MESSAGE FROM THE PACT TEAM

In this newsletter, we are focusing on a very broad topic that is critical in the lives of teens. As a team, we witness many challenges for our students – academic, social, and religious. Yet at the core of all of these challenges lies the emotional lens in which they experience their lives.

This newsletter’s topic, “The Emotional Life of Teenagers,” explores the developmental expectations we can have for our teens as they go through their high school years. It also describes ways in which our program here at SAR addresses some of the emotional struggles and the systems in place to give our teens support as they navigate their complicated lives.

In addition to our newsletter, please remember that we have PACT programming for parents in the coming months for grades 10-12. Details are on the last page.

Finally, we are also extremely excited to introduce our brand new parent forum, “Wake Up with PACT.” Rabbi Frank and Mr. Courtney will lead a discussion on the bestselling book, The Teenage Brain. The sessions will take place on February 29 and March 14 at 8 AM here at the high school. Look for more information about these events in future weeks.

In the meantime, please keep on communicating, asking, talking with us and with your children as we continue our mission of PACT.

We would love to hear your thoughts about this newsletter or any other PACT related issues. Feel free to email us at pact@sarhighschool.org with any comments, questions or suggestions.

- The PACT Team

THE EMOTIONAL LIVES OF ADOLESCENTS

By: Dr. Russell Hoffman, School Psychologist

Adolescence is the developmental stage of transitioning from childhood to adulthood. It is a drawn-out process that takes several years, generally beginning with the onset of puberty, continuing throughout the teenage years, and concluding with the completion of brain development in one’s early-mid 20’s. It can be a somewhat confusing and tumultuous time of life for the adolescents experiencing it; for the adults parenting and/or educating those adolescents, it can (continued on pg. 2)
be an enigmatic and inspiring thing to behold. Adolescents have the youthful energy and exuberance of childhood, coupled with a nascent capacity for more sophisticated and abstract thinking. During this protracted period, there are several developmental processes occurring simultaneously and at different rates. For instance, at a certain point during adolescence, physical development might be much further along than cognitive and/or emotional development (which is why teenagers can sometimes seem like such contradictions, so mature and yet so immature at the same time). Emotional development during adolescence is driven by two factors: brain development and experience. As the emotion centers in the brain mature, teenagers are able to perceive, experience and reflect on an increasingly wide range of emotions. And, as teens get older and accrue life experience, they become more adept at understanding, regulating and modulating their emotions. Thus, an important thing to keep in mind when assessing the emotional state of an adolescent is that their capacity for emotional regulation might not be fully developed, and, even if it is, they have had minimal life experience in which to learn how to use their emotional regulation tools effectively.

A feature of adolescence is increased emotional intensity. One way to understand this phenomenon is to imagine adolescence as a time when the emotional “hardware” is being upgraded; adolescents must adjust to sensing the world through an emotional filter that is gradually recalibrating from child to adult settings. During this process, teenagers tend to experience their feelings more vividly and acutely. For many people, adolescence is when they begin to feel passionately about certain causes, relationships or activities. This emotional intensity can be energizing and can be the fuel that powers one’s drive and sense of purpose in life. On the other hand, sometimes teenagers can be ruled by their emotions in more negative ways. At times, the emotional intensity of adolescence can be overwhelming and can leave them feeling out of control. At these times, the challenge of regulating such strong emotions can lead to moodiness, impulsivity and over-reactivity. This is especially understandable in light of adolescents’ youth and their relative lack of emotional experience or practice. This means that, for teenagers, a certain amount of moodiness and emotional volatility is “within normal limits” for adolescence (whereas the same kind of emotional dysregulation might be considered more clinically significant in an adult). However, this begs the question - how can you distinguish between “normal” adolescent emotional variability and signs of emotional distress/dysregulation that are more concerning? The answer to that question is, al regal achad, by paying careful attention and communicating openly with your teenager.

Looking for signs of an emotional problem in adolescence is, essentially, looking for changes in a teenager’s emotional functioning during a time of change. Some of the signs of emotional distress in teenagers include irritability, difficulty concentrating, changes in eating/sleeping/activity routines, and diminished interest in activities or subjects that the teenager has previously found important and/or enjoyable. And yet, most teenagers experience some or all of these criteria as part of their normal adolescent development. When determining if a teenager is experiencing the kinds of emotional issues that warrant some support or intervention, the main criteria to consider are “how much” and “how long.” For example, if a teen seems to be moody or irritable, it is important to consider how different that is from their usual way of functioning and for how long it has been happening. Thus, the people who are best equipped to identify when a teenager needs some emotional support are the people who know that teenager the best. This clearly includes parents, but it can also include friends, teachers, counselors, etc. These are the people who tend to be most attentive to that teenager and who are best positioned to differentiate between the emotional and behavioral ups and downs that are typical of adolescence and those that might signify an emotional problem that a teen can not manage on their own. And, if a parent, teacher or friend does feel that a teen’s emotional state might warrant some direct support, they should seek out a consultation with a mental health professional, such as one of the school psychologists (see “The Role of the School Psychologist” in this newsletter). Openly communicating with teenagers about their emotional lives is another crucial element in knowing when to intervene.
MEDICATION AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH
By: Russi Bohm, School Nurse

For some students who are struggling with emotional health concerns, medication can be a valuable component of a treatment plan. Not every student who receives therapeutic support for emotional issues needs medication. Sometimes psychotherapy alone is enough to facilitate the desired changes. Other times, however, medication is used in conjunction with a psychotherapeutic intervention. Indeed, sometimes medication is necessary in order for psychotherapy to be effective. For instance, medication may be needed to lift a student’s mood or alleviate anxiety so that they are then able to benefit from the emotional support and behavioral strategies that are available to them through the therapeutic relationship. Oftentimes, medications are used for just a short time to help recalibrate the brain’s neurochemistry and/or to allow therapy to take root.

Whatever the case, it is good to keep an open mind when it comes to considering the benefits of medications. It is important to trust your doctor/therapist to determine if a psychiatric evaluation is necessary. If medications are prescribed, discuss the pros and cons at length with your therapist or medication provider. Share your concerns and expectations and listen to your provider in terms of what to expect from the medication so you can make a fully informed decision. Ask a lot of questions!

Some parents have concerns about medication’s side effects but it needs to be understood that every medication you take – even the most basic like antibiotics or aspirins – all have potential side effects. The prescriber will go over what side effects are most prevalent and what you can expect. Most people that go on medication to help with emotional issues feel that the benefit outweighs any actual side effects. If your child is experiencing side effects, your prescriber can alter the dosage. He/she can either change the timing in which the medication is taken, the manner in which it is taken, or switch the medication entirely. There are many, many options.

It is always important for parents to share any pertinent medical information with the school nurse. This includes if the student is on any medications. Whether he/she takes the medicine at home or in school it is crucial for the nurse to know. It is this partnership that helps support the student and offers continuity of care. SAR maintains a strict privacy policy. Information is given over to teachers on a need to know basis and only with parental consent. And, when parents do give that consent, the school can provide valuable feedback about the student’s functioning to parents and treatment providers, which can be important for assessing the student’s response to medication. Looking forward to continuing a close collaboration with parents and students for years to come!

THE NINTH GRADE PARENT PACT PROGRAM
By Ezra & Barie-Lynne Rosensaft (Parents, SAR High School Class of 2019)

As new parents at SAR High School, we attended the ninth grade PACT meeting in early November, where the discussion was fresh, open, and candid between parents and school faculty. The conversation and scenarios ranged from drugs to alcohol to religious observance levels, and heightened an awareness, as one parent said, “that we all have different points of view, and it's OK that no single way is the ‘right’ way;” though, some issues are clearly zero tolerance (e.g., drugs in school). The key overriding message was communication, whether it be with other families, the school or one-on-one with our children, etc.

Personally, while exiting the building I noticed a picture on the “values wall” specifically of Rabbi Frank holding a sign that said “I value reflection...”. That sums up a lot of what the evening was about; a time to reflect on how to handle a variety of scenarios we may encounter in the years ahead.

Thank you to the school faculty for facilitating such an evening and forward-thinking ideas on how to get ‘ahead of the curve’ on critical issues facing high school students and their families.
Ninth graders enter their high school careers with much anticipation. New social, academic, and extracurricular opportunities are approached with both excitement and stress.

The beginning of the year at SAR is filled with much fanfare for freshmen with programs such as orientation, Freshman Day and the Shabbaton. Yet, as we go into the middle of the year, as parents, teachers and students, we must realize that acculturation into high school is a process. Some students will adjust quickly and some will take longer. However, as we know, different teens have different strengths. Each 9th grader will find certain aspects of high school life simple and easy and other aspects of it more complex and challenging.

With respect to academics, lots of students come in used to “doing well” with little effort in school. Many have a hard time adjusting to the academic demands of high school, both because of the number of courses they are taking and because of the intensity of the material. In the public school system, “a ninth grade student is three to five times more likely to fail a class than students in any other grade.” Additionally, “even those students who we might think are immune to failure based on their prior achievement can face challenges during the ninth grade year. (Breakthrough Collaborative, February 2011 Research Brief: Challenges of the Ninth Grade Transition) While these facts may be more significant in public schools in some ways, the number of courses and long day of Yeshiva high school make these issues ones that should be kept in mind when monitoring our 9th graders’ academic life.

Also, in the organizational realm many students struggle in their transition to high school. Some kids have difficulty because they have trouble with time management. The long day, school work and commitments outside of school in a setting like SAR make organization a bigger challenge. Certainly these elements go in waves depending on student workload and practice schedule but these multiple commitments are an ongoing challenge for teens (and adults!) and must be monitored.  (Continued on pg. 10)
EMOTIONAL WELL BEING IN THE 10TH GRADE HEALTH CURRICULUM

By: Dr. Russell Hoffman, School Psychologist

One of the distinctions of the 10th grade program at SAR High School is the Health Education curriculum. During the first semester of 10th grade, students have Beit Midrash twice weekly. In these small, single-sex groups, students explore issues related to interpersonal relationships, sexuality, and other topics by reading and analyzing Jewish texts on these subjects. In the second semester of 10th grade, students continue to meet in small, single-sex groups for Health class twice weekly (in place of Beit Midrash). In Health class, students continue to explore these important developmental issues, as well as other topics such as alcohol and mind-altering substances, through the lens of positive decision-making. Health classes focus on providing the students with accurate and comprehensive information and facilitating critical discussion and role-playing to help them integrate and personalize the material. One topic covered in the Health curriculum from this perspective is emotional health.

In the emotional health unit, students have the opportunity to expand their emotional vocabulary and learn about adolescent emotional development as well as strategies for maintaining their own emotional health. Students are encouraged to challenge the stigma and societal double standard between emotional/mental and physical health concerns. A core message of the emotional health unit is that students should value and safeguard their emotional health and that they should seek out the advice or support of a trusted adult if they have concerns about their own or a friend’s emotional well-being.

Another point that is covered in the 10th grade Health class is the idea of using alcohol and/or drugs as a way of coping with emotional distress. This first comes up in the unit about alcohol and other mind-altering substances. In this unit, the Health curriculum addresses the many reasons that people in general, and teenagers specifically, choose to use these substances. The idea of “self-medicating” with alcohol or drugs to cope with adversity or stress is one the reasons covered in this discussion. This idea is revisited during the emotional health unit as part of the larger discussion about the many ways - both healthy/adaptive and unhealthy/problematic - that adolescents use to manage and cope with their negative emotions such as stress, insecurity and anxiety. Again, a core message of the Health curriculum is that students should make thoughtful decisions about these issues that have serious implications for their well-being, and that part of positive decision-making is asking questions and talking to parents and other trusted adults.

HOW YOU CAN HELP YOUR CHILD WHEN THEY ARE CONCERNED ABOUT A FRIEND

By: Dr. Michelle Humi, School Psychologist

SCENARIO:

Imagine your child shares with you that they are very concerned about a friend who is going through a hard time. This is not such complicated parental territory. You can acknowledge and praise your child’s empathy and help them brainstorm some ways that they can be supportive to their friend. Now imagine that your child also shares with you that their friend is self-harming or putting him/herself at risk in some other way. For most parents, this situation can be difficult to navigate. It raises difficult questions about what to do, who to tell, etc. Here are some suggested guidelines that can help parents help their children in this type of situation.

Support your child. Just like in the simpler scenario, this is an opportunity to praise and reinforce the value of empathy and how important it is to you that your child cares about and protects the welfare of others. You can validate your child’s feelings - it can be really hard/scary to know that their friend is going through such a difficult time, and it can be hard to want to help but not know what to do. (And it might be hard for them to come to you with their concern and ask for for help or guidance.) Ask your child how they are feeling. They might not be aware that supporting a friend in distress can take an emotional toll on themselves, or that this is a normal, expected reaction and that they don’t need to feel self-conscious about it.

Help your child recognize their limits. A feature of adolescence is the disparity between teenagers’
By: Dr. Michelle Humi, School Psychologist

School psychologists wear many hats in the school environment. They often partner with students, families, teachers, school administrators, and other professionals as consultants or liaisons in order to create a supportive learning environment between school and home. In addition, school psychologists provide direct support to students, families and teachers. Specifically they may consult on how to support diverse learners and help students improve academic achievement (motivation, organization, etc.). School psychologists may also promote positive behavior and mental health, which may include assessing students’ emotional and behavioral needs, offering organizational and time management support, providing individual counseling, and help problem-solve around social situations. Furthermore, the school psychologist may make a referral to an outside provider to help support a student’s needs.

The school psychologist can help students, families, and educators understand what a student is encountering and can help address short term, long term, and chronic problems that the student may be facing. Adolescence can be a trying time for many students and parents, and the school psychologist can help assess whether what the student is exhibiting is developmentally appropriate or may require further support. Adolescents can often be faced with problems around social relationships, difficult decisions, or managing emotions such as feeling depressed, anxious, worried, or isolated, and the school psychologist can help support students and parents around these issues.

Mood fluctuations are a common feature of adolescence, as most parents of teenagers know. As a parent, it can be difficult to discern when these mood swings are developmentally appropriate and when they may be more significant and cause for concern. Sadness and/or anxiety that persist and begin to affect your child’s daily functioning may signify that they are struggling with something more clinically significant and need help. Here are some behavioral and emotional signs that can also indicate that your child might need support or therapeutic intervention:

- your child withdraws from social interaction and/or stops doing things they have previously enjoyed doing
- your child is more irritable and moody than usual; your child’s mood swings seem more severe or disruptive than usual
- your child has difficulty concentrating or seems preoccupied
- your child exhibits changes in appetite, energy level, sleep patterns and/or academic performance
- you suspect that your child may be experimenting with or habitually using alcohol or other substances

If you ever recognize any of these signs in your child, or if you have other concerns, you should consider consulting with a trusted professional. Seeking help can be a daunting step for parents, but avoiding or denying a problem can be even scarier in its consequences. There are many resources that parents can utilize if they are worried about their child. An adolescent’s pediatrician can be a great resource for parents and their child in terms of identifying whether additional support is warranted, and the pediatrician may be able to refer the parents to other appropriate providers. Another great resource can be the school psychologist. The school psychologist can serve as a sounding-board for parents and can provide expert advice, feedback and observations to parents about their concerns. The school psychologist can help parents decipher if their child’s behavior is developmentally/situationally appropriate or whether their child’s behavior may be suggestive of some underlying distress that requires attention. The school psychologist can also meet with the student to assess their mental health and to help determine whether or not other supports may be beneficial or necessary. In addition, the school psychologist can provide parents with recommendations for outside providers such as psychologists or psychiatrists should the student need additional support.

SAR HS has two school psychologists on staff: Dr. Russell Hoffman and Dr. Michelle Humi. In addition to the roles described above, Dr. Hoffman and Dr. Humi teach Health and Psychology classes in the school and collaborate with faculty and students on a variety of projects. Please feel free to be in touch with Dr. Hoffman or Dr. Humi about your child at any time.

Dr. Russell Hoffman 718.548.2727 X 1510, rhoffman@sarhighschool.org
Dr. Michelle Humi 718.548.2727 X 1578, mhumi@sarhighschool.org
The college admission process is a source of great anxiety for many parents. Whether nervous about sending a child from the home, paying for higher education, or finding that perfect match of student and university, it is only natural for the parents of high school students to stress over the unknown beyond high school. At SAR, that is likewise the case for numerous families. The vast majority of students have been housed in the comforts of a small, Jewish day school educational setting and the uncertainty of a gap year abroad in Israel and four years in a new environment may be daunting. Here are several pieces of advice to help assuage parental anxiety with regards to the college admission process:

1) Visit schools early. The process is very frontloaded for seniors, with most of them applying to at least one university by November 1st of 12th grade. That means parents should be encouraging their children to visit campuses in the junior year and not waiting until senior year. February break and Chol Hamoed Pesach are perfect opportunities to visit colleges. These visits help to lessen stress by giving students the opportunity to see themselves on campus; furthermore, students will have to monitor their absences in 12th grade and travelling to campuses while on break lessens that anxiety.

2) Have realistic conversations with your children about finances. Many SAR students will only consider public universities as a result of rising tuition costs. Your family is not alone in this situation and your son/daughter should not feel that the CUNY, SUNY, or out-of-state public options are less valued than private colleges. Discussing these topics early will help make the senior year realities a lot less stressful.

3) Don’t become overly concerned with what your child “must” do in the summer. There is nothing wrong with being a camp counselor, lifeguard, or attendee on a travel program. There is a misconception that a singular summer experience can propel the student into the college of his/her choice. That is not the case. While a summer activity can help round out the resume, ultimately, what a student pursues during the school year is more impressive to the college admission officials.

4) The use of language is very important. Never belittle a college that could be a foundation school for your child as he/she should be excited for that one place that would be a sure admission offer. Do not get hung up on “reach” schools where your son/daughter would most likely get denied admission. The media may focus on a select number of institutions but being highly selective does not mean a higher quality college experience. If you have the opportunity, read Frank Bruni’s Where You Go is Not Who You’ll Be: An Antidote to the College Admissions Mania. Mr. Bruni spoke at the PACT event this past June and his advice elucidated in the book is spot-on. Countless people have achieved professional success and personal fulfillment without the benefit of having attended a “brand name” college.

5) Avoid discussing college admission with your neighbors and friends. Maintaining a sense of privacy is beneficial for your family and also lessens the hysteria surrounding the process.

6) Avoid the urge to live vicariously through your children. This is their process and you should be their cheerleader and not the one wielding the keyboard and completing their applications. To that end, do NOT feel the need to hire tutors to write essays for your children. Your sons and daughters

(continued on pg. 8)
YOGA FOR TWELFTH GRADERS

By: Cari Cohen, Assistant Director of College Counseling

Leading two sections of yoga classes for seniors has been a highlight for me this fall. Most of the students had never practiced yoga before, and it has been especially gratifying to hear how beneficial they find the experience. Particularly after the stress of preparing early college applications, it feels appropriate to give seniors time to unwind and find the space to learn how to calm themselves.

Each class starts with a five minute meditation. Learning to focus on breath and to let go of the many thoughts that frequently bombard our consciousness is not easy. Despite the challenge, this practice is extremely effective in slowing down the mind and calming the nervous system. While lowering anxiety is not the goal of yoga, it definitely helps. Our beginner’s practice includes a variety of gentle poses: cat-cow, downward dog, cobra, twists, side stretches, forward and back bends, and child’s pose. We always include a balancing pose such as tree pose and an inversion. Plank pose helps students focus on and strengthen their core, and Warrior I and II not only strengthen muscles but also help students connect to their inner strength as well. Many students say that their favorite pose is without a doubt “Legs Up The Wall,” an inversion that provides a chance to refocus, breathe, and recharge.

We always end the practice with “shavasana,” another favorite part of yoga, and a chance to quiet the mind by focusing on the breath and letting go of random thoughts. Students leave class feeling refreshed and calm, which I find incredibly gratifying. When asked about their yoga experience at SAR, here’s what students’ wrote:

“In high school, where students are expected to balance so much, yoga offers many benefits. Cathartic in itself, yoga enables us to take a step away from our hectic day and focus on the present. It allows us to relax and shows us that we have the strength, both physically and mentally, to overcome whatever stress we may be facing. It is amazing that SAR offers this space, and I only wish yoga at SAR had started sooner and that more students could have this opportunity.”

“Yoga has been a great way for me to de-stress during the day. It gives me a break to focus on myself and not think about all of the work I have to do.”

“When they offered yoga in school I felt as though they were trying to help us get to a certain place of calmness and comfort. Yoga helps me manage stress. The breathing helps me to align my thoughts, and recharges me so that I can tackle the day and week ahead.”

“The day was long and exhausting. Finally came second to last period: yoga. I was not sure what to expect. There were about 20 girls in the class and Ms. Cohen led us in various stretches. She played zen music and we allowed the palms of our feet that we had been walking on all day to sink into the cushioned yoga mat. We practiced stretches that I cannot name because their names are beyond my vocabulary and the English language. For the last five minutes of the class, Ms. Cohen turned the lights off and we laid down on our mats with our backs completely straight, stretching our spines. She played slow, soft melodies that filled my lungs as I breathed in and out for five minutes. No worries on my mind, only 1 class ahead, it was the best five minutes of high school.”

EMOTIONAL BALANCE and the COLLEGE ADMISSION PROCESS (continued from pg. 7)

are very capable of drafting college essays and then working closely with their SAR college counselors to edit the material and submit work that they can feel proud of.

7) Recognize and communicate to your children that they will likely be happy wherever they end up, especially if attending an institution with a high retention rate.

8) Understand that your son/daughter’s sense of self-worth is not a result of how many acceptances they collect.

9) Parents should remember to discuss other topics besides college with their children. Let them experience the present of being in high school more than the future of what awaits them beyond SAR. Encourage them to join extracurricular activities as a constructive means for growth and socialization as opposed to a resume build-up for college applications.

10) Know that we at SAR High School are here to help make this process less anxiety-provoking. Do not hesitate to contact a college counselor at SAR with any concerns surrounding college admission.
Teenagers, like all people, are subject to the full range of emotions. This means that they experience feelings like joy, pride, sadness, insecurity, and anger, just to name a few. (For an entertaining and poignant, albeit somewhat over-simplified, glimpse into the emotional world of a pre-teen, see the 2015 Pixar film Inside Out. Or, better yet, watch it with your teenager!) Because teens are relatively new to the task of managing and regulating the more intense and complex emotions that come with adolescence, even predictable (e.g., “normal”) emotional reactions can be unsettling. Teens lack the on-the-job experience necessary for discerning the difference between sadness that comes from experiencing personal (or more existential) loss or disappointment, and the sadness that can be a precursor or symptom of depression. Or for differentiating between normal, healthy anxiety (yes, there is such a thing) and the more excessive worry that might indicate a need for more substantial support. Indeed, many adults have difficulty making these distinctions at times. Teaching adolescents how to be emotionally healthy and communicating with them consistently about their emotional experiences can provide them with the support they need to avoid some emotional pitfalls and the help they need when they encounter them. When teenagers can talk openly about their feelings with a trusted adult, they can maximize the constructive, educational aspects of even negative emotional experiences. In other words, they can make the most of their limited on-the-job experience.

Another reason that it is valuable to communicate openly and non-judgmentally with adolescents about their emotional lives is because it helps them to develop their emotional resilience. It can be enormously helpful for teenagers to have a safe and supportive relationship in which to process their emotional reactions to the “slings and arrows” of life. Such a relationship can help in myriad ways: it can help identify and validate their feelings, it can help de-stigmatize and normalize their feelings, it can generate different ways of responding to their feelings, etc. This type of support is the emotional scaffolding that teenagers need in order to navigate the tricky emotional landscape of adolescence and to emerge successfully as emotionally mature adults.
EMOTIONAL WELL BEING OF NINTH GRADERS

(Continued from pg. 4)

Finally, realize that every student is in transition. Even in a school such as SAR with many students coming in from the Academy, all 9th graders need time adjusting to the size and pace of high school. While we work hard to give students the tools to problem solve and advocate for themselves, faculty and advisors provide a support system in school to help as well. Even the teens who seem to have it all under control need academic, organizational and general check-ins throughout the year.

I sat down for “tea” with a 9th grader over this past weekend. We had been discussing an issue related to the school curriculum, but I took the opportunity to ask him how the year was going. He responded that it has been really great, “much better than I thought it would be.” He anticipated that it would be good, but never thought that juniors and seniors would really speak to him. He has found that the students here at SAR have been so friendly, helpful and inclusive. This, for him, has made all of the difference in the world.

These little moments, ones in which we, as parents and teachers, show support and take the time to talk to our students about the adjustment, even in December and beyond, lead 9th graders to feel more welcome, adjusted and successful.

HOW YOU CAN HELP YOUR CHILD WHEN THEY ARE CONCERNED FOR A FRIEND

(Continued from pg. 5)

mature emotional capacities and their dearth of life experience. Some teens in this situation need to be gently reminded that even though they want to help - and may even feel like they are the only one in a position to help - they don’t really have the skills or experience yet to make that work. It can be frustrating to hear, but teenagers are able to grasp that expressing their concern for their friend and getting an adult involved may be the best way for them to help their friend. (Indeed, it is often reassuring and comforting to teenagers when an adult explains this and intervenes to in thoughtful way to help their friend.)

Help your child be a supportive friend. You can explain to your child that they can support their friend and be there for them, and that is enough. They are not responsible for “fixing” the problem. You can remind your child that simply a kind word or a supportive gesture can go a long way toward helping a friend cope with a difficult situation.

Consider who else could be helpful. You and your child can brainstorm a list of other people who could be helpful and supportive to their friend. Specifically, you can consider reaching out to the friend’s parents or to someone at school (a GLC, school psychologist, administrator, etc.). This could engage the assistance of another adult who cares about the friend and who is in a position to help them. Teenagers are often apprehensive about taking this step because they fear what could happen next - they worry that their friend would be upset or angry with them, they worry that parents or the school might overreact or respond in a punitive way, etc. You can explain to your child that these are real concerns but that they should not stand in the way of helping someone in need. And, to help mitigate their fear/worry, you can reassure them that you will address these concerns with any other adult you talk to about their friend. You can reassure your child that you will try to make sure that parents and/or the school respond in a thoughtful way that feels supportive - even if it is unsolicited and feels somewhat intrusive - to their friend.
MENTAL HEALTH

EXPLORED THROUGH THE LENS OF THE CATCHER IN THE RYE

By: Dr. Gillian Steinberg, English Teacher

Students in my 11th grade English class have been exploring the world of Holden Caulfield in the classic American novel The Catcher in the Rye. As part of their literary study students examined Holden’s mental and emotional state by defining a range of mental health-related terms, including "depression," "bipolar disorder," "antisocial personality disorder," and "social anxiety." Students considered the ways in which communities may label and stigmatize people with mental illness and discussed how Holden and others can be aided as they struggle to achieve mental health.

My students were especially excited to welcome Dr. Russell Hoffman (school psychologist) to their classes; he offered a clinical perspective on Holden's possible conditions and encouraged students to think interdisciplinarily, drawing on textual evidence from Holden's narration to support various hypothetical diagnoses. This exercise involved considering the different psychological, familial and environmental factors that seemed to be influencing Holden and debating if he was a “normal” teenager going through a particularly difficult time or if he was in fact exhibiting signs of a diagnosable psychological disorder. Students concluded the activity with differing opinions about Holden's precise issues, but they agreed that they had learned about the difficulty of making mental health diagnoses, the importance of open-mindedness and empathy, and the myriad factors – from grief to stress to insecurity – that can affect one's mental and emotional well-being.

AGE OF OPPORTUNITY

Lessons from the New Science of Adolescence

By: Laurence Steinberg

THE TEENAGE BRAIN

A Neuroscientist's Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults

By: Frances E. Jensen

HOW TO RAISE AN ADULT

Break Free of the Overparenting Trap and Prepare Your Kid for Success

By: Julie Lythcott-Haims

ADDITIONAL BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION ON THE EMOTIONAL LIVES OF TEENS

CLICK ON BOOK COVERS TO PURCHASE
GRADE BY GRADE RESOURCES

In addition to the support of our school psychologists, our Grade Level Coordinators monitor and help shape the grade’s culture. GLCs oversee the grade’s advisory program and serve as the point-people for monitoring the academic and social progress of individual students.

Along with Grade Level Coordinators and our PACT team, programs are created to further the PACT goal of increasing education and strengthening communication. Our 9th grade evening was wonderful. Please join us for the following upcoming events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRADE</th>
<th>GRADE LEVEL COORDINATOR</th>
<th>PARENT PACT PROGRAMS FOR THE COMING YEAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ms. Shoshana Chanales</td>
<td>9th Grade Parent PACT Night - November 4, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="mailto:schanales@sarhighschool.org">schanales@sarhighschool.org</a></td>
<td>PACT staff facilitate discussion using real life HS scenarios to open lines of communication between parents, their children and this school about parenting and decision making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ms. Gloria Schneider</td>
<td>10th Grade Parent PACT Night - January 20, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="mailto:gschneider@sarhighschool.org">gschneider@sarhighschool.org</a></td>
<td>Interactive evening with parents sharing what students are learning about in their health and beit midrash classes regarding sexuality, wellness and good decision making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ms. Michelle Hoch</td>
<td>Evening for students and parents, hearing real life stories from Riverdale community members about adolescent substance abuse experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="mailto:lbirnbaum@sarhighschool.org">lbirnbaum@sarhighschool.org</a> <a href="mailto:mhoch@sarhighschool.org">mhoch@sarhighschool.org</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Ms. Alicia Germano</td>
<td>12th Grade Parent PACT Night -December 14, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ms. Shuli Taubes</td>
<td>&quot;Parenting When Your Child Has One Foot out the Door&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="mailto:agermano@sarhighschool.org">agermano@sarhighschool.org</a> <a href="mailto:staubes@sarhighschool.org">staubes@sarhighschool.org</a></td>
<td>The evening which features a panel by parents of SAR alum, will focus on the challenges and issues regarding parental responsibilities in a year where we need to foster independence while encouraging wise decision making.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>