

# Helping Boys & Girls Learn

Vol 8 - Issue 12HS

Parenting for Success in High School

## What Did You Say?



Adolescence can be a very challenging time not only for boys and girls but for their parents as well! Many parents tell us that their children, especially their boys, just don't talk to them much. They ask questions and get short answers – not sharing much information about things that are happening in their classrooms and with their peers.

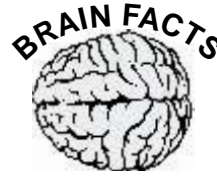
For boys, it can be hard to find the words to express how they are feeling about everything going on in their lives. Their bodies and brains are undergoing dramatic change and trying to understand what's happening can be difficult and even scary.

For girls, it can be hard to control the emotional ups and downs that come along with puberty. Hormones cause big mood swings, and asking your daughter a question one minute may get a calm answer and the next minute may result in an angry outburst.

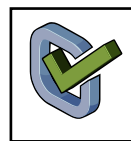
Try this: get a journal that is a date book and has one page for each day. Let your son or daughter know that you really care about what's happening in their lives, but you know it's hard sometimes to just talk about it. Use the date book to "make a date." When you have something you want to talk about, make an entry in the book for a date and time – it might include a shopping trip, going for ice cream or hot chocolate (depending on the season!) or a drive to a nearby park to take a walk.

Let your child know he or she can also make entries into the date book. If your child chooses a time to talk, make sure you are available and fully focused on being with him or her during that time. Try to listen without offering advice or input (unless asked) so that your child becomes comfortable sharing feelings and thoughts with you.

You can also use your "date book" to make sure you know about school events that your child would like you to attend, but doesn't want to make a "big deal" about. Adolescence is a time for establishing independence and although children still want their parents involved they may want it to be less obvious that they really do need you and care what you think.



Physical movement stimulates curiosity and curiosity increases attention. Certain neurotransmitters, such as dopamine, are associated with a pleasurable feeling and are stimulated by physical activity and novelty. All these effects on the brain help a learning mind stay tuned in and avoid "zoning out." So listening and learning are easier! Increased dopamine can mean decreased impulsivity, improving classroom behavior, especially for boys (and some girls). Class becomes "fun" in a way that reduces trouble and improves learning.



## Check This Out

Resources for Parents

### Helpful website for parents of teens:

Feeling stressed or getting the blues during the holidays is normal. Some simple steps can help ease the feelings for your teen and get them through the season.

<http://www.health.ri.gov/family/ofyss/teens/tips/Tip4.php>

# Parents Want to Know...

The Gurian Institute receives many emails from parents with specific questions about their boys and girls--we will periodically share some of the questions and our responses – many of you may have wondered about the same things.

*We have been reading your book (The Minds of Boys) with the goal of answering our question about whether to enroll our son in an all-boys pilot school in our school district. We haven't really seen anything in our reading that evaluates the all-boy versus coed approach.*

*It's like we're in the stage right now with the improvements made for females happening at the expense of boys. Our 15-year old son is a boy who is not thriving in this stage of his education in a large public high school. We wonder if moving him to a smaller, all-boy environment will benefit him? What do you think?*

Our response:

*A great question and one we hear a lot. The answer is complicated. You must take into account each child and the number of assets that child has. There are boys who thrive in a large, coed environment, developing resiliency and coping techniques. A few positive male models, sometimes only one, can be the difference between success and failure.*

*Kids are individuals and different. Some boys find the all-boy high school the perfect setting for them. The sense of camaraderie, brotherhood, is something they appreciate and internalize, making life-long friends.*

*One important factor is to really find out how*

*your son feels about the whole idea. Ask him! Making decisions without his input during this challenging developmental stage can cause conflict in already conflicted teen-adult relationships.*

*Then, visit the school. Let your son talk to the teachers, counselors, and, most importantly, the boys who attend. Talk to a lot of them so that he gets a balanced picture – don't just talk to a few boys selected by the staff.*

*Choosing the best public school for a child is an important decision. You're smart to consider it carefully and research the options well.*



Is there a question that you would really like an answer too, relating to your adolescent boy or girl?

You can email the Gurian Institute at:

**[info@gurianinstitute.com](mailto:info@gurianinstitute.com)**

and we will be happy to get back to you with an answer to your question. We have a wide array of colleagues with specialties in raising and educating children of all ages. Let us know if we can help you find an answer!

## Issues in Adolescent Development

Teen parties seem to be a taboo subject for many parents. With out-of-control parties happening and some parents feeling it's okay to allow teens to drink as long as they are at their home, it isn't any wonder. But there are very good reasons to host a holiday teen party with your teenager. Consider:

**Throwing a party with your teen will help strengthen the bond in your relationship.** The two of you will be working together to put on this event. You'll both need to have give and take on the rules, the food, the invitees, etc. Parties are also a great way to share family holiday traditions or let your teen start new ones. Sharing family traditions give teens a sense of belonging. Sharing that with their peers will extend the sense belonging to their youth community.

**During a party, you will get to know your teen's friends.** Will you like all of your teen's friends? Maybe not, but you will get to know who is who, which is a real leg up. You may find that you hear more about what goes on in school or elsewhere when your teen knows you know who he/she is talking about.

**Your teen will appreciate your wanting to do something for them.** It feels good to teens to know that their parents care about their social life, as it is a big part of their life. Having good friends helps your teen create a strong identity and self confidence. You helping your teen by creating fun times with their friends makes it easier for him/her to reach that goal.

**You will be able to laugh in the face of adversity.** Okay, this may not seem like really a great reason, but it is true. There is so much taboo surrounding teen parties that it isn't any wonder parents shy away from this activity. It is almost as if the alcohol and drug using youth community has put a stop to young people who want to get together to have some fun without illegal goings-on. If you follow rules for a safe teen party, you won't have to worry.

**Giving a teen party is an activity that will teach your teen many needed skills.** Having a party for your friends is a big endeavor. It will show him/her how to entertain and be a gracious host/hostess. If your teen uses his/her friends as a decorating crew and/or clean up crew, he/she will learn to delegate. There are many skills your teen will be able to hone while planning and giving a party.

A successful teen party needs to be fun and safe for all involved. You, as the parent, can insure this by following these simple rules:

**Make each rule clear to your teen.** Write them down in black and white so that there can be no disagreement on what has been decided.

**Split the workload and write up a list for each of you.** Be sure your teen knows what he/she is responsible for getting done for the party. You should not be doing all of the work.

**Keep the number of teens invited manageable.** Smaller parties are much easier to manage and tend to be more fun.

**Set the time for the party and stick with it.** Three hours from start to finish seems to work well.

**Do not allow any illegal substances,** including, but not limited to: alcohol, drugs of any kind, firearms, porn, etc. Place a 'there will be no drinking or drugs allowed' on the back of the invitations. This rule needs to be made very clear to all attendees before the day of the party.

**Do not have an open house.** Tell your teen that he/she needs to stick to the invitation list. Should you have crashers to your teen's party, do not allow them in.

**Do not be the only chaperone.** There needs to be adequate adult presence.

**Mark off an area in your home for the party.** Party goers shouldn't be in any other area of your home.

**Do not allow teens to leave the party and come back.** This is a recipe for trouble.

**During the party, 'be around'.** While you do not need to be right there, front and center, all the time, you do need to be visible. Staying in your bedroom is not chaperoning a party. Refill the food, help start activities and/or just walk through every 15 minutes or so.

If you plan carefully and work with your teen, you can help your teen have a successful social experience and build a stronger relationship.

# Family Fun This Month

## Read A New Book Month

### Ways to celebrate this month–

Visit the local public library with your teen. Try to find books about a variety of holidays and traditions that are written for teens. Find out if there are any special displays of activities planned for families this month that you could attend with your child. Especially look for events that help you and your family understand cultures that are different from your own. This will give your growing adolescent better information about the world in which he or she is going to be living – one that is getting smaller all the time!



Pick out a book you can read together during a family reading time each day, or several times a week, during this month. This will serve more than one purpose. It will force you and your teen to slow down and spend some time together without the television on! And if you can find a book that involves a topic your teen is especially interested in it will help build closeness.

For your boys, this will encourage literacy as a positive leisure-time activity. This is always something important to encourage with adolescent boys! For your girls, it provides all important time for building and strengthening relationships.

G  
R  
E  
A  
T

### *The Life of Pi: A Novel* by Yann Martel

Sixteen-year-old Pi Patel, his family, and their zoo animals emigrate from India to North America aboard a cargo ship. The ship sinks, and Pi finds himself sharing a lifeboat with a 450-pound Bengal tiger.

B  
O  
O  
K  
S

### *Weather Central* by Ted Kooser

Poet Laureate and Pulitzer Prize winner Ted Kooser writes about the simple things of daily life—shoes, a back door, baseball, fireflies—as well as the unusual.

F  
O  
R

### *The Return of Death Eric*

by Sam Llewellyn Death Eric was your parents' favorite rock band, but the band's leader, Eric Thrashmettle, retired because he thought he was cursed. When his bank account runs dry, Eric's children convince him and the other former band members to reunite for a blazing comeback.

B  
O  
Y  
S



G  
R  
E  
A  
T

### *A Great and Terrible Beauty* by Libba Bray

After her mother dies mysteriously in 1895 India, Gemma is sent to a finishing school in England where she becomes aware of her magical powers.

B  
O  
O  
K  
S

### *Grayson* by Lynne Cox

Seventeen-year-old long-distance swimmer Lynne Cox is training alone before dawn in the Pacific when she encounters a lost baby whale. Her true-life adventure as she tries to find the whale's mother is a testimony to athletic discipline and love of the environment.

F  
O  
R

G  
I  
R  
L  
S

### *Swimming to Antarctica: Tales of a Long-Distance Swimmer*

by Lynne Cox  
Lynne Cox chronicles her quest to swim the most challenging waters of the world, including the Bering Sea, the Strait of Magellan, the Cape of Good Hope, and the coast of Antarctica. Alex Awards 2005