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Thriving During the Teenage Years

The Magic of Mentoring

By Dr. Jan Hittelman

Adolescence is a turbulent time and as parents our high school and middle school children constantly challenge us. While we know it's a time of experimentation, we want to keep our children safe from drugs, alcohol and other risk behaviors. Even though they may lack focus at times, we want our children to achieve in school. Perhaps most importantly we want our children to learn the skills necessary to become healthy, happy and successful adults.

One way that we can help protect our youth against risk behaviors, while at the same time helping them to develop positive self-esteem is through connecting them with an adult mentor. This can be through formal programs as well as informal mentoring. Informal mentoring involves adults that are already in your child's world; a neighbor, teacher, relative, parent's coworker, one of their friends parents, etc. It is a trusted adult who can be a source of support and guidance for your child at a time when they are more resistant to guidance from Mom and Dad. This is no surprise because their developmental task is to separate from parents and become more independent. A mentor can fill this critical void.

Formal mentoring involves signing your child up for a program that screens and trains mentors to work with youth. In many of the BVSD middle schools the Community Access Mentoring (CAM) program is available to students. In addition to providing 1:1 mentoring at school the mentors also help youth access quality after-school programs, which are also an important protective factor for youth as most adolescents get into trouble between 3-6pm Monday through Friday. You can learn more about the CAM program, including how to volunteer to become a mentor by visiting: www.bvsd.org/mentor.

As an alternative to traditional counseling, many psychotherapists are now offering mentoring as an alternative; instead of sitting in an office and talking for an hour a week, they get together and do activities together. This is often more comfortable for adolescents and they may open up more about themselves and their challenges. On Monday, October 12, from 7:00-8:30 at the Meadows Branch Library in Boulder, there will be a free panel discussion on "The Magic of Mentoring". Join us and find out how your child can benefit from mentoring relationships.

UPCOMING PEN EVENTS:

Harvesting Healthy Families

Nourishing the Mind, Body, Soul and Community

Bryce Browne

Bryce@growefoundation.org

www.growefoundation.org

Monday, October 19, 6:30-8:30pm, BVSD Education Center (6500 Arapahoe, Boulder)

Learn more about PEN by visiting their website: www.parentengagementnetwork.org or by contacting Paula Nelson, PEN chair (pjn6225@yahoo.com 303-880-6030) or Eugenia Brady, PEN Co-Chair (eugenia.brady@bvsd.org 720-561-5150).

Dr. Jan Hittelman, a licensed psychologist, is Director of Boulder Psychological Services and the Founder of the Boulder Counseling Cooperative. Questions or comments for this monthly column can be sent via email to: jan.hittelman@gmail.com, or by phone: 720-217-3270