

**PCN National Speaker Forum  
Dr. Michele Borba – Summary**

**February 7, 2011**

Dr. Michele Borba described the daunting challenges facing 21<sup>st</sup> century kids and parents. Children are experiencing profound levels of stress; early onset of eating disorders (age 7); a rise in cheating, shoplifting and lying; cyberbullying; greater promiscuity and sexting; and substance abuse using common home medicine cabinet items.

A recent UCLA study documents a serious mental health crisis on college campuses. According to researchers, this generation's incoming freshmen are smarter than ever, but have the poorest coping skills seen in 25 years. American youth raised in a hyper-competitive world are suffering such high levels of stress that statistics show a steep rise in freshman dropping out of college or committing suicide their first year.

**What can parents do to prepare children to leave home with resilient hearts and coping skills as well as strong minds?** Dr. Borba reminded us that a loving, committed parent & child relationship is the single greatest influence in developing a child's character. Three home conditions are most influential in healthy youth development: unconditional love and acceptance; reachable expectations; and respectful, democratic opportunities for children to be heard. Parental expressions of love and acceptance, clearly conveyed regardless of accomplishment, form the basis of kids' security. Watch that our children don't feel "my parents love me IF...or WHEN... I do certain things." Creating clear expectations and consistent structure that is less permissive helps build kids' self-esteem. Kids need routine family times and rituals (i.e. family dinners or a replacement) that provide opportunities to connect, be heard, and learn family values.

Socially responsible children need to develop a moral conscience. Dr. Borba's evening presentation focused on sharing practical strategies to help parents build moral intelligence. She encouraged parents to take home one new technique to weave into daily lives with our children.

**MORAL COMPASS**

One of the greatest gifts we give our children is a clear sense of our values. We want our children to "internalize us" so that the voice of our family values pops to mind when they solve problems and make choices. Borba challenged parents to fast forward 25 years imagining their child at graduation. What one trait would you like to see your child embody?

Use the TEACH acronym to help weave your virtues into everyday life.

**T= Target your key values**.....What do we stand for? Talk about it.

**E= Be an example**.....What virtue would kids catch from your behavior?

**A= Accentuate**.....Connect a virtue label to teachable moments, build rituals such as "what 2 kind things did you do for someone today?"

**C= Catch in the act**.....catch kids doing it right, explain why it's a virtue  
**H= Highlight Why**.....explain why your family believes the way you do.

### **LOSS OF FACE TO FACE CONNECTION**

In a world where children are “plugged-in” up to 7.5 hours a day, kids are losing the ability to read body language and personally convey body confidence. Bullying studies show that targeted kids consistently slouch, avoid eye contact and keep their head down. Face to Face skills rate highly throughout a child's life. Importantly, employers still value most a job candidate's ability to look eye-to-eye and shake hands firmly.

From an early age, we need to direct our kids **“to always look at the color of the speaker's eyes”** whenever talking with someone. This small prompt instantly straightens the body, conveys confidence and builds trust.

Children also need to practice attentive and reflective listening. Studies reveal that family dinner times provide a key window to overall emotional health. Family time spent together talking, sharing our day, and in doing so, conveying our core values, provides meaningful face-to-face connections.

### **COPING STRATEGIES**

Today's kids are under stress and parents should invest time in teaching concrete coping skills. Children need practice to regulate intense feelings and manage difficult situations. First, learn to identify your child's specific stress signals. Physical symptoms include: headaches, constant colds, sleeping or eating changes, rapid breathing, nausea, shaky hands, clenched jaw, sweaty palms. Emotional signals may include: irritability, acting out, general moodiness, clinginess, trouble focusing or thinking clearly. Learn what's “out of the norm” for your child.

Change what you can in your child's environment. For instance, reduce computer time prior to bed to promote better, sounder sleep. But importantly, **parents must teach concrete “stress reducers” or “stress replacers”, a ritual or action kids can perform when stressed.** Dr. Borba shared four strategies and advised parents practice and role-play these techniques together. “Let me Show you How it Works”:

**1. 1+3+10 = CALM (visual is three circles, 1, 3, 10)**

**1 = Say to yourself “Calm Down”**

**3= Take 3 Deep Breaths**

**10 = Count slowly to 10 (or down from 10)**

**2. CALM - A good technique to help Bully-Proof your Child**

**C= Cool Down (use imagery that helps your child chill)**

**A= Assert (say “Cut it Out” or come back w/ a line)**  
**L= Look Eye to Eye**  
**M= Mean It (use a firm sounding voice)**

- 3. Make a Stress box**  
Fill a box with fidgets, drawing tools, photos that remind a child of cool, calm places, an ipod loaded with soothing music.
- 4. Elevator Breathing**
  - 1 – Imagine you’re at the top floor of a tall building**
  - 2 – Take a slow breath**
  - 3- Push the lobby button**
  - 4- Let out your breath slowly and stress fades as the elevator goes down.**

### **PROBLEM-SOLVING**

Let’s teach our kids to solve problems so that they learn to make wise, independent choices and feel like masters of their own fate. Don’t always rescue your child. The ability to bounce back from problems to try again has a strong correlation to success.

- 1. Use the acronym “Take a STAND” to teach older children socially responsible problem-solving.**

**S = Stop and calm**

**T= Tell what’s Wrong.....state the problem factually without emotions**

**A= Assess alternates.....brainstorm solutions/directions**

**N= Narrow the choices**

**D= Decide the right path**

- 2. For younger children, teach them their hand is a “pocket problem-solver.” Have a child work through his situation using his hand as a prompt:**

**Pocket Problem solver – your hand:**

**Thumb = say the problem**

**Next three fingers = come up with 3 different ideas about what you can do**

**Pinky finger = Your decision, go do it**

- 3. Teach the steps to conflict resolution using real world examples of dilemmas to practice problem-solving. Find ethical dilemmas In the news media, literature book clubs, movies, celebrity spotlights, school assignments, etc. and work through different scenarios for handling situations.**

## **NURTURE THE NATURE**

Cultivate your child's natural areas of competence and talent to develop healthy, authentic self-esteem. Don't make it your goal to raise a prodigy, rather help your child know his own competence. Healthy self-esteem has two parts...

1. You have great characteristics
2. Knowing that you're competent and you can cope

It takes 21 days to build a new habit or reframe a personal image. Work on helping your child develop a sense of his own capabilities. Work on a trait goal until you see it internalized.

### **21 Day Reframing Project**

- **Target 1 or 2 traits you'd like to cultivate**
- **Praise child when earned**
- **Provide Opportunities to demonstrate a skill**

Watch out for labels and your child. Identify your child in redeeming ways that they can feel good about and incorporate in their self-image. For example, reframe hyper to spirited. Look for quiet affirmations that are true that can help "feed" your child at a time in her life when she really needs bolstering.

## **HOPE AND OPTIMISM**

Parents can help their child cultivate a positive, hopeful attitude about life. Be wary of the "mean world syndrome." Many children now see the world as a hard, hostile place which contributes to their stress. Counter persistent pessimistic news (tragedies, war, recession, etc.) with real-life examples of good news.

Consciously build rituals around gratitude and hopefulness. In the five minutes before children go to sleep, their brains are especially receptive to deep learning. Use this special window of time to remind them of their strengths and review the good things that happened that day. For older children, suggest a gratitude journal.

## **Wrap-Up**

In conclusion, Dr. Borba challenged parents to make a "21 Day Pledge." Since it takes 21 days to build a new habit, what is your "21 Day Promise to Your Child?" Choose a new strategy, a trait you'd love to see your child take into adult life, and work at weaving it into your relationship. Borba concluded by sharing her favorite quote from Confucius,

***The most beautiful sight in the world is a little child going confidently down the road of life after you have shown him the way.***