

Phoenix School Counseling, LLC
Dr. Steve Kahn, Ph.D, L.P.
2697 East County Road E White Bear Lake, MN 55110
stevekahn@comcast.net 651-426-4297 www.drstevekahn.com

Beginning of Their Journey

The summer after high school is either the end of their childhood or the beginning of their journey, depending on how we choose to view it. Their world lies ahead of them with so many opportunities. If we are not careful, we might focus too much on what we, or they, could have done differently or on how things would have looked at this time “if only.” That is a good trap to avoid.

As always, try to keep your focus on the space between you and your teenager, rather than between your teenager and their new adventure. They have so much to think about, and so much to sort through. Their friends will be scattering to their own futures, and the security of the familiar is about to be replaced with the insecurity of the unknown. Expect a roller coaster summer.

Your “little boy” or “little girl” is a high school graduate. They may have to convince you, and themselves, that they will not miss you in September. And they may try to accomplish this by being completely obnoxious and self-absorbed for the next three months! They may act as if they deserve the Nobel Prize for graduating high school, as if no one has ever accomplished such a thing before.

Try to remember that they have a lot to deal with emotionally, even if all they seem to do is hop from one graduation party to another, with endless laughter and endless tears, and a summer of goodbyes. But they only have 18-year-old skills and 18-year-old emotions to see them through this time. Instead of judging them, worrying and intruding, let go of their list of things to do, and hang on to the connection. In the end, it is really all we have.

And that brings us to the end of this book, as well. The last point I want to make is about how much this book is asking you to do.

It is easier for me to convey to a parent in my office, rather than through the written word, that I know how hard it is to do this work. Please know that it is hard for everyone. The four general principles (disciplining with reassurance, honoring sovereignty, protecting the connection and presenting our lives as models) sound like fluff, until you try to parent according to them every moment of every day, no matter what your children are doing. Very few of us were parented in this kind and gentle way.

You may ask, and I have wondered, how realistic is it to ask you to develop new viewing skills so you will be able to use every mistake and disappointment in a way that moves your children towards their long-term goals? The families where I live are just as “crazy busy” as your family is. Many parents have told me in exactly these words that, “it is all we can do just to get through the day.”

While our goal is to parent insightfully every minute of every day, very few of us can achieve that goal. However, I believe that *we can set our goals that high, build in self-forgiveness, and parent according to these principles as often as we can*. Baseball players do not get a hit every time at bat, and we probably do not have to go ten for ten either. And we can use the times when we are worn out, and act in a way that we later regret, to teach about forgiveness and humility. Our children will need to know how to forgive themselves for mistakes they make, and we can show them through our model how it is done.

The principles require hard work, keeping the long-term goals in focus is hard work, and understanding our blind spots is hard work. Judging feels like parenting to a parent with that blind spot. And it is the same with the worrying, intruding and hesitating blind spots. Developing insight into our blind spots can be freeing. It helps us connect with our children in a way that allows us to see them for who they are and to see what they need to learn. When we parent with that kind of insight, we will be able to make the moments count.

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