

Each month during the school year NNHS will distribute a "Healthy Huskies Letter." The goal of the newsletter is to enhance our the school's partnership with families, particularly by sharing our knowledge of various topics related to your child's social, emotional, and physical health, and what our school and our families can do to promote student healthiness. Each issue will address a different health topic and will contain resources for further exploration of that topic. Staff at NNHS as well as the School, Family, Community Partnership (SFCP), will be advisors for these newsletters; we encourage parents and students to suggest topics and resources. Send suggestions to kpobst@naperville203.org.

Healthy Huskies Letter

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Last year more than one hundred NNHS students were hospitalized for social-emotional issues. In recent years, the Naperville Collaborative Youth Team reported on the state of the health of youth in our communities. The report concluded that the youth of Naperville are suffering from an unhealthy level of stress brought on by **excessive** competition in academics and athletics, **over-involvement in activities**, and a community culture of perfectionism. At NNHS we see students working hard to cope with a high degree of stress; too often some of them do so in maladaptive ways: substance abuse, school-avoidance, self-injury, and eating disorders.

This month's Healthy Huskies News targets how we can partner—as parents and school personnel—to encourage our children to achieve a healthy balance in life, a balance that makes episodes of unavoidable stress more manageable.

What does stress look like?

It can be challenging to see stress in a teenager, because just being a teenager is stressful. To an adult, a lot of things teenagers do look like abnormal behavior. You must trust your gut. If your child's behavior changes abruptly, if the change is sustained (continued for two weeks or more), and if the change compromises normal daily functioning, then it is distinctly possible that some serious stressors are at work on your child.

Sustained changes to which you may pay particular attention include disinterest, irritability, fear, avoidance, procrastination, broken relationships, risk-taking, unethical choices, rigidity, perfectionism, self-injury (or disguising self-injury with clothing), isolation, drug use, unusual eating patterns, and unusual sleeping patterns.

Specifically, what must we **stop doing to help students find balance in their lives?**

- **Alibi-ing.** It is not just a phase. He *won't* get through it on his own. It *is* that bad. Deal with what you see, don't minimize it or avoid taking it on.
- **Escalating Decisions.** Over-stressing choices to be made, like college admission.
- **Over-Scheduling.** Make sure that children have "down time." It is unhealthy for every minute of every day to be programmed. Often we do this because we fear unstructured time.
- **Competitiveness.** Competition in all spheres of life is real. Deemphasize the talk of competitiveness in grades, popularity, being a starter, etc.
- **Parenting from Fear.** Ask yourself what motivates you as a parent. Are you afraid that your child will be "left behind," or "won't measure up?" Are your choices driven by a fear of failure? Are you communicating your fears of your child's failure to your child?

Specifically what can a parent **do** to promote balance and reduce stress?

TALK

- **And Listen.** Make sure your children have a voice that is respected in your family. Let them know you want to listen and make yourself available. Make sure you know and show respect for your children's hopes, dreams, and aspirations.
- **Share Your Values.** Make sure you are clear about your family's values; do not let other families' values drive your decision-making and your child's decision-making.
- **Choice.** Make sure your children know they have a choice—they are not compelled to do anything. Openly examine priorities and keep them clear.
- **Identify.** Identify the stressors in your children's life. Keep track of what is going on in your children's life with an eye toward helping them avoid extremes and excessive involvement.

ACT

- **Doing Your Best.** Make sure your child knows that "Your best is the best we want to see." Promote personal satisfaction.
- **Balance.** Celebrate balance! (Not volume of involvement.)
- **Model.**
 - Positive coping strategies when you encounter stress. Make sure they see how you adapt and adjust.
 - Balance. Be aware of the message you send when you allow your life to slip out of balance. Do your best to balance family, work, and play.
 - Exercise.
- **Eat well and eat together as a family.**
- **Relationships.** Encourage them to build relationships so they can advocate for themselves, initiate conversations and problem-solve.
- **Pull Weeds.** We stress persistence, but there are times to quit and move on.
- **Set Limits.** Boundaries reduce stress by preventing over-competitiveness and over-involvement. For example, curfews and limits on social networking are caring and smart.
- **Separate *Your* Esteem from *Their* Achievements.** Don't live through your child.
- **Comfort and Support.** Most of the messages you communicate to your child should be positive, supportive, and comforting messages.
- **Love.** Unconditional love is a powerful stress reducer.

REACH OUT

- **Consult.** Contact school staff, especially Nurses, Social Workers and Guidance Counselors (see contact information below).
- **Network.** Talk with other parents about what is going on in your children's lives. Build allies in promoting balance and deemphasizing competition, perfectionism, and over-involvement.
- **Seek.** There are many resources in the community and online that can provide advice, intervention and education (see list below).

RESOURCES

[NNHS Social Workers, Nurses and Guidance Counselors](#)

"How to have the difficult conversation." Tips for parents:

<http://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/communication/conversations-kids>

<http://www.dupagehealth.org/mental-health>

Please consult your son/daughter's pediatrician with your concerns.

Please consult your insurance plan for referrals to local community agencies that provide mental health coverage.

Websites:

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/stress-management/MY00435>

<http://www.cdc.gov/features/handlingstress/>

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/anxiety-disorders/introduction.shtml>

http://www2.massgeneral.org/schoolpsychiatry/info_intro.asp

<http://www.namidupage.org/education-programs/nami-basics>

www.adaa.org

www.ocfoundation.org

www.beyondocd.org

www.WorryWiseKids.org

Each year our Social Workers, Psychologists, and Nurses attend a mental health providers' open house. Each year the number of local providers increases. Stress is growing and producing a lot of business for local agencies and practitioners. Additionally, last year over one hundred NNHS students were hospitalized for social-emotional issues. The challenges facing teens, parents, family members, and school personnel escalate every year. We need to work together – school and parents – to help our students find balance.

Please, consider Naperville North High School to be your partner.