

Column & Goodbye June, 2010

Ask the Counselor by Ellen Sotoloff, Quest Counselor, MS, LEPC

Communication is the Key

While working with gifted children over the past 16 years, I have come to the conclusion that “good” communication is the key to healthy family relationships and to the success of these children, both academically and psychologically. Therefore, I will offer some tips.

The tone of one’s voice is essential to conversation. There are many ways to say, “Do your homework.” It is important that the tone carries the message in a firm and fair way. Body language is significant. When a student says he needs help with his homework, pay attention to the message his body is conveying. His stance and demeanor can show real motivation, lack of comprehension, or trying “to get out of” doing the work himself. Eye contact is a powerful tool for getting a message across. If parent and child are to really connect, their eyes must meet. Listening skills require more than just ears. Paying full attention and being really present are two techniques that help communication flourish. Feedback in a way that shows understanding and acceptance of feelings/ideas is required also. Even though you may not agree, being able to hear another’s viewpoint creates a strong bond. Negotiating a common ground is necessary with different points of view. Timing and choice of words can make or break a meaningful interaction. Middle school children are trying to find their own places and want to be independent and respected. However, as much as their actions or words may say they want to be left alone, do the opposite. Hold them tightly and make them feel safe by connecting with them on a regular basis.

As most of you know, my Quest Counseling position has been eliminated for budget reasons. I have sincerely and joyfully worked with your children. I will miss them a great deal. My plans are to write a practical book on my experiences with gifted children. In addition, I will continue to have private practice. You can reach me at elnsoto@aol.com. The students will remain forever in my heart. It has been a blessing to know them.