have a process for discussing/changing rules. Do not just have parents dictate. Help kids figure out self-control using technology.
- Be sure there is time for face-to-face interaction.
- Technology overuse is a problem for everyone. It is a family problem.

- Screen time should be a SHARED experience. Watch a movie together.
 - Use tech to support relationships, not take away.
- Teacher in the film said that kids who can self-advocate are the most successful.
 - It does not always look the same. That's okay.
- 2018 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation report cited top environmental conditions harmful to adolescent wellness, making them more “at risk” for elevated levels of chronic stress, including:
 - Poverty
 - Discrimination
 - Trauma
 - High academic pressure/excessive pressure to excel
- Research shows that students who write down values about themselves, then take a test, do better than those just focused solely on academics. Perspective matters.
 - School is not the sum total of their being!
 - Care about the CHILD, not just their performance. Then they will perform better.
 - What makes a satisfying life? It does not matter where you go to college! Serve the world, not just yourself. It is about connection. Not money. Being socially competent leads to a happy and fulfilling life!
 - Successful models of parenting are neither authoritarian nor doormat. Authoritative parenting is key. Family based rules, not parents dictating.
 - Once stress causes an increased heart rate, children only hear “blah, blah, blah”.
- Technology/Phones
 - Where does your phone sleep? It should NOT be in the room at night.
 - Buy an alarm clock for your kids
 - Have cell phones sleep in the kitchen or elsewhere – PARENT phones too!
 - People perform better when well rested – in all areas of life.
 - Modeling is huge! “I got 8.5 hours of sleep last night. I feel fantastic.”
- When talking to teens about what is on their mind, think “Whose problem is this?”
 - We are wired to reduce their suffering.
 - Out of love and respect, though, it is their problem to solve.
 - Think of yourself as a consultant. Offer help, but do not try to force it.
 - Ask them, “Is there something I can do to help?”

For additional resources, please go to:

[Best Practices Resource Guide](#)

[Parent Guide](#)