



Stepinac Lady Crusaders

General Meeting Highlights

Tuesday, January 12, 2021

7pm

I. **Welcome**

Laurie Naughton

Welcome to the new year. For the first time, this meeting is open to all parents, both moms and dads. This is an important meeting, possibly the most important we've had. 63 people have joined so far. We start the way we start everything at Stepinac, with a prayer:

II. **Prayer**

Cindy Pramann

III. **Guest Speaker**

Dr. Susan Conte, Ph.D., LCSW-R

Laurie introduced Dr. Conte who is in her 2nd year as the Social Worker at Stepinac. Prior to Stepinac she counseled undergrads and graduate students at the College of New Rochelle, where she was also Associate Professor of Guidance and Counseling.

Introduction:

The COVID-19 pandemic has radically changed the lives of families around the world. Our homes have become offices, schools, and gyms as well as the place for "normal" family life. Some schools close, then reopen, only to close again; parents scramble for child care, to supervise remote learners, and struggle to do their own jobs. Parents have had to become instant teachers while continuing to do work at their own careers; families have lost income and many have lost loved ones. For parents, this year has meant recalibrating again and again. For some, the pandemic has brought isolation, uncertainty, and sadness. Yet, joined together, there may also be ways for families to find hope and gratitude.

Parents may feel vulnerable, anxious, and stressed-out. These feelings are experienced strongly by children, especially teens. Although teens deal with such emotions in different ways, if your son has had to deal with school closures, cancelled events, or separation from friends, he is going to need your support now, more than ever.

In the time we are together tonight, I would like for us to discuss your experience as mothers, especially of teens, the effect of the pandemic on you and your sons, and strategies you may use for self-care.

Family Context

It is impossible to separate the effect of the pandemic on a teen without looking at the family as a whole. As mentioned, some families have lost loved ones and, now, most of us now know people who have had the virus. Some parents work on the front lines; others at home, and others may have lost their jobs. Some families have what they need, while others struggle to provide for their families. Sheltering at home may contribute to a teen's frustration at the loss of age-appropriate socialization and milestones (birthdays, the prom, graduation, college visits). For others, time at home can provide for family time for using technology to connect with friends and other family members.

Isolation is intolerable at any age, but it is intensified in the life of a teenager for whom peer relationships are an important aspect of development. In addition, the tone of the family contributes to the teen's experience: if parents are overwhelmed, their emotional distress will fuel the teen's feelings of isolation, stress, depression, anxiety, or other mental health issues.

Parenting Teens in a Pandemic

Adolescence is a time of tremendous growth and development—cognitively, physically, emotionally, morally, and socially.

Some general effects of the pandemic on teens include: increased anxiety (about contracting the illness themselves or concern about the safety of parents and older relatives); sigma; heightened feelings of helplessness, and higher incidence of mental health issues, notably depression and anxiety.

Family distress may compromise the teenager's primary source of support.

In addition, adolescents may be missing the structure of in-school learning, their friends, and their social life. As was mentioned, school closures make it impossible to celebrate key milestones in high school life, including cancelled plays, proms, graduation ceremonies, sports events, concerts, and activities that teens care deeply about.

As parents, it is important to let them feel what they feel. In the scope of an adolescent's life, these are major losses. Support, expect, and normalize that they are sad and very frustrated about the losses they are feeling,

Check in with them about what they are hearing. Directly address misinformation and get them on the right track.

How to Help Them to Cope:

1. Spend time with your teen (talking, cooking, exercising, riding in the car)
2. Talk with them about Covid-19. Correct misinformation. Involve them in fact-finding.

3. Share responsibilities: Allow them to choose a special job to help out.
4. Make routines:
 - involve your teen in making daily schedules
 - set goals and rewards together
 - make time for relaxation as well as for homework and chores.
5. Deal with difficult behaviors:
 - Talk through the effects of challenging behavior
 - Explore alternatives and let them make suggestions.
 - Decide together on fair rules and boundaries
6. Promote kindness and compassion:
 - Model kindness and compassion for those who are sick and for those who care for them.
 - Show how you can make a difference in someone's life (volunteer examples).
7. Parents Set the Tone:
 - Stay positive, even if you are dealing with your own stress.
 - Set aside time to take care of yourself.
 - Seek the support you need for your own mental health.
 - Use relaxation techniques: meditation; yoga. (CALM; *Headspace*)
 - Build in "down time" for the whole family
 - Get help to manage your grief, if warranted. (The Bereavement Center of Westchester is an excellent resource)

Prevention of Mental Health Issues:

For teens, lockdown during crucial years of education may add to anxiety, fear of failure, lack of motivation, loneliness. Emphasize the importance of face-to-face interaction and the use of digital platforms.

Strategies to prevent mental health issues:

1. Effective use of electronic and social media to communicate
2. Allow for healthy expression of emotions (including grief);
3. Limit exposure to pandemic-related news;

4. Focus on positive (e.g., improving skills);
5. Regulate sleeping and eating habits;
6. Teach relaxation techniques (e.g., Yoga and meditation).

For teens with existing mental health issues, these may be exacerbated by the pandemic. In addition, with school closures, they may lack access to school-based mental health services.

The American Academy of Pediatrics, in the article, *Mental Health during Covid-19: Signs That Your Child May Need More Support* (11/23/2020), outlines the following:

1. Signs of distress, including feeling hopeless, anxious, and angry
2. Changes in mood, e.g., ongoing irritability, feelings of hopelessness or rage, frequent conflicts with friends and/or family members.
3. Changes in behavior, for example: removing oneself from relationships (little interest in texting or video chatting with friends).
4. Loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed;
5. Difficulty falling or staying asleep/ sleeping all the time
6. Changes in weight or eating patterns
7. Problems with memory, concentration, or thinking;
8. Less interest in schoolwork;
9. Lack of energy;
10. Changes in appearance; lack of personal hygiene
11. Use of alcohol or other drugs
12. Increase in risky behaviors
13. Thoughts about or talking about death or suicide: Suicide risk increases during times of stress. Take any talk of suicide seriously. Seek help immediately. Excellent resources in our area include:
 - St. Vincent's Hospital Crisis Prevention and Response Team (914) 925-5959
 - St. Vincent's 24/7 Evaluation and Referral Service (914) 925-5320

Self-Care:

Research tells us that our parenting is influenced by three factors: our own psychological endowment, the characteristics of our children, and our own social support networks. All three of these factors have been disrupted by the pandemic. The pandemic has disrupted all three of these parenting determinants.

It is important for us to keep in mind that the situation we find ourselves in is **not** normal. Parents are being challenged to juggle childcare, work, financial responsibilities, personal health, and the health of our families. It is important for parents to have patience with themselves.

Parents should make time to stay connected with their own friends and to engage in activities they enjoy (e.g., a short walk, t.v.). Self-care is not an indulgence. It is necessary to keep a healthy mind and body.

There are evidence-based treatments for improving mental health, for example, psychotherapy, medication, mindfulness meditation. Mental health providers have introduced tele-health services and free apps. These offer access to guided resilience coaching and educational content about managing mental health. It is important to seek out these services and make their own mental health a priority,

Isn't it true that caretakers can care about everyone else but themselves? Dr. Stephanie Walsh, M.D., in *Taking Care of Yourself during COVID*, outlines 10 ways to practice self-care. She suggests:

1. Acknowledge your feelings and allow yourself to feel them. *For frontline workers, manage traumatic stress.*
2. Avoid comparing your feelings to others.
3. Practice healthy habits (eating, sleeping, exercise)
4. Follow a routine (waking, mealtime, work time, recreation, sleep time)
5. Give yourself a break (Cut yourself some slack. You are doing the best you can)
6. Set clear boundaries (limit exposure to COVID-related news)
7. Focus on what you can control (Make use of electronic and social media to communicate, e.g.)
8. Take 5: Do something only for you
9. Make time for laughter and joy
10. Practice gratitude (Think of one thing a day for which you are grateful).

Comments/suggestions/questions from the audience:

- Try to ask kids what has been good about Covid to shift the focus to positives.
- How to handle downward motivation with school work?
 - Use plus portals to check progress, try to keep them intellectually motivated.
 - Force them outside even for 10 minutes – you'll see a change in mood. Boys are used to a lot of exercise...to now be confined is very difficult. Stretch in between classes...get up, leave the room – helps.
- The disconnect is hard...social/emotional component is missing. – Balance is the challenge.
- What is being done to help students who are struggling?
 - Extra help sessions are available.
 - Reach out to your guidance counselors.
- Anyone have success with any after school clubs that have engaged their students? Coaches are checking in with their teams...what about the boys who are not on teams?
 - The teachers are open and available to help. Will refer them to guidance if they are concerned.
 - Reach out to your guidance counselor, they are excellent
 - Club/activity suggestions - Video game club, rotary club, OLMC volunteering (Mrs. Buda is the moderator, mbuda@stepinac.org)
 - Family walks, game night, pray the rosary, learn to cook and sew,

Ending comments:

I want to express my gratitude to you for this opportunity to be with you this evening. Please be assured of the interest and support of the Stepinac community as we go through this unprecedented time. Please feel free to reach out to your son's guidance counselor or to me if we can be of help to you and your son. You can reach me by email at sconte@stepinac.org or at Stepinac at extension 241.

Susan A. Conte, Ph. D., LCSW-R

General Meeting Topics

Trivia Night: Thurs. Feb. 11

Tricia Riccio

- Next meeting will include a fun trivia night with **prizes!**
- Bring the beverage of your choice.
- Stay tuned for more details!

Merchandise

Diana Soto and Mary Costa

- On-line store sales going very well. After Apparel and Carol event, we sold out of many items, closed store temporarily over holidays, but the store has now

reopened. We will notify you through social media as we bring new items on board. With (hopefully) spring sports, we hope to increase merchandise/sales activity.

- Online store: www.stepinacLadycrusaders.com (click on the “merchandise” tab).

Family Courtyard Brick Sales

Laurie Naughton

- Creating family courtyard around the statue of Mary in the back of the school. Honor your son, a friend, graduate, teacher, team, etc.
- After completion, we will add tables/umbrellas to create a gathering place.
- Sales will be open for another 6 weeks – go online to purchase while site is open!
www.brickrus.com/donorsite/stepinacLadycrusaders

Interest in Board position for the 2021-2022 School Year

- Opportunity to get involved as a board member.
- Please contact us with any area of interest.
- We will pair you with someone in a 2021-2022 co-position to learn the role.
- Many members have sons graduating in 2022, so we need to fill the ranks!
- Great way to contribute and make life-long friends.
- Contact us with interest or questions: ladycrusaders@stepinac.org

Thank you parents for your tremendous generosity!

- Faculty/staff gift collection. Overwhelming. 86 faculty members and janitorial staff received significant monetary gift and coffee truck to enjoy. Very grateful for everyone's generosity.
- The Gofundme collection for Jordan Prado who lost his father to COVID – thank you – your incredible generosity and compassion is felt deeply!
- Thank you also for helping the Stepinac Family who lost everything in a fire. The Amazon wish list was completely fulfilled, and the mother of student was brought to tears with the kindness and generosity of our Stepinac community.
- What a wonderful, compassionate and supportive Stepinac family!

Meeting Conclusion

- *Thank you for joining us tonight. We appreciate you!*
- *Happy 2021 - all the best wishes for health and happiness*

DATES TO REMEMBER:

January 18: NO SCHOOL - Martin Luther King Jr. Day

January 27: Junior Parents: **College Information Night**, 7pm

February 11: Trivia Night (prizes!) and February Lady Crusaders Meeting, 7pm