

Building parent-school partnerships

WORDS Michael Grose

The stress of teen success

Adolescence is an age of freedom; an age when taking responsibility is for someone else; an age of live for today and let the future take care of itself.

Right? Well, not really.

A recent Australian study shows that today's young people have one eye firmly on the future, yet they're not confident of their chances of future success.

A Mission Australia survey released in late 2014 showed that young people now take their future very seriously. The survey of 13,600 young people's aspirations, found that 87% of respondents ranked career success as their number one priority, followed by being financially independent (86%), owning a home (73%), having a family (68%) and feeling a part of their community (41%).

The flip side of these high aspirations is that around 40% of these respondents didn't feel they could achieve career success or own their own home.

Girls were less confident of future success than boys. But that's not a new finding. Similar research that this writer has been involved with over a number of years reveals that girls put far more pressure on themselves to succeed than boys. While girls rated school and career success as more important than did boys, nearly 50% of girls worried that they wouldn't get into their choice of tertiary studies compared to

30% of boys who had the same concerns. Tellingly, these young people identified their parents, rather than teachers as being the major source of external pressure for them to succeed.

There is no doubt that the gap between young people's aspirations and their achievability appears to be a major source of stress for young people. The world of work that today's young people are preparing to enter is full of uncertainty. Youth unemployment rates are increasing, potential higher costs of tertiary education and a lack of affordable housing means that young people are less confident of achieving their goals than those of past generations.

The need for resilience

The young people in the Mission Australia survey identified coping with stress (42%) as their number one concern, higher than worries about body image (30%) and family conflict (20%). While teens must learn how to cope better with these immediate pressures, the need to develop resilience as well as relationships skills is compelling, as it is these that will help them succeed in the

competitive and changing environments they are about to enter.

The ability to persist when success doesn't come easily; the propensity to learn from rather than take failings personally; and a willingness to take the right rather than the easy options are the types of resilience traits that parents and teachers should be developing in young people on a daily basis.

Keep mental health on the agenda

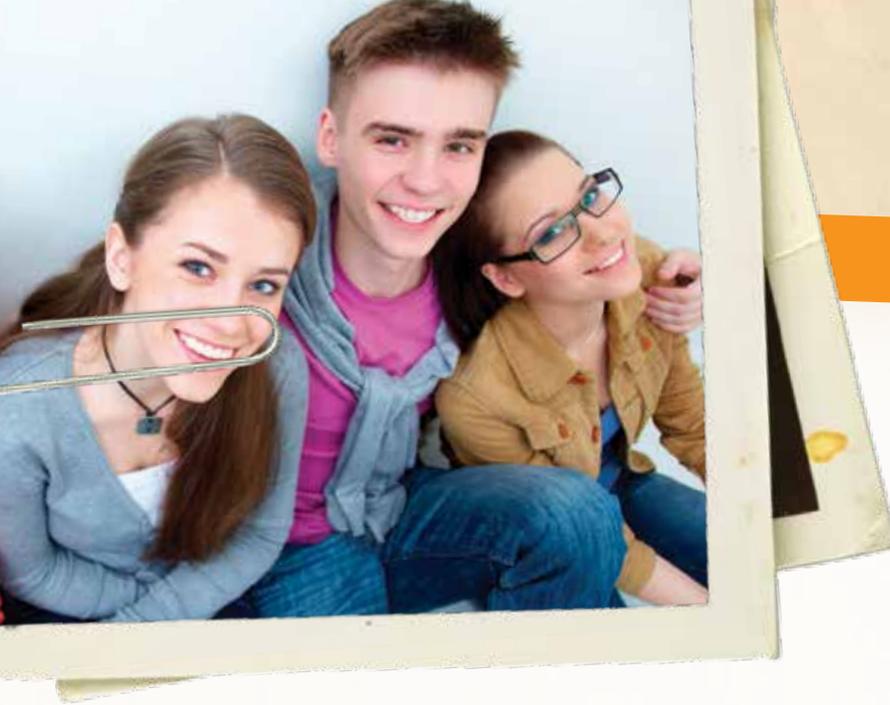
Equally important for young people's future success is paying attention to their wellbeing. "How's your mental health?" is a question that parents should be asking young people on a regular basis. While on one level this question may receive a shrug of young shoulders; on a deeper level tuning your young person into his or her own emotional wellbeing is an immensely savvy thing to do.

For many parents mental health awareness is a new frontier.

more on page 2 >>

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However, I suspect parents of past generations intuitively knew a great deal about mental health when they insisted that kids 'go outside and play', that everyone in the family 'should eat together', or that young people in their house should turn their bedroom 'light out at a decent time'. Keeping young people's wellbeing front and centre is about helping them keep a balance in their lives.

Don't put all their eggs in one success basket

One conversation that you may wish to strike up with young people is "What does success look like?" Try to broaden the definition away from the narrow base of academic, sporting or even financial success.

There are two points worth making. First, there are many ways that a young person can be successful. For instance, the development of real spirit of generosity is as much a measure of success as the ability to perform well in a test.

Second, remind young people that focusing on a narrow definition of success (i.e in an academic, sporting or artistic sense) can come at a cost to other areas of life such as relationships, happiness and health.

This survey is like the canary in the coal mine. It's a warning that the world young people are entering is challenging and changing, and that now more than ever, they need a balanced approach from parents and teachers if they are going to thrive rather than survive now, and in the future.

Get my ebook – Unwinding- that has 10 relaxation ideas to help kids and young people reduce anxiety and maintain good mental health at parentingideasclub.com.au. It's FREE.

Michael Grose

Help young people maintain good mental health:



- 1 Make sure they get plenty of sleep – 8/9 hours for teens.
- 2 Encourage exercise – a minimum of 60 minutes of movement a day.
- 3 Minimise time alone particularly between school and dinner.
- 4 Encourage creative outlets.
- 5 Help them to relax - mindfulness or meditation may help.
- 6 Foster volunteering and helpfulness.
- 7 Bring fun and playfulness into their lives.

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