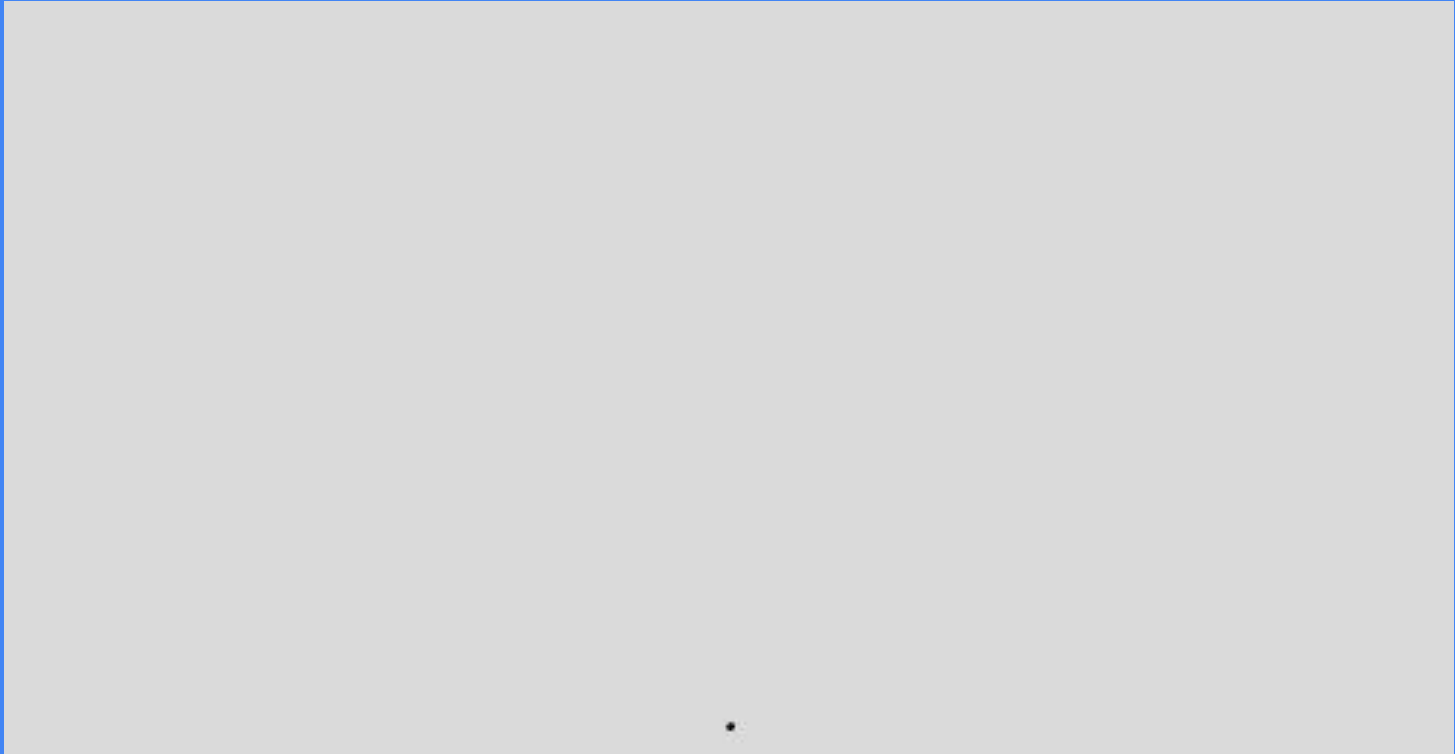


# Balancing Pressure to Achieve with Mental Health

What Parents Can Do



# What are some things you hear your child saying that indicates they are feeling pressure to achieve?

I won't ever be good enough.

I don't have time...I can't...I want to relax...

"I can't handle it." Crying. Complaining about a B.

You have no idea what I am dealing with. Things were easier for you.

She won't get into a good college without straight A's and so any stumble on a quiz or test makes her think that she is failing.

# Risk Factors for Adolescents' Mental Health

- Poverty
- Trauma
- Discrimination
- Pressure to Achieve (usually seen in affluent communities)

\* Robert Wood Johnson Report on Adolescent Wellness, 2018

# Common Denominators - Pressure to Achieve

Teenagers who attend schools with:

- High test scores
- Rich extracurricular academic offerings
- Many college-level courses offered
- Many graduates heading for selective universities

# Why Did We Choose McLean HS?

- High test scores
- Rich extracurricular academic offerings
- Many college-level courses offered
- Many graduates heading for selective universities
- High ranking - #4 Virginia High School, US News & World Report
- Diversity



# Potential Contributors



- “Middle Class Squeeze”
- Modern Technology and Social Media
- Social Comparison - Unrelenting pressure to accomplish ever more to distinguish oneself as among the best
- Rising income inequality has led to greater segregation among neighborhoods and among schools
- Belief in “one path to success”

# To Our Brains, Status Matters

Human beings have a deep-rooted drive for accomplishment.

Accomplishment is often seen as a “life raft in an unpredictable future”

Studies have shown that ***there is little evidence that attending a highly selective college translates into greater success. There is one exception: first-generation and marginalized students who attend a top-tier school are more likely to have higher incomes than peers who attended less-selective colleges.***

# What Parents Can Do



The most important protective factor for kids is having a ***good relationship with a primary caregiver.***

This relationship rests on the parent's psychological health. You must have a good relationship with YOURSELF to be able to have a good relationship with your child.



# What Is Out of Our Control?

- Our child's test scores.
- Our child's grades.
- How our child responds to pressure.
- How smart our child is.
- The competitive atmosphere at McLean.
- Our child's accomplishments.
- What college our child gets into/attends.
- What other peoples' kids are doing.

# Parental Support - One Student's Story

“The primary thing I’d like college admissions committees to know about me is how significant of a role my family and their unending support have played in my high school career. While I do attribute my success as a student to my hard work and dedication, I would be nowhere without my parents. I failed my first test in my junior year. Devastated is an understatement when it comes to describing how I felt. I came home and told my dad and his response was one of the most comforting things I have ever heard. He didn’t yell or ask why I got such a bad grade. **He looked at me and told me it was fine.** It seems so small looking back, but I couldn’t have asked for anything better. His response enabled me to move through my exasperation and focus on recovering from my failure as opposed to wallowing in it. “

-McLean HS Senior

Serve as HOME BASE



# How To Make Home a Safe Base: Be Your Child's Consultant



- You cannot solve your child's problems or "fix" things for them. Often, this backfires. We want them to be able to solve their own problems.
- Listen and validate.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Empathize with your child's experience rather than rush to judgement.
- "When parents try to understand their child's experience, rather than rush to judgment, it usually leads to a close relationship and greater influence."

- Dr. William Stixrud and Ned Johnson



# We can make sure our kids know what we value. Family:



# Take a Values Inventory

1. Look at how you spend your money when it comes to your kids.
2. Look at your child's calendar.
3. Pay attention to what you ask your kids about.
4. Notice what you argue with your kids about.

\* Many parents think they're not overemphasizing achievement, but when they look at these four things, they see how their behavior is telling their kids a different story.

# Values:



- Consistently talk about what you value with your child and significant other, if you have one.
- Write down your family values and display them. Choose no more than five to focus on.
- Make sure you are reflecting your values in your daily life.
- [List of Values](#)
- [Kids Value Success Over Kindness Because Parents Do](#)



# ZEN NATURE



# What are you talking about at dinner?

- ~~College applications?~~
- ~~Test scores?~~
- ~~Grades?~~
- What are some other topics you can discuss that will help your relationship with your child?

# In Summary: Your Child Matters

- Our kids often feel that they are not good enough, smart enough, don't achieve enough.
- At home, they must feel like they MATTER.
- Your child must feel valued for **who they are** at home. Not what they achieve, perform, produce, or acquire, but simply for who they are.
- Listen. Be Home Base. Validate. Be a consultant. Be the balance-keeper. Ground your parenting in your intrinsic values.
- Start with your own mental health.

# RESOURCES

[List of Values](#)

[The Mental Price of Affluence - Podcast](#)

[Kids Value Success Over Kindness Because Parents Do](#)

[Never Enough: When Achievement Culture Becomes Toxic \(book\)](#)

[The Self-Driven Child \(book\)](#)