

**Wellesley Middle School - Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO)  
Minutes from the FRIDAY, February 27, 2015 Meeting**

Welcome – Catherine Mirick welcomed everyone to the PTO Meeting

(Quick announcements – order forms for the mini marathon tee-shirts coming home; cost is \$10)

Speaker: Joani Geltman, Blog: [joanigeltman.blogspot.com](http://joanigeltman.blogspot.com), [www.joanigelman.com](http://www.joanigelman.com)

Adolescent Psychology – The Parent Version

[Joani Geltman book is available. The book provides 80 stand-alone tips on different topics, i.e., “Spin the bottle and any other sexual situations.” The book discusses the problem on each topic from a developmental standpoint and then provides parents with strategies on how to deal with the situation.]

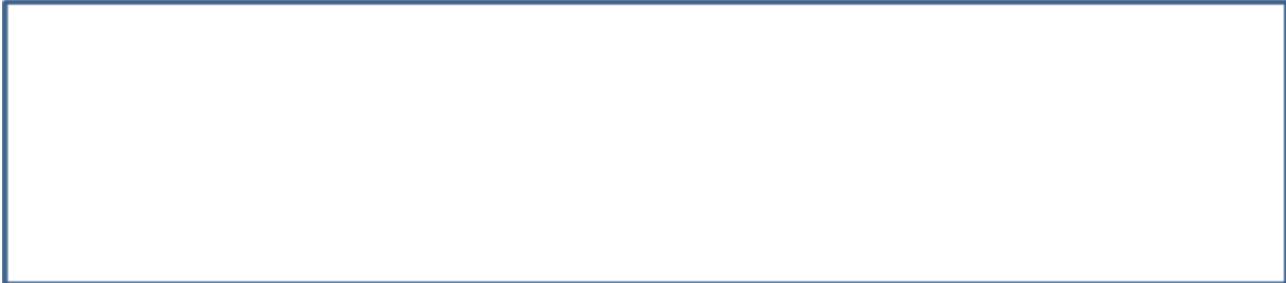


Slide #1 -- Changes in the brain – connections made in adolescence (period of 5-7 years) equals the number of brain connections made in the first 18 months of life – lots of change.

- Brain on overload
- Too many new feelings
- Too many new thoughts
- Too many new worries

- Middle school particularly difficult because so many differences between the kids both physically and psychologically/emotionally. The new brain connections and feelings impact many parts of their lives including changes in what had been long-term friendships.
- Kids are exercising their new brains and looking for friendships (no longer based on conveniences and parents' friendships). Looking for friendship with commonality. Kids are able to analyze now in a way they were never able to do so before; looking at things more deeply; new feelings that they have never experienced before, i.e., they have never dealt with sexual feelings – they do not have experience with these feelings and they do not know how to deal with them. Middle school comes with new worries as well – realizing the future can be impacted. The kids start to realize that you (parents) care more about how they are doing in school and now they are worry about it as well; worry about how they look and what others think of them; lots of new worries.

- At this stage, girls are very dramatic and easier to read. It is harder to read the boys – they have the same worries as girls but they may not have the expressive tools to tell you about them so you need to be aware of this fact and help them. Let them know that they are not crazy for having these feelings – acknowledge the feelings. Give them coping mechanisms.
- In elementary school, kids want to tell you about their day. In middle school, this changes and kids really tell you nothing. You ask them about their day and the kids basically grunt. Parents either get upset about the rudeness – that was a disrespectful way to talk to me and then kid responds inappropriately and you take away their technology. Another approach to the grunt – parent red flag goes off – did something happen, all okay? Kid says it was fine and parent is even more scared. Here is what is going on? Changes in brain, many feelings, kids are trying to figure out how to deal with it (i.e., kid tripped on stairs getting on bus and worry about what others kids think of them) – hyper level of sensitivity about themselves and what other people think of them at this stage.
- Kids have many worries – tripped on bus, spilled sauce on themselves, raised hand and got wrong answer, got embarrassed, etc. – kids do not list all of these things out when they speak to their parents. How should you respond? There are times when you do not need to teach the lesson about the grunt being rude. Let them have some time. Wait until later and ask how the quiz went today. How kids communicate with you is impacted by your tone. Keep a neutral tone – sometimes kids think you have a tone even when you do not. Parent voice/tone will get your kids to shut down.
- Advice – (1) be aware of tone; and (2) be aware that kids are full of items in “Slide #1” so give them some space and ask questions later on.
- What is underneath this emotionality? Study done of both adults and kids; scan done of brain when certain tasks done and the assumption was that the brain of kids and adults would be impacted the same way. This did not happen. The scans showed that the adults responded as expected. But the teens saw the human emotion differently. The teens got the emotion wrong. Teens live in an emotional brain and adults live in a learning brain. Literally we are living in a different brain than our kids. Kids mislabel.
- Kids feel, rather than think. The emotional brain is driving them. That’s why when you ask kids what were you thinking when they did “it” – well they were not thinking. Because of emotionality – really high highs and low lows.



Slide #2 – four ways of fighting

- (1) the “gotcha” ones
- (2) the “no” ones
- (3) the “pushing buttons” ones
- (4) the “crossing the line” ones

The “gotcha” fights –

- Kids are looking at parents more deeply during this time period and seeing that their parents are not perfect for the first time. The kids have an ability to think more deeply and are very critical of their parents. Our kids want to give you an honest appraisal of what they think of you and what they are saying is not necessarily different than what we think. The difference is that we know not to say it.
- Some of the things that kids criticize their parents about are snarky. This is really the first time that kids realize their parents are normal and it makes them feel better about themselves that parents are normal and not perfect. Do not give your kids the ability to make your feel bad. Do not say, “That is a hurtful thing to say.” Do not let them know they have this power. When they give you one of those gotcha comments, give them a pinch on the cheek (gently) and say you are so cute when you are being a brat. Take all of the fun of their being snarky. They want you to respond to and if you do not do so, you are taking away the fun of it. Do not feed into the snarkiness. Give a response that has an impact on them. If it does not affect you the way they want it to do so, they will stop doing it.

The “no” fights –

- Once kids hit middle school, they think there are a lot of things they can now do. Kids in middle school are role playing and practicing for being teenagers. They think they should be able to do things that older kids can do. They do not ask parents for permission but rather just present it as fact that they are going to do something. Adolescence is a time with a lot of no. You say “NO” when you feel the request is either unsafe or inappropriate. If you are clear on where you stand

on that issue, it is easier. In the kids head, they are already doing the thing they are asking you about and in their head it is a yes so when you say “no”, it is hard on them. They go crazy because of your no response. It is not realistic of you to think they should react any other way. The kids are not going to say, “Good parenting call. Thanks for teaching me that lesson.” They are mad. You as parents know what is right so you need to respond differently than the kids – stay in control, say your no, let your kids know that you are in their corner. Say, “I get it. I get that you are disappointed” and then shrug you shoulder. The shrug is the period at the end of the sentence. Nothing else to say. This tells your kids that you understand and know that they are angry but nothing left to be done – no room for compromise.

#### The “pushing buttons” fights –

- It is easy to have your kids push your buttons and they like to do it. The longer they can keep you at it, the more their chances improve that they will get what they want from you. This is how to respond to this situation. Teach the kids how to pull it back in -- this is a life skill that you need to demonstrate so that they can learn it and use it in the future. Stop and in the calmest voice tell your child that “we need to take a break” – acknowledge that you are both out of control --- then go somewhere. Do not expect your kid to go somewhere. You should go somewhere. Go get a cup of coffee at Dunkin Donuts (do not just go into the kitchen); go for a walk; go to your room for 15 minutes. Kids have no investment in stopping this confrontation so you need to walk away. Some kids are great chaser so if you have such a kid, stop and stand in front of them and tell them you are taking a shower, taking your clothes off– no kid wants to talk to their parents naked so this will achieve your goal. After break, go back to the child and say, “I would like to hear what you have to say.” (Do not tell them what you want to say, let them tell you what they wanted to tell you.) Maybe it is something that you can work out a compromise now that you are both calmer. Maybe it is not.
- You want to get to a place where your child feels that you understand them and they want to tell you how they feel. Do not get mad at the kids for not thinking things through because they simply cannot do so – their brains are just not there.

\*\* In adolescence, it is not about control over your kids but about your relationship with them and their respect of you that will get them to do what you want.

#### The “crossing the line” fight –

- We all have different lines but once your kid goes to that place, here is what to do – (do not go to taking away technology because they know they will get it back) – when kids go to that place of disrespect that is unacceptable to you, do the following – Part 1-- stop as if they have slapped you in the face and in a calm voice say, “Wow, I cannot believe you would say that.” Walk away. Part 2 – send the message that this is a relationship violation. When a kid crosses the line, they have gotten it out of their system and they forget about it. You have not. They will come back to

you at some point for something, i.e., ride to game, etc., you will say to them, “You know honey, I would love to do that for you, but because of what you said or did to me yesterday, I do not feel like doing that for you.” Kids have to understand that there are consequences for their behavior and that relationships are reciprocal. For example, if you do not give them a ride, they may get in trouble and their coach will be upset but that is life. There are consequences for their actions.

\*\* Stay calm and keep a neutral voice!!!



Slide #3 –I’m Not Thinking Straight

(1) Sequential thinking

(2) Driven to distraction

(3) Forgetfulness – strategies for remembering

- Kids at this stage do not think things through. The emotional brain gets them revved up and they do not think things through about consequences. This is something that they need your help with. Do not tell them what to do. Rather help them think through the situation. (Example – spin the bottle – kids at a boy’s house – not social kids – more nerdy kids – 3 girls/3 boys – all friends – in the basement at the house – not overly supervised because good kids --- one of the boys suggested playing strip poker – by the end of the game, three girls were in their bras and panties. Parents had never talked to the girls about this because they never thought they would be in this situation.) Say to your kids, you are going to be in situations when kids bring booze to a sleepover, want to play strip poker, play “snap roulette” –here is how to deal with the situation. If you are in this siltation, let’s talk about what you might do. Understand that your kids get caught up in their awesome brains and you need to talk to them ahead of time about possible situations and how to do with these situations. You need to prepare them for this situation and give them strategies on what to do. The girls did not want to play strip poker. They did not know what to do and how to handle it. You need to give them tools on how to get out of that situation. Say to the girls, “Let’s prepare for it. What could you say to those boys?” Possible response, “Why

would I want to get naked in front of you guys.” If it is a situation with alcohol, your child could tell the others they are taking medication and cannot drink or say they are sick and need to leave. As parents, you need to help kids get out of these situations.

- Kids get distracted quickly. Saying to our child, “don’t forget your book” is not a strategy. Help your child figure out a strategy that works for them. Say to your child, “I get that you are distracted in the morning (show support) and that you forget things, we need to figure out something together so that you can remember your stuff.” Work with your child to figure out what will work for them.



Slide #4 – Cell Phone Smarts -- this technology has added another level of hyper sensitivity for our kids as to what others think of them. To minimize the effect of social media parents need to take an active role and reduce the amount of time kids are on their cell phones --

- (1) Never ever a cell phone to bed
- (2) Limit number of apps downloaded
- (3) Enforce a daily two hour cell phone break
- (4) No cell use in the car for potential new drivers
- (5) Monitor cell phones for sexy pics/texts

- Your kids will get mad at you at first for not letting them have their phones, but eventually they will thank you. They will be relieved to have the excuse that they cannot be on it.
- Snapchat is bad!!! BAD BAD BAD -- it was developed by college students for sexting. If your kids want to send pictures, they can use Instagram or twitter. Kids are using snapchat as a way of making plans that their parents will not see. Snapchat is all about secrets. There is nothing you can do on snapchat that you cannot do on Instagram other than wanting to keep something secret.



Slide #5 -- No Apps –

- Snap chat
- Ask FM
- Yik Yak and
- Vine



Slide #6 – teen proofing home – this is not about trust but temptation – all about safety – they are not bad kids, but curious and need your help to stay safe

- (1) Lock up the liquor (including wine)
- (2) Empty house plans
- (3) Sneaking out
- (4) Backpack and water bottles
- (5) Prescription drugs – make them inaccessible – concern not just your kids but other kids.

Questions:

*How to deal with little lies?* Encourage truth telling; you do not want to set them up to lie to you. Find an alternative to what they would lie you about

*Any tips for creating a segway to having conversations to help kids prepare them for situations?* You want to work towards “what is your safety plan for the night?” Make the conversation time relevant. For example say, “I know you are going there tonight, let’s come up with some strategies” or “I get that this may be boring but we are going to talk about it anyway” or “I know you think it is stupid but I want you to be safe.”

*When does their thinking brain kick in?* College

*Any thoughts on sibling rivalry/fights?* Natural competition between siblings. In the end, they will be friends. Model respect for people and kindness. Part of it is a moment in time. Tell the offending person, I get that your brother or sister is annoying to you but your response was inappropriate and I (parent) will not do something for you (offending child) because of how you treated your sibling.

*Can you delay smart phone until college?* That would be my preference. You can get them a smart phone now and use parental controls – shut off safari, parent can only download apps, make it like a regular phone. Will make it less socially difficult for the child if you give them the smart phone (will make child feel like others) but you need to exercise parental controls.

Minutes submitted by Connie Burton