

Teen Scene XX...A Real-Life Panel

BY VERONICA BENNETT

How do you get teens to talk to parents?

For a generation's worth of teens growing up in New York City, NYC-Parents in Action has answered this question by providing a forum for discussing teens' lives both in and out of school—what they do, where they go, how they cope. This year, an impressive group of 15 students from a variety of independent day schools and one boarding school took the stage in early February for NYC-Parents in Action's annual Teen Scene, co-sponsored with the Parents League of New York.

Lucy Martin-Gianino, moderator of Teen Scene since its inception, guided the teens through the relevant topics of the day. As always, she asked the questions parents sometimes struggle to ask. Her respect for the teens on the panel encouraged a candid and informative discussion. And we—the parents in the audience—were grateful to have her open a window on the lives of teens in New York City today.

Stress and Schedules

The tightly-scheduled, stressful lives of today's teens was an easy topic of conversation for the panelists, whose activities represent a full array of high school sports, clubs, summer jobs and community service. Weekdays and weekends alike are filled with academic and extracurricular "obligations," with little time left for relaxation. Some students expressed true joy and

interest in their activities, describing them as welcome diversions from schoolwork and a way to unwind and socialize with friends. Others viewed them more as necessary requirements for the college application process. Those students were more likely to feel that

...eventually every teen is faced with the decision whether or not to smoke, drink or take drugs....

Saturday night provided the only opportunity for fun. One sophomore described high school as "one big, long hyperventilating experience," and said that she would breathe in college. Most panelists agreed that some level of stress is okay and helps with achievement, and one described school as the perfect place for students to learn to deal with pressure without help from parents.

Alcohol, Drugs and the Antidote of Communication

While some students relax on the sports field or by hanging out with friends at home, all panelists agreed that eventually every teen is faced with the decision whether or not to smoke, drink or take drugs or go to clubs or parties where such activities are encouraged. Several panelists concurred that these things "will be in your kids' life" by the seventh grade, give or take a year. From home liquor and medicine cabinets, to stores and restaurants that don't card properly, to parents who actively provide alcohol and pot, teens can "get anything" in New York. Alcohol is the drug of choice for most teens, with a few even bringing spiked water or soda bottles to school. Prescription drugs too are becoming more popular for in-school use, while pot is reserved mostly for weekend social use. Cocaine was described as a "girly" drug, while

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Thank you to the NYC-PIA board members for their hard work, to our advisory board members, and to our facilitators. And thanks to the independent school parents who have supported our activities with attendance and contributions.

PRESIDENT'S Letter

Spring 2006

Each year at NYC-Parents in Action we develop our program theme for the following year, looking for trends in the areas of child development, health, learning issues, and substance abuse prevention. We listen to professionals on our advisory board, to parents in our facilitated discussion groups, and, of course, to our own kids at home.

Our theme for next year is “Lost in Space: Parenting in a Media-Driven World.” The idea resonated with all of us, since we’re raising our kids in a revolution. The world transformed by the computer, the Internet, and digital media is full of contradictions. On the Internet, we have access to a diverse global community, and yet we’ve become more isolated in front of our monitors. Private, intimate thoughts have become public in the boundless forum of “blogs” and MySpace. Our media present an uneasy mixture of celebrity adulation and earnest self-examination.

Psychologists and sociologists have charted our families’ changing landscape with many disturbing studies and perceptions: on the loss of a voice in adolescent girls; the emotional illiteracy of boys; a girls’ culture of aggression; a boys’ crisis of confidence; stress and emotional fallout on both genders in an increasingly competitive world; and our tendency to micro-manage our children’s lives well into college. As I considered these subjects, I found myself asking questions:

Are we really comfortable with the “new norms?”

The new childhood has a rapid social and academic pace. By age seven, our kids have been nudged by the media and marketers into their “tweens.” Social groups, like cliques, form earlier in grade school; when kids master the keyboard, bullying can move into instant messaging. It is assumed that students will work above standard grade levels, and that by high school they will do college-level work. This hectic pace may be fine for some, but for others it may be too much, too soon. Are eleven-year-olds really ready to go dancing in a club, or ninth graders to spend Saturday night in Soho, or seniors to travel alone for spring break? Should we expect every kid to

manage several AP classes? If we determine that a breakneck social and academic velocity doesn’t work for our own children, can we step back, slow down, or say “no”?

A rewe in seventh grade forever?

One of the authors who studies mean girls recently noted that Queen Bee Moms and Kingpin Dads may be the real powers behind the throne. Psychologists pose constructive ways for dealing with socially aggressive kids and adults: speaking up in a non-confrontational way, engaging in positive “win-win” negotiation. But another option is to turn attention away from them and focus on others who are receptive, and who share our interests and values. We readily apply skepticism to the celebrity culture—to those who are celebrated not for talent but for their publicists’ skills. Can we help our kids apply the same skepticism to the cool group in the classroom? Can we share with them our perspective and social observations? These questions presume that we’re not enthralled by the kids at the “cool table” ourselves.

Can we have “little town blues” in New York, NY?

In this city there is a different world on each block, sometimes in each room. And yet, in an independent school, where kids enter in kindergarten and may stay for thirteen years, the world can feel small and insular. We have many chances to bring kids into different spheres—sports, choral singing, dance, acting, community service—and to introduce them to a diverse population and different values. Can we give our kids the gift of a broad, city-wide education? Can we inform their choices for college and beyond by introducing them to things completely apart from their school world?

Many of us are about to do just that, as we send our kids to camp, summer programs, and foreign destinations. When we return in the fall, we’ll be bringing you a calendar of seminars, another issue of our newsletter, and many new features on our Web site (www.parentsinaction.org). Our best wishes for a happy, healthy and expansive summer.



AIMEE GARN

—AIMEE GARN

Are We “Too Wired”?

BY MARY BETH HARVEY

As a college student in the 80's, I remember many a paper typed in the wee hours of the morning as I redid a line with Wite-Out or Correctape. We had no computers for spell checking, and certainly no Internet to help in the research. Things have really changed, for better and for worse.

As computer use and the Internet allow us to research subjects, communicate with others a world away, and write and edit to our hearts' content, it has also opened up a scary world of accessible information, real-time photography, pornography, and child predators. There is no time to edit our thoughts and, although communication is high, the art of communication is low. I heard one mother say, “I knew something had to change when my family started emailing one another from inside the apartment.” What has happened to the art of talking?

On January 31st, NYC-Parents in Action hosted Special Agent Kent E. McCarthy, a U.S. Secret Service Agent in the New York Field Office who is dedicated to educating kids and their parents about the dangers of Internet use. In his first example, he walked the crowd of over 200 guests through the Internet journey of how much information one can find out about a person. “Teresa” did not list her age or gender on a posted profile. She did state the name of her brother Bobby Jr., and mentioned a school game she would attend. In moments we knew her real name, interests, mother's name, brother's name, telephone number and email address. With the use of map search and online phone books we found her address, possible school and pictures. Lesson: Be careful what you post, even vague references can be tracked.

McCarthy quoted several stunning statistics—there are more than 30 million children in the United States who use the Internet. Of children ages 10-17:

- 1 in 4 have had an unwanted exposure to sexually explicit pictures
- 1 in 5 have had an unwanted sexual solicitation

Agent McCarthy's Internet Tips for Parents

- 1 Establish rules for Internet use. Determine what sites your child can visit. Who can they talk to and how long can they be on line?
- 2 Decide where can they use the computer. Like many experts, McCarthy recommends keeping the computer in a public/common room. If your child has a wireless laptop or handheld Internet-capable device, it's equally important to discuss rules of use.
- 3 Discuss with your child the importance of telling you or a trusted adult if something ever makes him or her feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused while online.
- 4 Communicate, be informed, and learn what you can about the Internet. Ask your kids to show you the places they go and keep your cool while they do.

- 1 in 17 have been threatened
- 1 in 33 have had an aggressive sexual solicitation

These statistics represent reported incidents, while most have not been. Only 25% of the youths who encountered a sexual solicitation told a parent. Less than 10% of this group reported it to authorities. Yet, the majority of these incidents took place from a home computer (70%) or a friend's computer (22%). Who are the offenders? Virtually all are males acting alone, and more than three-quarters are older than 25.

Crime has increased because of access to children and teens through the Internet. It can be as simple as a school posting a sport schedule and a predator being aware of the Web site, teens posting a picture and information on one of the many sites used for socializing: MySpace, Friendster, Xanga, Match.com, FaceBook. Agent McCarthy's advice—never post your picture on the Internet. Remember photos can

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COMMON SENSE ABOUT THE MEDIA

One of summer's mixed joys is the rash of new "hot" media releases, some of which leave parents cringing or heading for the exit door. The free, nonprofit Web site <http://www.common sense media.org> keeps us cool with up-to-the minute reviews, parenting tips, substance abuse research, a weekly newsletter and even space for parents and kids to share opinions.

The site reviews all new children's and teen's media, from movies, TV, and video releases to books, music, and games. Reviews supply an age recommendation and detailed info on content relating to sex, violence, language, social behavior, alcohol/drug/tobacco use, and even commercialism. Check online first and you can sit back, relax, enjoy the show!

TEEN SCENE XX

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crushing and snorting Ritalin provides a similar high but is considered more rebellious and "macho."

The extent to which these substances become a predominant part of an individual's social scene depends on a range of expected reasons. Whether it is peer pressure, a desire to rebel, or a manifestation of coolness, most teens agreed that much will depend on the security of the teen and the quality of parent-child communication. Teens want to communicate with parents, but they don't necessarily feel that their parents will be open to discussion. One freshman thought it best to talk generally about what is in the social environment, rather than personal behavior.

Teens also understand the parents' role in setting limits. One teen said that "you need to teach your kids the lessons your parents taught you" while another said "your job is to tell your kid what is right and wrong." They do, however, want understanding. They want to be able to call their parents if they are in trouble without the fear of excessive punishment. There was debate over whether "grounding" alters future behavior, but greater consensus about the

effectiveness of appropriate consequences. One senior said, "I hate consequences, but I learn from them."

Sex

Like cigarettes, drugs and alcohol, sex and dating will become part of the general social scene somewhere around the 7th grade. While there are still some couples who date, more common is casual hooking up—which can range from "making out" to intercourse. One sophomore said that kids get drunk and hook up on the weekend and it's "totally forgotten about on Monday morning." Some girls on the panel warned that boys will stay sober but encourage girls to drink to be able to take advantage of them. Sexual activity occurs "wherever you can think of," including movie theatres, clubs and apartments.

Most panelists agreed that there is some pressure to lose one's virginity before college, and one described the issue as "the most difficult decision a teen makes." Another teen said that an individual's school and religious community can have an effect on how much pressure is felt to have sex. All panelists who discussed the issue said that sex means intercourse and that oral sex simply is not considered sex in the eyes of today's teens. The panelists said they were well versed in the methods of safe sex, but when asked if they practiced safe oral sex, the question didn't register at first. One said that her friends viewed oral sex as safe sex, and a male panelist called oral sex with a condom "utterly ridiculous."

A Twenty Year Perspective

Lucy Martin-Gianino closed Teen Scene by reading the often-quoted poem "Children Learn What They Live" by Dorothy Law Nolte. In so doing, she reminded us that while we face new challenges, the simple gift of effective parenting is as relevant today as it was twenty years ago. ●

WEB VOLUNTEERS WANTED

Web Site Committee of NYC—Parents in Action seeks additional volunteers.

We're looking for people who are comfortable working with computers, want to gain skills in Web site development, and can meet weekly. Estimated time requirement is three hours a week. No programming skills or degree required.

For more information email Martha Leitner at martha.leitner@parentsinaction.org

The Parents of “Teen Scene”: Aftershock

BY VERONICA BENNETT

NYC-Parents in Action introduced “Aftershock” this year, a parents-only program for further exploration of the topics raised at Teen Scene. If Teen Scene is the forum for teens to tell it like it is, Aftershock is for parents to discuss how they feel about it and for professionals to advise how to deal with it. The Aftershock panel included Dr. Ralph Lopez, renowned pediatrician specializing in adolescent medicine, Dr. Bruce Polsky, Chief of the Division of Infectious Diseases at St. Luke’s-Roosevelt Hospital Center, and Lucy Martin-Gianino, long-time moderator of Teen Scene. Parents in the audience were invited to share thoughts about Teen Scene and to pose questions.

Communication

Dr. Lopez started the discussion by noting that the Teen Scene panel itself offers lessons in effective communication with teens. He observed that the teens did not discuss themselves and made only tangential references to their own behavior. Lucy Martin-Gianino, he said, eased conversation by letting the kids finish what they were saying, by listening to their answers and by not making judgments about their statements. Parents too can adopt this formula. Dr. Lopez suggests asking your teens what is in their environment rather than specific questions about who is doing what. He noted that even tame kids are exposed to a world with sex, pot, cigarettes and alcohol.

Dr. Lopez suggests asking your teens what is in their environment rather than specific questions about who is doing what.

Dr. Lopez reminded parents that it’s okay for them to say how they feel about an issue. If your teen tells you something, an appropriate response can be “I’m glad that you’re telling me this, but you know that I really don’t approve.” Dr. Lopez recommends not using discussions as a bully pulpit—once you have gotten your point across, don’t prolong the conversation. He also

said that it is not necessary to tell your children about your own youthful transgressions.

Sex and Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Dr. Polsky stressed that communication is also critical to sexual health and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). In the past five years, he has treated six teens in the independent school community infected with HIV. The initial response of the mother of one sixteen-year-old girl was “how could this be happening to us?” The myth that “this can’t happen to me” is mirrored in teens who assume that sexual activity is safe as long as they know their partner. Dr. Polsky asserted that STDs are “equal opportunity pathogens”—they infect regardless of class, education or financial status. Dr. Polsky also treats teens for gonorrhea (which can lead to infertility if untreated), chlamydia (the symptoms of which can be silent in girls and which can also lead to infertility if untreated), syphilis (a resurgent disease), herpes simplex and human papillomavirus (HPV), a leading cause of cervical cancer. Dr. Polsky explained that the immature cervix is especially susceptible to HPV and that the longer you prolong sexual debut in girls—to the age of 20 or even later—the better. While condoms help prevent STDs, they are not perfect and not used consistently. Dr. Lopez added that teens on birth control pills assume that sex without a condom is safe if both partners have tested negative for HIV. They forget that they still risk infection by other STDs.

Oral sex was raised first by a parent expressing the view that it is hard to believe that any thirteen-year-old girl would really want to perform it, or that any thirteen-year-old boy would be comfortable with the notion that he should want it performed. When one mother responded that girls were “empowered by it,” other parents were visibly stunned. Dr. Polsky agreed that some girls can find it empowering or feel that it is a way to fit in socially. They view it as an expected rite of passage and believe the myth that they won’t get infected with STDs, added Dr. Lopez. The doc-

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PIA-FACILITATED PARENT DISCUSSION GROUPS

Volunteers Wanted!

At NYC-Parent in Action discussion groups, the goal is to strengthen connections among parents and create a communications network that will be in place through lower, middle and upper school. The discussions, led by trained facilitators, provide a forum for an exchange of

ideas and concerns with other parents. We are looking to train new facilitators who are articulate, comfortable speaking in groups and interested in parenting issues. We are making a special effort to include fathers who would like to become facilitators.

If you are interested in learning more about facilitator training, or know someone with this interest, please call NYC-PIA at (212) 426-0240.

THE PARENTS OF “TEEN SCENE”: AFTERSHOCK

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tors also confirmed that most teens do not consider it to be sex and that boys do not want to have oral sex with condoms. STDs potentially resulting from oral sex include gonorrhea of the pharynx, herpes, HPV and HIV.

Because issues relating to sex and drugs are protected by doctor-patient confidentiality, Dr. Lopez stated that laws both protect teens and hurt them. For example, doctors are required by law to tell parents about common strep infections, but may not tell them about STDs. He said that it is critical for parents to get comfortable talking to their kids about sex in order to protect them.

Girls are performing oral sex but very rarely receiving it. When Dr. Lopez discusses the notion of boy on girl oral sex with boys in the 6th to 8th grades, he is met with responses such as “Are you out of your mind?” Perhaps a more appropriate question would be whether these teens are really mature enough to be engaging in oral sex at all. Or, as asserted by a mother of boys, shouldn’t oral sex be reserved for committed adult relationships— and preferably marriage?

Respect, Relationships and the Role of Alcohol

The conversation then turned to the broader issue of respect and relationships. The doctors said that parents need to counter stereotypes and talk with their sons and daughters about respect and sexual responsibility. They noted that some parents are proud that their sons are sexually active, and believe that it is the problem of the girl’s parents to protect their daughter. One parent said that disrespectful and stereotypical views are being reinforced in popular culture and music. Dr. Lopez recommends having dinners where all family members can engage in a dialogue about themselves and issues important to the family.

There is no question that alcohol reduces sexual inhibitions, and that boys will drink slowly while encouraging girls to drink more, said Dr. Polsky. Dr. Lopez advised girls to be particularly careful because they need less alcohol than boys of equal weight to get drunk. Dr. Lopez’s experience is that there are two categories of teen drinkers—those who purposefully drink to get drunk and those who don’t know how to drink but are trying to blend in. Parents need to model the right behavior and to discuss dangers. If a teen comes home drunk, don’t have a confrontation, says Dr. Lopez. Instead, discuss the situation with concern when the teen is sober the next day.

Setting Limits and Saying No

To meaningfully discipline teens, Dr. Lopez says that he doesn’t like punishments. He does believe that privileges can be forfeited, such as computer use, vacations or car use. What is important is that the consequence relates to the offense.

Parents also struggle with how to set limits on behavior without breaking the trust of their teen.

Parents also struggle with how to set limits on behavior without breaking the trust of their teen. One mother said that she trusted her daughter, but didn’t trust the environment of spring break. Dr. Lopez noted that every parent has a breaking point for what is acceptable—the key is to decide what those things are and hold to them. He suggested that footing the bill for a week of unsupervised spring break debauchery might be one. Dr. Polsky agreed that parents don’t say “no” enough, a thought echoed by several parents in the audience. ●

Top Ten Survival Tips for Middle School

BY PAMELA WEINBERG

There's no doubt that tremendous growth takes place in middle school, whether in the academic or social areas, or simply in the physiology of the kids themselves. But this exciting time also brings fresh challenges for parents and kids in the areas of communication, independence, organization and friends.

This winter NYC-Parents in Action and the NYU Child Study Center presented Independence in Middle School: Safety, Self-Reliance and Risk Taking featuring NYU's Harold S. Koplewicz, M.D., Lori Fleckenstein Evans, Ph.D., and Joshua Mandel, Ph.D. Also speaking was parenting expert and author Charlene C. Giannetti. The experts shared tips for navigating this tricky time:

1. Puberty increases a desire for independence.

"Middle schoolers want to move away from you beginning now," said Dr. Koplewicz. "Separation in music, fashion, political ideas, etc. begins to occur." Allow kids their independence while making your home a warm, loving place where your child and friends want to spend time.

2. Parents still retain influence.

At this time, middle schoolers will develop their own social network based on intimacy with friends and common interests. The search for friendship and acceptance among peers becomes more important to them, "but never more important than the influence of parents," said Dr. Koplewicz.

3. Identify goals and support them with organization skills.

Dr. Koplewicz advised parents to acknowledge their middle schoolers "vocational or educational goals" and help children move towards them. Whether it is finishing a difficult novel or mastering algebra, parents can help kids by being involved with schoolwork and homework planning. Organization is difficult for middle schoolers, particularly because this is the time when their brains go from "country roads to a super-

highway." Make sure they have a clean, open, easy-to-maintain work space.

4. Talk, talk, talk.

Dr. Mandel stressed the importance of communication. Discuss your child's day, as well as expectations regarding homework and organization. Monitor successes and difficulties and make dates for specific times to be together. Plan family dinners as often as possible, and watch TV shows together to use as a springboard for discussing values. Sometimes it is easier to tackle important issues when your child is not looking right at you, like during a car ride.

5. Stay in touch academically.

"Do some homework with your kids," Dr. Mandel stated, "and keep in touch with your child's teacher to keep on top of what is going on. Middle-school teachers see the kids less and might miss a problem." Remain aware of their homework, tests and friends.

6. Watch out for self-esteem issues.

Middle school is traditionally a time when self-esteem can plummet. It is important to encourage and support your child's particular interests and passions. Children gain confidence from mastering these activities.

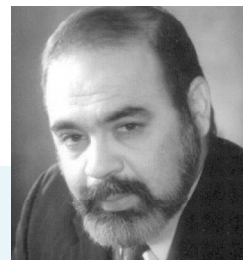
"The anonymous nature of the Internet allows kids to be meaner online than they would be in person."

7. Monitor Internet social communications and be aware of cyber-bullying.

One of the greatest new challenges for parents, said Charlene Giannetti, is monitoring the use of the Internet. "The Internet is the social life for many middle schoolers, and it is very hard to supervise," she said. Parents need to monitor their child's Internet use and be sufficiently informed to discuss the Internet intelligently. Kids spend big chunks of their time emailing, instant messaging, writing blogs, and using Web sites such as myspace.com. Cyber-bullying

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Q&A WITH DR. RALPH LOPEZ



The Talking Cure

BY EVA POMICE TIMERMAN

As parents of teens well know, they're not always the first people their children want to talk to. A pediatrician specializing in adolescence can help teens navigate normal academic and social stresses and provide a life-line to kids in trouble. NYC-PIA newsletter writer Eva Pomice Timerman talked with renowned pediatrician Dr. Ralph Lopez about the often delicate task of gaining teens' trust and helping them make healthy decisions. An associate professor of Cornell University's Weill Medical College, Dr. Lopez is the author of *The Teen Health Book: A Parents' Guide to Adolescent Health and Well-Being* and a NYC-PIA Advisory Board member.

Q NYC-PIA: What role can an adolescent doctor play in a teenager's life?

A LOPEZ: When I meet with a patient and parent for the first time, I tell them that I am their son's or daughter's doctor. Everything we discuss is confidential. However, I remind them that if there's something he or she feels mom or dad needs to know we will figure out how to tell them.

Q NYC-PIA: Why don't teens just talk to the pediatricians they've gone to since childhood?

A LOPEZ: Am I equipped to deal with a five-year-old's temper tantrum? No. Likewise, a pediatrician isn't always prepared to deal with teens' drug and alcohol issues. As an adolescent pediatrician, I deal with the psychological stuff, how to talk to teens is part of my training. If a teen has a relationship with his pediatrician that allows him to telephone without needing mom or dad, or to make a weekend call and say "Hey doc, the condom broke," that's what matters. You just need to be there for kids.

A perfect example is the phone call I just got. One of my patients, a high-school senior, called me because the girl he was having relations with over the weekend was told her birth control might not be as effective because she was on antibiotics. What was interesting to me is that girl could have called her doctor but she didn't. She was afraid he wouldn't be receptive. But I'd been there for my patient on other issues, stuff about his performance at school, so I passed his test. I was a resource for him and he felt comfortable enough to call me.

Q NYC-PIA: Are children sometimes hesitant to confide in the family doctor or, for a girl, her mom's ob-gyn?

A LOPEZ: The problem with the family doctor or with the mother's ob-gyn is that from the teen's perspective there are issues of confidentiality. Those doctors may seem to come from a different perspective: loyalty to the mother. I've had kids say: "I can't talk to Dr. Jones. He delivered me."

Q NYC-PIA: In an age when extended families rarely live near one another and many nuclear families are fractured, do doctors sometimes stand in as important adults in children's lives?

A LOPEZ: In families with absent parents, a doctor can be viewed as an extension of the family. I get a fair number of single moms saying to me, "I know my son has some questions. I can't answer them."

Q NYC-PIA: How do you gain a teen's trust?

A LOPEZ: Most of the times kids like having their own doctor because they feel somebody is in their corner. I may not always agree with them, but I'm listening to what they have to say. In conflicts with their parents, kids feel I'm neutral. They know I won't judge them.

Q NYC-PIA: What about issues of confidentiality? Can you tell parents if you think their child is engaging in risky sexual activity or drug use?

A LOPEZ: In New York, I have to tell you that your son has strep throat, but I can't tell you that he has a sexually transmitted disease and he got it doing cocaine at an orgy. Issues of sex, sexually-transmitted diseases and pregnancy are confidential in New York State.

The reason behind the law is that it is better for kids to feel they have access to medical care. Interjecting parents prior to getting care could interfere with kids getting care.

Q NYC-PIA: Isn't it sometimes difficult to comply with that requirement and still do what's best for your patient?

A LOPEZ: It's a very fine line between full confidentiality with a teen and doing right by the parent and the teen, if the teen is struggling with a serious issue. In the case of pregnancy, for instance, I don't try to influence them, which would be totally inappropriate. But I've been able to talk almost every one of my patients who has become pregnant into informing her parents.

Q NYC-PIA: How does stress affect kids in the New York City independent school community?

A LOPEZ: Many kids handle it. It's a matter of whether your son or daughter is at the right school with a reasonable amount of downtime. But kids do get headaches, stomachaches, and backaches from sitting at the computer. They eat too much or drink too much caffeine. And when it's time to play they want to let loose too hard and that sometimes involves drugs and alcohol.

Q NYC-PIA: If you suspect a patient has a drug problem, how do you help him without compromising his privacy?

A LOPEZ: Legally, I'm not allowed to reveal it, unless I think the teen's life is in danger. If I have a kid who smokes a joint once in a while, do I want him to do it? No. I tell him I think pot is a problem and what's wrong with it. If his mom calls me and asks whether he's doing pot, I say: "Why don't you do a drug screen?" But I don't order it without that request. I had one situation in which a girl was doing a fair amount of cocaine. She was a junior in high school, 17, and I told her, "You've got to tell mom and

dad. It's now out of hand." She told me she would sue me. I told her she could sue me, but that if she didn't tell her parents soon, I would drop her as a patient and that would lead them to ask why. She told them and we got a plan together and found a drug counselor.

I had parents call me and say, "My daughter is losing weight and has a constant cold." I said: "Please put it together. Get a urine screen".

Q NYC-PIA: What are the limits of your role?

A LOPEZ: Parents sometimes want me to step in and do the parenting. I can't be the parent. They'll say, "Will you ask her to do a drug screen? I can't because she'll get angry." If a kid is drinking heavily and I find out there's alcoholism in the family, the family has to deal with that problem first. I also won't act as a referee between parents who disagree. Your job as a parent is to be tuned in enough to figure out when something is wrong and when you need an intervention. My job is to help with the intervention.

SURVIVAL TIPS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL

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(using online technology to tease and torment others) is more common than in-school bullying these days. Unfortunately, said Giannetti, "the anonymous nature of the Internet allows kids to be meaner online than they would be in person." Often, online bullies continue their bullying at school.

8. Emphasize the importance of privacy.

Ms. Giannetti also emphasized that parents need to make sure children understand the difference between what is public and what is private on the Internet. Many middle-schoolers have blogs (web logs) that express their innermost feelings that can be read by anyone with a computer. Sometimes what kids say on their blogs can be used to harm them emotionally.

9. Don't be afraid to talk about intimacy and sex.

"Explain to your kids why they shouldn't talk about private things in a public space," states Dr. Koplewicz. This is time of great experimentation for kids and it is important to talk to your kids about intimacy and sharing your body. According to Dr. Koplewicz, the trigger of puberty brings about brain changes that cause middle-schoolers to engage in riskier behavior.

10. Put yourself in their shoes.

Be kind and empathetic. Try to remember what it was like to be in middle school, and be open to hearing your children's views on music, friends, politics, etc. They may have different views than you do, but respect what they have to say and guide them by example. As Giannetti advised, "it is important to set limits in behavior, but also to remember what you did as a middle schooler and be realistic." ●

ARE WE TOO “WIRED”?

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be used by a predator both to find children and to assume the online identity of a child in order to lure other children into the predator’s confidence. Pictures posted on the Internet are no longer your own. The Internet is global, and this is a global issue.

As I edit this article I am away with my children in an old-fashioned place where bingo, backgammon, riding bikes, playing cards and hanging out are the popular activities. No one is wired, few iPods are seen, and kids are actually talking! In the world McCarthy has described we all have to be knowledgeable and prepared for the dangers and appropriate use of the Internet. For all of the amazing things the Internet has given us, I’ve loved this family time when all of us weren’t “too wired”! ●

In October, NYC-PIA plans to host another free, public seminar with Special Agent McCarthy.

NYC-Parents in Action, Inc. invites speakers to present their opinions and expertise on specific topics. Their opinions and comments are not necessarily those of NYC-PIA.

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If you’d like to be in touch with NYC-Parents in Action, you can reach us at:

MAILING ADDRESS: NYC-Parents in Action, Inc.
P.O. Box 287451 – Yorkville Station
New York, NY 10128-0025

TELEPHONE: 212-987-9629

NYC-Parents in Action Administrator: Penny Spangler
NYC-Parents in Action Web site: parentsinaction.org

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P.O. Box 287451 – Yorkville Station
New York, N.Y. 10128-0025

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