

What questions should adults ask students?

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The following responses to the above question are from a survey given to 9th and 10th graders at a parochial high school in Clyde Hill, Washington in 2016:

1) “How do older people’s negative outlooks on your generation (lazy, depended on technology) effect your life as a student?” “How can you use your electronic devices more, but for educational purposes?”

Kids pick up quickly when they are being judged or disrespected. Each generation is unique. My brother is six years older than me and my sister eight years. They were born during World War II with many restrictions, rationing and constraints. By the time I was born in 1951, my Father was out of the military and into a stable job, my parents had settled down and there were no more restrictions or rationing. We could have similarly been labeled lazy and dependent on technology, because we had a TV and a telephone (not everyone did). With each new

technological gadget that comes along, teachers need to flex and see how these may or may not be compatible with their classroom.

Currently, in our junior high school, cell phones are not allowed in class. Each student has a lockable pouch to sequester their phone for the day, only to be unlocked by a teacher at the end of the day, unless authorized for use in a particular class.

2) What was the most interesting thing in school that happened this year?

With so many students joining the “I hate school club,” asking what interesting thing happened this year might help the student avoid the “group think,” and focus on something good. Another question might be, “What was the most interesting class you took this year and what did the teacher do to make it interesting?” This would be quite informative. In all these questions teenagers think adults should ask them, is the overarching concept of viewing things from the students’ perspective. Whenever possible, physically or metaphorically, stoop down to see things from your students’ view. I will often kneel next to a

student's table while we discuss a difficult science concept or complicated graph for a lab report. First, it helps the student know that you think they are important and valuable, and secondly, it's hard to assume a haughty, know-it-all attitude when you are kneeling with your head lower than your student's.

3) How was your mental/emotional health?

Caring for what is happening to your students is paramount for the compassionate teacher. For the teacher who thinks they are doing a good job by being able to "get to" 50% of their students, they are in serious error. (This defense of another teacher came from the head of the department; a real situation I experienced in a public high school.) What happens to the other half of the class? Are these the definition of "throw away kids?" Are we going to focus only on the brightest and best students and shun those we feel are less capable? Regardless of our feelings, we have a moral obligation to make school a success for each child, to the best of our ability. Each child is valuable and needs our love and consideration. Being tuned in to their mental

and emotional health is a huge part of our duty. Teachers need to be consciously aware (if possible) of everything that touches their students' lives. Checking in with a student whose countenance has fallen may be the crucial step needed to give them permission to share their struggles with you. Of course, some students will never share their troubles with you, even if you are sure something has changed for the worse and ask directly. Nonetheless, I continue to let them know I care. Sometimes the best thing is to refer them to their guidance counselor to work out a difficulty.

4) "What is stressing you out?"

Be specific please. There are many students who suffer from school stress. "I am so stressed out! I have so much homework and my parents are pressuring me to raise my grades so I can get a scholarship to help pay for college tuition." "My parents are always arguing and my little sister is constantly bugging me to do stuff with her." "I'm glad I got my driver's license, but honestly, I'm afraid I'm going to kill

someone.” Then you hear, “You think that you’re stressed, let me tell you what’s happening with me . . .”

OK, we know kids are experiencing pressures, yet at times there is also competition for who can tell the most stressed-out story. We need to read between the proverbial lines to discern where intervention is needed and where it is not. A difficulty in this discernment is that a student who keeps repeating about how stressed they are, may turn that into a self-fulfilling prophesy. Repeatedly verbalizing negative words, reinforces negative thoughts. This illustrates, “you are what you eat.” If your diet consists of propagating negativity, you will end up becoming a negative person.

5# “How long does the average relationship last nowadays?”

Getting an insight on social relationship could be quite helpful. The tug-o-war, the inter-tension between the genders, plays an important role in school life. I always find it interesting to observe the couples that form on campus. Sometimes you just shake your head at combinations that are befuddling. The savvy, intellectual girl matches with the

academically struggling young man. The special education girl and guy form a pair, and you always wonder who catches the attention of the beautiful cheerleader or the handsome jock. It's not always who you might imagine. As to the duration of relationships, I have but to reference an incident from my own ninth grade, some many years ago. The school was having a fire drill. As was usually the case, the guys would hang out in one location along the athletic field fence and the girls formed in another gaggle. By the time the fire drill was over, the girls had all switched boyfriends, and the guys were totally confused, but went along with the female power play thinking, "This should be interesting. So, who am I matched with now?" So much for long-term relationships.

