

When Parents Rescue Their Kids at the High School Level By Beth Silver

Parents try their best to nurture and guide their students. At times, this guidance process becomes a micro-managing of a student's academic and social life. It happens when the parents have a definite vision of how their student should function in terms of what they see as ideal in a school setting. The vision and the ability of the student may not be related. This is the point at which a parent will continually rescue a student by overseeing homework, making sure assignments are completed and placing pressure on the teachers to help this student by supporting their vision of what the child can do.

At no point does the parent step back and look at the development of the student in relationship to responsibility and work ethic. The parent steps into the executive functioning process of the student and does the processes associated with executive functioning for the student. This happens when the student is in an academic situation that is challenging or the student has learning disabilities. Executive functioning refers to the ability of a student to process and make decisions about how to handle homework, sports and friends. If there is one item that is most important in raising children to become a contributing part of society, this is it. After a student leaves high school, who is going to pick up the pieces of the executive functioning that are not in place?

What motivates parents mainly is fear. It is fear that a student will not do well, be accepted or make it in the world. It is a fear that the student does not fit the mold of the other students. It is the fear that the student cannot be both a football hero and an academic success. It is important for parents to begin to show a student how to take this responsibility. Telling the student to do it or demanding that work be done at a certain time is still micro-managing. The student needs to be shown how to handle all the activities.

The parent also must show the student how to do self advocacy. It is important for the student to have a relationship with the classroom teacher. Every student should be encouraged and shown how to make appointments with teachers to discuss progress and specific needs that the teachers see for the student. Nothing replaces this relationship. Most students would like to "fade into the woodwork" and not be recognized. But, really what is needed is to be recognized and professionally guided by a teacher to learn

how to be successful in a particular course. True, teachers have a hectic schedule. However, the primary goal is to educate the student and make sure that the skill set that is needed is acquired by the student. The student needs to learn how to do this. The frantic email from the parent may alert the teacher but the teacher really needs to have the student do the interaction. Control by remote control does not work. If the parent is trying to control the learning process by going around the student to the teacher and not including the student, then the learning that should be achieved for executive functioning does not happen. Sometimes it helps if the parent is present at an initial meeting during which the student does the advocating.

All of this is part of the "fine art" of knowing how to let go of the student and allow the independence and growth to take place. Parents are fearful of changing a student's schedule because the general feeling is that if the student lets go of something, the student will be seen as a quitter. If a student is truly managing his/her program, then letting go of something does not make the student a quitter. This could involve an academic course, sports, or another commitment. It does, however, make the student a smart manager in rearranging time so that the student can meet academic goals or other goals.

Parents generally have an agenda of goals that they feel students should achieve. These goals are usually predicated upon their own experience in high school and college. It is important for them to take a look at the student who is a blend of both or perhaps is unlike either parent. Parents should talk with students about goals. When a grading period finishes, sit down and look at the results. Have the student assess what should be done differently for the next grading period. Let the student figure out how to handle things differently and set the processes in place to achieve the new goals. This builds character. This helps a student learn independence. Having a parent state the goals and give the specific directions cheats the student out of truly learning an area of executive functioning.

Parents and teachers refer to a rescuing mom as the Helicopter Mom. This means that the Mom is hovering over the student all the time to make sure that the student meets the goals the Mom has decided upon for the student. So, for people who do this, it is important to figure out why and what can be done differently. It is not an easy process for some, but it should be begun at once.

Another area that parents need to evaluate and learn how to help students cope with is the daily energy level of a student. There are some students

who require more sleep. Others are exhausted when they return home from school or sports and need some time to relax. People have different body clocks. Some are good in the morning and others later in the day or at night. Early morning classes for some students are an absolute struggle. For others, after lunch should really be a nap time. When a student has many items to balance, it is important that the student understand the best time of day for study and homework. If the student has too many things on an agenda, it may be necessary to let go of some in order to do the remaining parts well. Parents need to help their students maintain a steady blood sugar level by eating and resting well.

Common sense is the rule in working with a student to create independence. Once a student graduates from high school and is off to college and life, that student needs to have his/her executive functioning in place to be successful.