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Celebrating Sisterhood in a Middle School Jungle

By Sarah Mohamed

(Campolindo Class of 2010, 2009 Sister-to-Sister Facilitator)



Sister-to-Sister

Photo Sophie Braccini

Saturday, March 7th will mark the 10th anniversary of the American Association of University Women's annual Sister to Sister Summit. The Summit is a one-day conference run by high school girls for middle school girls from JM, OIS, Stanley, and

WCI and the emphasis is to celebrate being a girl. It includes games, discussion groups, motivational speakers, crafts, and food. This year's Summit is jungle-themed and will be held at Orinda Intermediate School.

Middle school presents

trying experiences for many developing pre-teens and people often rush to AAUW coordinators to ask for the underlying message of the Summit. One needs to look no further than the attendees themselves. When asked what she thought the impor-

tance of a Summit for girls was, JM 8th grader Mina Lucacher explained, "Having a group of people to talk to takes the day-to-day pressure away." Lucacher added that girl-talk is important "because it's not good to bottle things up." Lucacher has participated in the summit twice, as has fellow JM 8th grader Sarah Vaughan. Vaughan gave her thoughts on having a summit for girls: "I think maybe it's because girls have always had a harder time; I mean boys just have to put on sweats and a t-shirt and they can leave the house—with girls, there's a lot more stress and having a Summit helps because it's nice to get guidance and hear what everybody else's problems are."

When signing up for the Summit, girls are asked to specify the discussion groups they would most like to participate in. Some of the topics include relationships, body image, cliques, bullying, peer pressure and families. It may seem like a large feat to get a

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bunch of reserved middle-schoolers together and ask them to delve into their personal lives. However, the young women feel better able to express themselves since it is a girls-only event. "You put me into a room with a bunch of boys and ask me to talk about my feelings and I won't say a word. Having just girls present helps communication. The high school girls help move things along. If parents were running the Summit, I'd probably fall asleep, you know? We get the same from teachers every day," said Vaughn.

As the registration period opens up, facilitators will be visiting the middle schools to tell girls about the Summit and to provide

brochures. Often, the girls worry that buddies will not be attending with them, but Lucacher made it clear that friendships can be made at the Summit: "I met a few people that I stayed in touch with through text and email." After all, who says that a few games, some slices of pizza, and a profound discussion of body image can't bring any two 12 year olds together?

The 2009 Sister-to-Sister Summit will be held on Saturday March 7th from 9:30-3:30. The Cost is \$30 and includes lunch and a t-shirt. Registration deadline is February 28th. For questions regarding registration, call (925) 942-0102. For more information visit www.aauwoml.org.

Ask Doctor Harold:

Are Our Kids Depressed?

By Dr. Harold Jules Hoyle, Ph.D.

Coming out of Pete's in Lafayette last week, a mother stopped me and thanked me for my column on ADHD. We had a short conversation during which she said, "You know, I think a lot of our Lamorinda kids are depressed." So here is your quick rundown on kids/teens and depression.

Depression is a rough disorder for us Americans. The pull-yourself-up-by-your-own-boot-straps culture is hard on those who are not always happy. It is almost un-American to say you are depressed. A quick Google search came up with 8,740,000 hits for positive thinking techniques. Amazon had 17,111 books with "Positive Thinking" in the subject or title. So in a culture obsessed with positive thinking, what do we know about kids who suffer from negative thoughts?

The US Department of Health and Human Services publishes rates as high as 1 in 8 adolescents suffering from depression. It is real and serious; it is not something people make up. Suicide and self-destructive behavior are the main dangers. If you think there is something serious with your son or daughter get it checked out by your pediatrician and then a mental health professional.

Secondly, depression is not just one thing. There are several "symptom areas" that include negative mood, negative thoughts, difficulty concentrating, restlessness, sleep problems, physical symptoms, loss of energy, self-destructive or aggressive thoughts, and aggressive or noncompliant behavior. When a child has enough of these and is overwhelmed then a diagnosis of depressive disorder can be made.

Depression manifests differently in youth than in adults. Most adults who are depressed have depressive symptoms (depressed mood). Many children and teens act out more when depressed. Imagine an adult at a holiday gathering getting bad news, they may get quiet, avoid the fun, want to go home early; they will shut down. A young person in that same situation might start screaming, arguing, acting irritated; they are more likely to act out.

The cause of depression falls into our usual three categories of physical, social, and psychological. Research indicates genetics, brain chemistry, levels of neurotransmitters, and metabolic functioning are all involved in depression.

When I was in Fiji last year and told people I worked

with children who were depressed, they didn't understand. How could a kid be depressed? The social lives of our youth are difficult. Children have to negotiate the dangerous world of making friends, dealing with groups at school, and knowing how to get social positives. Breaking the code of the social groups in today's schools is much more difficult than it used to be.

Psychologically kids are dealing with deciding who they are going to be. Kids often feel isolated and under enormous pressure. Teens are trying to figure out how to separate from their parents in a safe and secure way. They are dealing with relationships, drugs and alcohol, and sexuality. No wonder they don't want to take out the trash. The world has increased in its complexity without a whole lot of training for them on how to do get it all done.

So what are you likely to see and what can you do?

The depressed kids and teens I work with in the Lamorinda area are dealing with a lot of pressures. Younger kids have to deal with complicated social networks that can be exclusive and difficult to figure out. Older kids are dealing with incredible amounts of

school pressure on top of the previous mentioned issues. I had a kid tell me he was going to have to live in a bad neighborhood because he got a 0 on his math test which would drop his grade and that would "mess" with the college he wanted to get into. That math test held a lot more power than it should have. These pressures can hit teens hard. Kids/teens I work with describe it as feeling as if there is something wrong all the time but not knowing what it is.

One of the most valuable activities we can do with our kids is to pay attention. Pay attention to mood, thoughts, and activities. Remember, a psychological disorder happens when people get to the point of being overwhelmed. If we can help kids avoid becoming overwhelmed we are one step closer to being helpful. Be involved in their lives and make sure they take the time they need to do the activities that bring them energy. Maybe it is snow boarding, or a sandwich at Morucci's, or a trip to The Jungle with their friends. In any case, put yourself in their shoes and think of some things that you could do with or for them that would help relieve the Lamorinda pressure.

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Kindergarten Registration Starts Soon!

If your child was born on or before December 2, 2004, get ready for Kindergarten Registration Day! Kindergarten registration will take place at your neighborhood school on the dates and times listed below. You will need to bring several documents with you, including your child's birth certificate or passport, proof of residence, emergency contact information (your child's doctor and dentist) and a complete immunization record. You may also need your child's Social Security Number and a Report of Health Examination for School Entry Form. Check the school district websites for specific requirements. If you are not sure at which school you should register your child, please call the district office.

Lafayette School District

Registration dates are Tuesday, January 27th and Wednesday, January 28th at:
Lafayette Elementary, 950 Moraga Rd, 9:00am-12:00pm and 1:00pm-2:30pm (School office: 927-3570)
Burton Valley, 561 Merriewood Dr, 9:00am-11:00am and 1:00pm-2:30pm (School office: 927-3550)
Happy Valley, 3855 Happy Valley Rd, 9:00am-11:00am and 1:00pm-2:30pm (School office: 927-3560)
and Tuesday, February 3 and Wednesday, February 4 at:
Springhill, 3301 Springhill Rd, 9:00am-11:00am (School office: 927-3580)
District Website: <http://www.lafsd.k12.ca.us/>
District Phone: 927-3500

Moraga School District

Registration dates are Thursday, March 5th and Friday, March 6th:
Camino Pablo, 1111 Camino Pablo, 9:00am-11:45am and 1:15pm-3:00pm (School office: 376-4435)
Los Perales, 22 Wakefield Dr, 9:00am-2:00pm (School office: 631-0105)
Donald Rheem, 90 Laird Dr, 9:00am-2:00pm (School office: 376-4441)
District Website: <http://www.moraga.k12.ca.us/>
District Phone: 376-5943

Orinda Union School District

Registration dates are Monday, February 2nd thru Thursday, February 5th:
Del Rey, 25 El Camino Moraga, 9:00am-1:00pm (School office: 258-3099)
Glorietta, 15 Martha Rd, 9:00am-1:00pm (School office: 254-8770)
Sleepy Hollow, 20 Washington Ln., 9:00am-1:00pm (School office: 254-8711)
Wagner Ranch, 350 Camino Pablo, 9:00am-1:00pm (School office: 258-0016)
District Website: <http://orindaschools.org/ousd/site/default.asp>
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