

**MINUTES OF THE SSFS PARENTS ASSOCIATION MEETING**  
**PARENT EDUCATION TOPIC:**  
**“HOW TO EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE WITH OUR CHILDREN”**  
**November 14, 2006**  
**Yarnall Hall**  
**8:15 am**

Kathleen McKay, Clerk, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Kathleen introduced Mecha Inman, Director of Admissions, to the group. Mecha briefly wanted to describe the work that the Admissions Office does through out the year and to introduce her staff: Linda Cooper, Lower School; Louise Steinfort, Middle School; and Sara Brigham, Upper School. She acknowledged that her office recognizes that the parents serve as ambassadors of SSFS and encouraged interested parents to help with tours, participate in the First Friends program and spread the word about our school.

In the absence of Parent Education Clerk, Marla Zipin, Eileen Hollander was called upon to give the following introduction of the topic and speakers:

The purpose of the meeting was to talk about how to effectively communicate with our children and ask the tough questions. The goal was to brainstorm ways to help parents talk with their children and also to discuss how knowledge of the developmental stages can help with those conversations. The counselors from each division were introduced as follows:

- **Jen Cort**, Director of Student Support Services (and current counselor for the PK class)
- **Ilene Lees**, Upper School Counselor
- **Nancy Preuss**, Upper School Dorm Counselor
- **Lauren Keller**, Middle School Counselor
- **Tim Croft**, Lower School Counselor.

The purpose of having the counselors at the meeting was to answer questions and to help lead a discussion to help parents with children of all ages.

**The counselors presented the following list of topics for parent discussion groups:**

Adoption	Allowance
Sex	Control
Stranger-danger	Eating issues
Discipline	Birthday parties
Substance use	Family values
Divorce	Protection vs. fear
Bullying	Exclusion
Internet safety	

Parents then formed break-out discussion groups according to school division. After time in discussion groups, each group presented the topic which was discussed in their particular group with the counselors providing helpful feedback and suggestions. Following is a brief summary of what was discussed:

- Lower School: Discussed birthday parties and the issue of inviting all of the kids in a particular class or grade versus a select group. The school policy regarding birthday parties was reviewed. This policy requests that parents be “sensitive to the feelings of young children and to the Quaker values of simplicity and inclusion.” It also states that if a child is planning on inviting more than 50% of a particular group (i.e. the class, grade or gender), parents should consider

inviting that entire group. (See page 36 of the SSFS handbook.) It was pointed out that the Birthday Party Policy is merely a “suggestion” and not an obligation. It was suggested by the counselors that parents be open with their children in discussing this policy and their feelings about it and that parents should make their own choices based on what is best for their family.

- Upper School: Parents in this group also chose to discuss issues related to parties. Some of the points touched on included the following:
  - Autonomy: When do we draw the line? What issues can we let our children deal with on their own?
  - Some suggestions from the counselors:
    - ❖ Parents are encouraged to call the hosting parents before a party to find out if parents will be present and what is being planned for the kids. Ninth & 10<sup>th</sup> grade parents tend to do this, whereas 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade parents tend to stop calling because kids are driving, etc. Calls are even more important with older kids.
    - ❖ Parents should encourage their kids to blame it on them: i.e. “If I do this, my parents will kill me.”
    - ❖ Kids can also practice “codes” with their parents. A “code” is something they would say on the phone to a parent if they want to be picked up. Kids should practice role playing so if they find themselves in an uncomfortable situation, they will have practiced what they will say.
    - ❖ Talking with a child in the car is a good time to get their attention.
    - ❖ Parents should demonstrate and model self-advocacy for their kids.
    - ❖ Kids have a lot of concerns regarding telling parents what happened at a party so:
      - Parents should wait until the next day to ask what occurred. Heat of the moment discussions do not work well.
      - Parents do not have to play investigator. Parents should balance investigation with kid’s privacy.
      - Parents could pass on the information to the school counselors and let them investigate.
    - ❖ Kids should be trained to listen to their “inner voice”
    - ❖ Kids should be encouraged to take a moment to consider the consequences before acting.

It was pointed out that each division has a life skills curriculum. In the lower school it is called a “Wellness Curriculum.”

Other important points for parents from Jen Cort:

- Take time to probe with your child before you act
- The frontal lobe is not fully developed until age 23 so parents need to be their children’s “acting frontal lobe”.
- Research shows that the #1 trusted source for kids is their parents.
- Kids should be taught good decision making skills at a young age.
- Quaker Philosophy: “There is that of God in everyone so a “rough patch” doesn’t mean a “bad kid.”
- Parents are encouraged to check the SSFS websites for more information.
- Possible helpful approaches to communicating with your child:
  - “This is the first time I have been with you as a \_\_\_ year old. This is new to you and new to me.”
  - Remind them that you have “been there.”

Respectfully submitted,  
Eileen Hollander, co-secretary

