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High School Parenting is Gardening, not Carpentry

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Effective parenting takes courage, wisdom and lots of prayers! This is particularly true for parents of high school students. Instead of thinking of parenting as a list of steps or a formula for producing a smart, happy and successful adult, we need to think of ourselves as guides who are helping our sons and daughters shape their purpose and destinies. Instead of building and structuring our teen-ager the way a carpenter would, we should think of parenting as gardening. We are creating, protecting and nourishing space for our young adults to flourish.

A plan or approach for parents to follow in this cultivating process is key to helping young adults successfully navigate through their high school years. Any experienced parent will tell you that a good plan ensures consistent parameters and boundaries, as well as flexibility as each student and the challenges they face are different. The following are key elements of a plan to ensure that your high school student not only survives, but also thrives during their high school years:

Encourage Experiences Beyond the School Day - Young adults discover interests, find their passion and shape their identify through being engaged and involved in after-school clubs, activities and sports. These experiences help them develop skills and talents; build social skills; and develop self-discipline and character.

Leverage the School's Online Resources - Parents should regularly check their son or daughter's grades via the parent portal. School websites will have up-to-date information regarding testing dates, special events and resources available.

Nurture "Talk and Listen" Times - Teen-agers often open up and share at inconvenient times. Take advantage of these moments to ask questions, listen and affirm them.

Support Homework Expectations - Identify a quiet, well-lit, distraction-free place in your home for homework to be completed. Encourage a social media break during this time to help with focus and quality work.

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Instill Organizational Skills - Staying organized, managing time and seeing work through to completion are key executive functioning skills that parents can encourage.

Encourage Self-Advocacy - When dilemmas and challenges arise, encourage your son or daughter to advocate for themselves. This includes following up personally with teachers, attending after-hours study opportunities, setting and working toward goals and accepting help from others.

Seek Volunteer Opportunities - Contrary to your son or daughter's resistance, they do appreciate knowing that you are involved with school committees, booster clubs and fund raising efforts.

Attend School Events - Stay informed by attending Back to School, Curriculum Nights and Parent/Teacher Conferences. Glenbard District 87 has an outstanding parent series where nationally recognized authors present on relevant topics, such as adolescent growth, drug and alcohol awareness, brain development and college admissions. Details are at glenbardgps.org.

Know the School's Key Disciplinary Policies - Become familiar with the code of conduct, which cites expectations and consequences related to student behavior, dress code, bullying, electronic devices, cheating, vandalism, etc.

Be Aware and Engaged With Friends and Groups - The most powerful force for a teen-ager is peer influence. A parent needs to stay close and build relationships with key friends and their parents.

Playing the role of gardener, we will be more successful if we are present, aware and provide protected space for our young adults to grow and mature. Years of nurturing and cultivating will result in the greatest outcome: a smart, happy and successful adult.

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