

6/12/19

Modeling Happiness for Our Students

By David F. Larson, Ed.D.

Superintendent, Glenbard Township High School District 87

More than anything, a parent's ultimate desire on graduation day is that their son or daughter's future path will lead them to be a balanced individual who will thrive, both personally and professionally – and, put simply, be happy.

Unfortunately, much of a parent's attention during their teen's high school years is centered on goals that can cause anxiety and stress. Striving to achieve a certain grade-point average, feeling pressure to be in certain activities, being admitted into "the right" colleges, etc. can contribute to unhappiness.

Summer provides an ideal time for parents to regroup, center on and model those attributes and dispositions that contribute to greater happiness and contentment.

Research findings reveal that, while life's circumstances outside of our control have an impact, a large portion of happiness is determined by one's habits, attitude and outlook on life. And those habits and attitudes are shaped by the individuals we spend the most time with – our family.

Let's look at those key happiness attitudes and dispositions that parents can reinforce:

- Discover Your Passion and Interest
 - Take time for "down time." Explore a new hobby or pick up a hobby that has lapsed over the years. Local park districts, public libraries and the College of DuPage offer an array of programs and classes for every interest.
- Build a Network of Quality Friends
 - Healthy relationships with friends who share common interests, believe in us and bring out the best in us can have a positive effect on our physical and mental well-being. It's critical to be intentional about making time for friends.
- Foster Old-Fashioned Values
 - Help others through a volunteer project in the community. So often, we hear volunteers say they get more out of volunteering than the people or organization they're serving.
 - Be sincere and honest with one another
 - Be loyal
- Spend Time Together as a Family

- Something as simple as a weekly dinner together on the deck or patio or a family trip are great opportunities to slow down and connect with one another.
- Follow Healthy Routines & Habits
 - We know that exercise, nutrition and good sleep are crucial elements of a healthy lifestyle. It's important to go from knowing this to taking steps to improve in these areas.
- Limit Social Media
 - Balance is key. Schedule breaks from social media, and take the phone out of the bedroom at night. Know the pressure that teens feel to maintain a social media presence – one that often depicts an “ideal” life. Help your teen understand the truth behind filtered photos and posts on social media.
- Avoid Blaming & Criticizing
 - Blame and criticism can lead to resentment and distance in a relationship. Manage stress and emotions in positive and constructive ways.

Realize that your teen probably pays attention to 1% of what you say, but they notice 100% of what you do. Model positive behaviors.

The good news is that the teenage years are an ideal time to mold and shape teens' attitudes, habits, dispositions and outlook. It's important to remember that family life should focus on what is best for your child, not on your child being the best at everything.