

Community Institute for Psychotherapy

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2021-2022 News & Notes



April 2021 News and Notes

Raising Wise Girls: What Parents Can Do

By Robin Joy Berenson, PhD, LMFT

At the outset of her presentation, “Raising Wise Girls: Helping Girls Develop Self-Esteem in the Age of Social Media,” **Sierra Dator, LCSW**, explained that growing up in a digital landscape is a very different experience than what we adults knew in adolescence. While social media has much to offer teens, its use has also been a significant contributor to a rise in adolescent depression and anxiety. Parents can help mitigate social media’s negative impact by offering their daughters high levels of social and face-to-face connection. These are key to bolstering both self-esteem and resilience.

Dator identified three tools for building daughters’ self-esteem: encouragement from parents and other important people; maintaining connections with people they value as well as making new connections; and the development of a value-rich life through connection with the self and interest in issues and activities larger than themselves.

Dator explained that it’s important that parents “show up.” Be present for your daughter and provide opportunities for her to connect with you. Take family time together away from home, connect through nature. Express interest in her activities, asking “What did you see online?” and “How was school today?” Stay open to her views, giving room for her opinions that may be different from your own. Compliment her about what you’ve noticed or relay positive comments others have shared about her. Encourage her connections with extended family members, and other important people.

Activities such as yoga and meditation can work to build a strong connection with self. Parents should also encourage participation in what interests her to help find her own purpose and meaning. This might involve volunteering, social issues, work or travel, the arts, and so on. Share your own process and feelings.

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Resilience is an essential trait for everyone. It enables individuals to thrive, despite hardship and challenge, and to bounce back from stress, loss and setbacks. Dator offered these guidelines:

- 1) Allow life to happen. Realize that sheltering your daughter from setbacks, disappointments, and other unfortunate events, will work against her ability to develop resilience and to learn from these experiences.
- 2) Let her know it's important for her to feel her feelings and not avoid or numb them, particularly through devices or other distractions. Numbing is especially dangerous because it causes us to lose our connection to ourselves, our feelings, and can lead to addictions.
- 3) Model self-care; demonstrate how to meet basic nutrition, sleep, and hygiene needs on a daily basis, and minimize or avoid harmful activities. This includes the amount of screen time each the day. Collaborate with your daughter on setting reasonable limits.
- 4) Help your daughter understand that life brings changes. Recognize that friendships, relationships, all things are temporary.
- 5) Teach self-compassion. Let her know that some failure is inevitable. "You don't have to be perfect to be worthy." Resilience will give her the ability to bounce back.

Sierra Dator is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with a private psychotherapy practice in Petaluma, CA, with over 19 years' experience helping girls and families work through challenges of low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression.