

Parents: Stay Strong, Act on Facts, Support Problem Solving and Nourish Healthy Communication

By Doreen Oshinskie

This article summarized the Decaf Coffeehouse that Conard/Hall Community of Concern sponsored in November. Special thanks to the Institute of Living and Rosemary Baggish, M.Ed., MPH, founder and director of Mental Health in Independent School Communities at The Institute of Living, for offering this program pro bono.

Rosemary Baggish presented parents of Conard and Hall and the community with a 2-hour presentation entitled, "Being there for your Teenager." The program included a formal presentation and then break-out time for parents to wrestle with a typical "situation" that they might find themselves dealing with as they raise teenagers.

Rosemary noted that as she drew up plans for her clients, over time four themes developed. She came up with the ABC'S of effective communication to help parents support and nurture their children.

The ABC'S of effective communication

1) The **A**dult is in authority

As the adult in authority you need to maintain healthy boundaries and protect your privacy. These attributes will help you support your child and stay strong in your role.

2) **B**ehavior is observed not interpreted

Base your comments and actions on observations, not interpretations. Do not assume. Question the "why" behind the behavior you are seeing in your child.

3) Establish good **C**onnections for problem solving

Research has shown that a good relationship with an adult is a protective factor for a child. Connection gives us resiliency, asking for help is a step towards rebounding.

4) **S**afety through communication

Kids need to know there's a place they can go to communicate and work out problems.

Kids can be resilient when they are able to soothe themselves with:

- a solitary activity (playing an instrument, writing in a journal, running, etc)
- a safe place (to go problem solve)
- one adult – to connect with for help solve problems

Rosemary said that this model helps parents to be strong so they can help support their children during challenging times. About problem solving, Rosemary said, "Our culture never gives us the message that we're good enough. But we can let our kids know that

they are more than good enough and it's ok to have problems." As parents, the next step is helping our kids learn how to solve their problems in an effective way.

After the formal presentation, parents formed small groups to talk over and solve one of two situations that Rosemary offered parents.

Here's the situation: How would you react?...

Your daughter has been invited to a sleepover at a classmate's home. You ask, "Will the parents be supervising." She tells you that the older sister is home from college and will be supervising.

What is your immediate reaction? Do you need more information? Have you made any assumptions? What are the steps to be followed by whom to resolve the situation? Can you give your child some latitude within the framework of setting limits? What is the ideal outcome? What do you want to avoid?

Rosemary noted that while the scenario stated that the "older sister will be supervising" never did we hear that the parents would not be home -- but yet the group assumed that the parents were away. Rosemary asked the parents to reflect on the assumption they made. Parents were also encouraged to find a way to give latitude to their child while still setting limits and being comfortable with the safety factors of the setting.

A few parents remarked that they enjoyed the opportunity to hear from a knowledgeable presenter and then be involved in a conversation using some of the concepts just discussed by the presenter. The Decaf Coffeehouse model lets parents get involved in the

- **Related item: Party Tip from Rosemary Baggish**
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- When a party is planned or when your child is attending a party...
- Here are some things to consider about the location of the party:
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- **Does the party allow access to:**
- Alcohol and drugs
- weapons
- medications or drugs in the bathroom medicine cabinet
- computers
- Vehicles on the property
- Private rooms throughout in the house
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- Entrances and exits.

issues and share ideas.