

George C. Marshall PTSA Meeting Minutes
October 27, 2021

Board Members Present: Althea Benjamin (president), Elizabeth Keegan (secretary), Jeff Litz (principal)

1. Guest Speaker: Presentation by clinical psychologist Rachel Bailey on Students and Anxiety. Ms. Bailey works with families to manage stress and anxiety in teens. She has a particular interest in resilience and self-esteem. Ms. Bailey has a free podcast called "Your Parenting Long Game."

What causes stress and anxiety in teens? It is not the situation but how we think about it. They believe that bad things will happen, and we can't handle it. Certain temperaments are more prone to stress. The rational part of the brain – the prefrontal cortex that regulates emotion – does not fully develop until the mid-20s. When kids perceive a threat, the brain goes into "fight or flight" response and cannot access the rational part of the brain. When the brain is in this heightened state of fear, a child cannot meet their full potential.

What do you see when kids are anxious? Anger, aggression, disrespect ("yuck" [Rachel's word] turned outwards), negative self-talk, avoidance, low motivation ("yuck" turned inwards), excessive use of electronics, use of alcohol or other substances ("yuck" numbed).

As parents, what doesn't work to help an anxious teen? Reassurance (humans need to see evidence for ourselves), logic ("danger" is programmed to override logic), parental anxiety (our emotions make things worse).

What does work? A genuine belief that everything will be ok, that the child can handle whatever happens.

How do we teach them this? First, teach kids to solve larger problems by strengthening their problem-solving skills with small, every-day problems. Ask them for advice with your own problems.

Second, help them learn to cope by recognizing their feelings and doing something about it – WHEN I notice (blank) THEN I will (blank). The child gets to be in charge and create physical, cognitive, or creative strategies for coping with feelings. When-Then is something that needs to be practiced often. How do parents respond to worry/anxiety in the moment? Be calm; help them feel safe by assuring them they're not alone, that you understand; empower and give them control to solve their own problem. They need to learn to depend on themselves. Remember, the opposite of anxiety is "I can handle this."

When they are the most stressed out, be sure to ask these questions below.

- What do you need?
- Do you know how to handle that?

Ms. Bailey's full presentation can be found on the PTSA website at www.gcmptsa.org

2. Principal's Report: Mr. Litz reported that the quarter ends on Friday, October 29 with a two-hour early release. Academic Letters will be given on November 9. There have been no Covid cases in 3 weeks. All athletes aged 16+ must be vaccinated; 14–15-year-olds will be tested weekly if not vaccinated. GCM faculty and staff have very high vaccination rates. 850 kids attended the Homecoming dance.
3. President's Report: Meeting minutes from September were approved. Althea reported that the International Night Committee has met and needs more volunteers. The PTSA is planning a cookie exchange fundraiser/social for December. We are in need of a PTSA treasurer.
4. Budget: The PTSA is presently without a treasurer, so no budget was presented.

The next PTSA meeting is Wednesday, December 15th and Karen Prem of NovaStar Prep will be our guest speaker to discuss the future of the SATs in college admissions.