



Parenteen

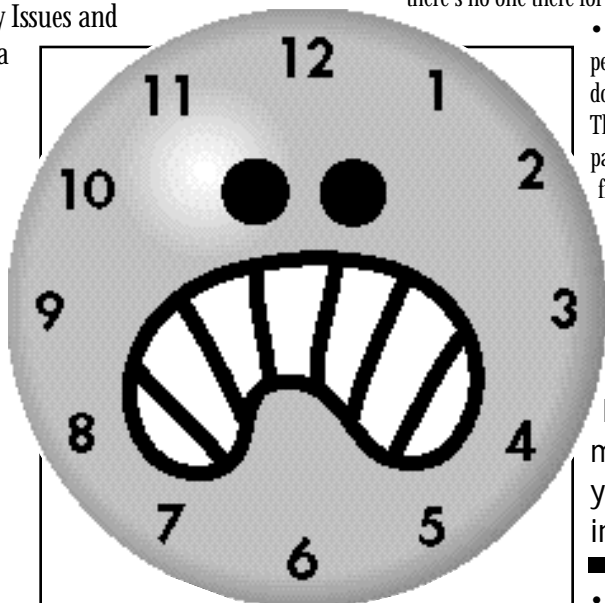
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Managing Relationships: How Teens See It

For this issue of *Parenteen*, the Coalition's Issues and Choices Committee asked a group of our teen consultants to discuss the issue of relationships — the role they play in teens' lives and how parents can be helpful as kids try to manage them. The teens were recommended by the school counselors, and the group was led by Issues and Choices chair Julie Terraciano, a teacher and therapist.

How do friends help you manage your emotions and how do you help them?

- My friends give me unconditional support.
- Different friends can help you with different things. You can't go to everyone for everything.
- I've kind of gotten away from the group thing — sometimes if you tell something to one or two people, pretty soon the whole school knows. Now I just tell important things to a couple of very close people. Close friends can really help you, and it makes them feel important when you tell them things.
- I think the burden of managing my emotions is on me. You can't rely on others for all your emotional support.
- Friends can help, but it's very unhealthy to put that burden on someone else. You need to be able to do it yourself and be emotionally self-reliant. And when you're helping others, it's easier to help yourself — you can follow your own advice.
- It depends on the level of support needed. If you're trying to help someone who's really needy, it can be totally draining. You need to take care of yourself before you can take care of others.



People who are always freaking out about their friendships need to get involved in something — they've got too much free time.

- I do a lot of caretaking of my friends, but tend to keep my own problems to myself until it reaches a certain level, and then I just have to tell someone. I can get into a mode where I'm helping so many other people that my own stuff gets lost.
- Sometimes if you don't act emotionally needy, you actually end up getting

more help. If you start trying to help yourself, help comes — people are attracted to other people who they know won't just suck them dry.

- You need to know you have someone you can turn to, a place to fall when you're going to fall, even if you don't need it all the time.
- The scariest feeling ever is that there's no one there for you.

• Sometimes all people want to do is complain. That's OK, that's part of being a friend, but only to a point.

How do your parents help you manage your feelings?

• I'm more likely to talk to my mom than to my friends. I don't feel that my friends are capable of treating me the way I expect in a really great relationship. In a great relationship, you don't break plans, you call

when someone's sick to see how they are. I feel like I can trust my mother to treat me that way more than my friends, because I know she'll always be there for me.

• Relationships are extremely complicated. My mom likes to hear the nitty-gritty details about my social life; she

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Emotional Intelligence: The Key to Success

By Sue Adams
Parent, Lick-Wilmerding High School

What turns teenagers into happy, successful adults? If you think a great life hinges on a high IQ, you'd better think again, because the real key to a successful life is emotional intelligence, Marin County psychotherapist Jay Skelton told parents at a Coalition forum in September.

Emotional intelligence, a concept popularized by psychologist Daniel Goleman in his 1995 book, *Emotional Intelligence*, involves the ability to understand and manage your feelings, feel for others and handle relationships. These are the skills needed to cope successfully with life. Skelton discussed the importance of emotional intelligence in adolescents and noted that recent studies indicate that 80 per-

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The Student View (continued from page 1)

really pushes for information. But your best friends know just the right way to ask you questions, when to probe and when you just need a hug.

- My dad is interested in grades, and my mom is interested in social stuff. I feel weird talking to my parents about social issues.
- Once one mom knows something, they all know. Information gets shared. Sometimes that can be nice, because it makes you feel like part of a community. Sometimes someone else's mom can talk to you about something like an adult friend, and if they know something about the situation, they're coming from an informed point of view.

How do your relationships make you more aware of your moods and feelings?

- If you're in a crappy mood and being negative and don't want to talk, your relationships reflect that. And when people ask you why you're in such a bad mood, it can help make you aware of it. It feels better when people notice — it's nice to know someone's paying attention.
- You're more likely to try to change your mood if one of your friends calls it to your attention. If my mom says something, I'll just ignore her — but if she pushes, I might open up. I need her to push me to talk.

How important are your relationships?

- They aren't everything — what happens, happens. School, college applications, sports practices, parents — all those things are huge. People who are always freaking out about their friendships need to get involved in something — they've got too much free time.
- I like it when friends hug — it feels warm and friendly, like you're part of a community. I hug all my friends.
- Some kids have such a strong need to belong to a group that they'll give up their own ideas and beliefs.
- The biggest change for me in the past three years is that now, I plan weekends around who I want to hang out with.

How do you choose your relationships?

- You just know — the friends who give as much to you as you give to them, the people you trust to respect your confidences.
- I used to drink and do drugs, but I don't anymore — I realized that's just not me. I don't enjoy being around drunk people anymore, so that had something to do with choosing my friends.
- Your friends create the environment you spend most of your time in, so you need to think about that when you choose them.

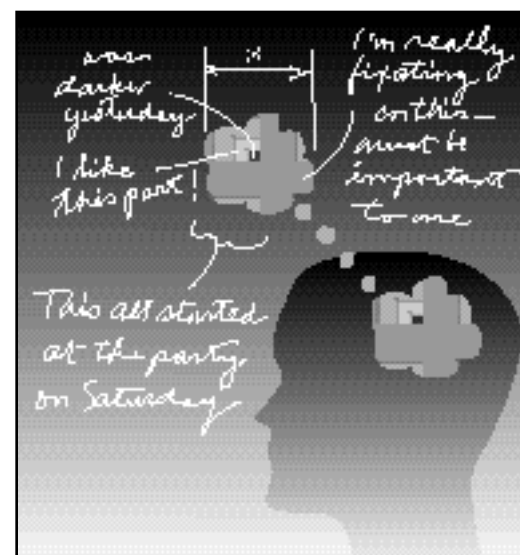


Emotional Intelligence (continued from page 1)

cent of life's success may be due to factors that have nothing to do with traditional IQ.

There are five sets of skills associated with emotional intelligence, Skelton said:

- Self-awareness. This is the ability not only to be aware of your mood, but also to be aware of how you feel about your mood. Without this skill, "you bump into other people emotionally," Skelton said.
- How can adolescents increase their self-awareness? "Lots of talk. Talk about your feelings and how you feel about your feelings," he said. With younger kids, help them name their feelings.
- Managing emotions. After you become aware of how you feel, devise a strategy to deal with your feelings. While this is often almost automatic in adults, teenagers need to develop the skill to make their emotions work for them, instead of simply acting out physically or verbally without thinking.
- Motivation. This involves self-control, the ability to put off impulsiveness and delay gratification. Ultimately, it turns into an "ability to withstand defeat," Skelton said.
- Skelton said parents can help increase their kids' motivation by encouraging them to develop an area in which they really feel good about themselves — an artistic or athletic



Self-awareness is the ability not only to be aware of your mood, but also to be aware of how you feel about your mood.

skill, for instance. After kids build a competency and strengthen it, parents should "point out their success," he said. "Once planted, the seeds of hope spread."

- Empathy. This is the ability to recognize feelings in others and feel them

yourself. It can also be expressed as an ability to read social messages, a skill that can be learned.

• Handling relationships. This involves dealing with the emotions of others, showing empathy and expressing it.

These skills help teens resist drugs and alcohol, Skelton said. When kids lack these skills, they sometimes turn to drugs for comfort, and in groups of such kids, drugs can end up essentially serving as the glue that holds their relationship together.

The best drug and alcohol education programs for kids are based on emotional skill-building, Skelton said. What doesn't work are strictly information-based approaches.

"Many people assume that if you give kids the information, they'll make

the right choices," he said. "But that's not all there is to it — they need to be emotionally ready and able to use that information."

Sound daunting? Perhaps. But Skelton notes that while many teens lack at least some of these skills some of the time, all of them can be taught and learned. And parents can help by talking to their kids, modeling honest communication and engaging on an emotional level themselves.

"Emotional intelligence skills are like the three R's," he said. "They can improve. Temperament is not destiny." ♥

The Parenteen Index

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Remedies for Emotional Hijacking

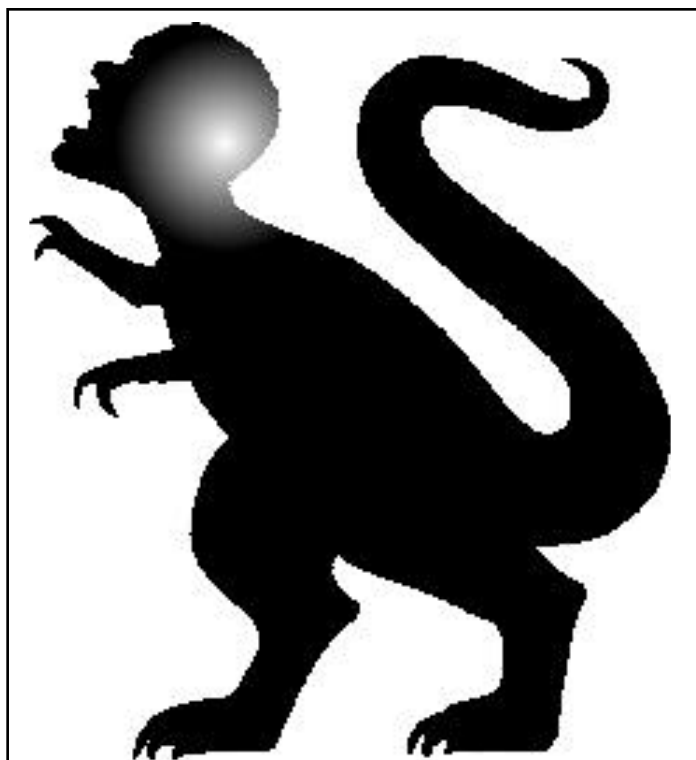
By Marsha Torkelson
Parent of two sons in college

In his best-seller, *Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman states that kids today are more anxious, angry, impulsive and sad than in the previous generation. The good news is that it is possible to change this trend by understanding how the brain handles emotions and helping our kids become aware of theirs. This is easier before the age of 16, while this part of the brain is still developing.

In a recent conference in San Francisco, Goleman asked the audience to break into groups and for each person to identify an incident where they had acted rashly and exhibited sudden, strong emotions, with consequences they greatly regretted. Examples are destroying something you value in the heat of anger, saying something below the belt to a family member, getting into an argument with your boss.

These illustrate the phenomenon of "emotional hijacking" that occurs in a more primitive part of our brain (the amygdala), which gets triggered before the more evolved thinking (neo-cortex) part can make a rational decision.

Recent discoveries in the field of neuroscience show the amygdala holds the learned emotional responses from childhood, which become automatic and thus unconscious. For example, he mentions that girls age 9 or 10 who lack self-awareness — who are unaware of their feelings — and who confuse anxiety, loneliness and hunger are the ones most at risk for eating disorders. They binge in order to soothe those feelings.



"Emotional hijacking" occurs in a more primitive part of our brain, which gets triggered before the more evolved thinking part can make a rational decision.

In a study of college kids, eating as a way of dealing with sadness was three

times as likely to turn to drugs or alcohol.

"Those feelings that take the direct route through the amygdala include our most primitive and potent," Goleman says in his book. This mechanism



nism is "the brain's alarm system," geared for a flight/fight response, needed in earlier times, which is now usually inappropriate. This is why kids' possession of guns is so scary — differences formerly were settled with fists.

In his book, Goleman emphasizes that suppressing emotions or expressing them verbally in an uncontrolled fashion only worsens the situation. In fact, once anger is raised, it builds on itself.

The three most difficult emotions are anger, anxiety and depression, Goleman says. His research shows there are concrete ways to combat these sometimes overwhelming feelings in order to find more creative solutions:

- Interrupt negative thinking by challenging our thoughts.
- Look at our thinking through a different lens (often the opposite stance helps).
- Distance ourselves from negative situations by taking a walk.
- Do something we enjoy.
- Write down our repetitive or worrisome thoughts.
- Do deep breathing, muscle relaxation.
- Help other people.
- Seek a transcendent power.

Changing one's experience actually changes brain function. One's typical emotional response has to be unlearned. Then the emotional circuitry can be reeducated. This happens by becoming aware of our typical response, even predicting it, and doing something different.

Emotional learning continues throughout our lives. The goal is for the amygdala to feel only a mild twinge of the old feeling when it is alarmed and for the intensity and duration to be minimal.

"One can bring intelligence," Goleman says, "to all sorts of moments, including emotional hijacking." ♥

of each individual. Thus the Greek philosophy of emotion could be reduced to two simple credos: "I am myself, and Become what you are."

— Joseph W. Gauld, *Character First*

I once heard Chogyam Trungpa, a Tibetan teacher, reply when asked how best to handle anger: "Don't suppress it. But don't act on it."

—David Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*

"It is with the heart that one sees rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye."

— Antoine de St.-Exupery, *The Little Prince*

"Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself."

— Leo Tolstoy

What They're Saying

The Greeks believed that each of us has a *daimon* or perfect self, within us, and that living up to that inner self, or unique potential, is the de-



REVIEW

Character First

By Joseph W. Gauld

Review by Diane W. Frankenstein
Parent, Lowell High School

Much has been written in academic journals about the vulnerability of youth. While this is often helpful, it gives no succor to young adults who seek expression of their hurts and innermost feelings. And often after reading the "How to Talk to and Understand Your Teen" books, a parent is left feeling that nothing they do is right.

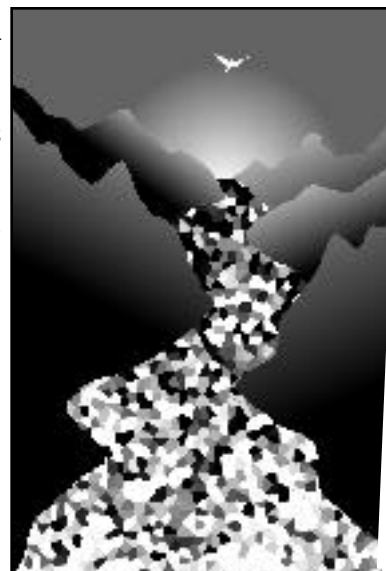
On the other hand, if we view literature as life unwrapped, then I believe that reading young adult and adolescent literature is one of the best ways to get a window on the world of teens. It helps you empathize with teenagers today and can make you a more effective parent.

Having said this, and springboarding from Jay Skelton's excellent presentation to the Coalition in September on emotional intelligence, I do, however,

recommend *Character First*, a book by Joseph W. Gauld (Prima Publishing, 1995). *Character First* focuses on the role that the values of courage, integrity, leadership, curiosity and concern play in a person's education, as opposed to a system preoccupied with students' ability and academic achievement.

Through the personal accounts of students, parents and teachers at the Hyde School in Maine, the book demonstrates how people effectively learn and how their character develops.

Gauld, a teacher and school administrator, founded Hyde School after he grew disenchanted with the strictly academic orientation of most educational institutions. He wanted an approach that offered students a more direct chance to learn to lead "responsible, meaningful, self-governing lives."



Don't quit that rocky path; it's meant to be hard.

The premise of Gauld's book is that adolescence is a crucial practice period, and that how teens face that obstacle course very much determines their lifelong attitude toward challenges, learning and growth.

Gauld's message is, "Don't try to go around that scary hurdle; it's there for a reason. Don't quit that rocky path; it's meant to be hard. Avoid taking that shortcut; there are none in life. Don't let yourself get discouraged; the great ones just keep putting one foot in front of the other. Trust the process; it will help you find your purpose in life."

As with so many lessons we are trying to teach our children to better equip them to go out into the world and be the best they can be, the messages in Gauld's book are timeless and can easily be applied to all of us in this lifelong process of growing up. A life-affirming message of this book is that it is never too late to change, to grow, to apologize, to try again, to cope with the impossible, to manage in spite of setbacks and failures. The message is that one discovery, one trauma, one wrong decision does not a lifetime make.

Without necessarily endorsing the Hyde School itself, I recommend this book as food for thought along the path of living and parenting. This book is not a formula of how-to's or checklists, but rather a thoughtful and reflective sharing of stories that serve as both mirror and window. *Teacher and consultant Diane Frankenstein is a nationally recognized specialist in children's, adolescent and young adult literature. She teaches courses for parents and teachers.*

Survival Suggestions

The "Survival Suggestions for Teens and Parents," which we inserted in the Fall 1997 *Parenteen*, is designed to help parents and teens communicate about difficult issues. The Issues and Choices committee of the Parents' Coalition gathered a group of its teen consultants and some parent representatives together to develop this resource.

The Coalition also has copies of "Recommended Guidelines for Parties," adopted by the San Francisco University High School Parents' Association in 1992, and "Students' Ideas for Communication," which student consultants to our Issues and Choices committee developed in 1995.

Call Issues and Choices chair Julie Terraciano at (510) 834-9727 if you would like copies of any of these. ♥

Parents' Coalition Mission

To support and inspire parents of adolescents through education and communication in order to promote the health and safety of our youth.

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If you or your school would like to be involved or if you have comments or questions, please call Mary Lane at (415) 435-7068.

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Readers are encouraged to submit letters to the editor; ideas for articles or articles themselves. Call Sue Adams at (415) 566-6511 for more information.

To subscribe to *Parenteen*, call Mary Lane at (415) 435-7068.

To learn more about the Parents' Coalition, check out our web site: <http://www.pbahs.org>

Very Important Dates

Parents' Coalition meetings

☛ The Coalition meets on the second Monday of each month, September–June, from 7:30 - 9:30 p.m. at San Francisco Day School, 350 Masonic Ave. (at Golden Gate Avenue). All parents are welcome.

Dec. 8 Forum: **Student panel** on diversity.

Feb. 9 Forum: **Daryl Inaba**, Pharm. D., director of the Haight-Ashbury Free Clinic, will discuss "What Kids Are Doing with Drugs and Alcohol."

May 11 Forum: **Diane Frankenstein**, teacher and consultant, will discuss "The Mystique of Adolescent Literature."

All forums take place during the first hour of the regular meeting.



Special Coalition Event

☛ Nov. 3 (Monday), 7:30 - 9:30 p.m. in the auditorium at the UCSF Laurel Heights campus, 3333 California St. An evening with nationally-renowned comic and child advocate, **Michael Pritchard**. For parents and students.