

TRANSITIONS CORNER: THE SENIOR YEAR 'DISORDER'



By Richard A. Schere, Ph.D., DABFM

September has come and gone, and classes have resumed. For high schoolers, this seasonal progression causes interesting ambivalence. The carefree-ness of summer has been reigned in, but, for teens who worked, there wasn't all that much freedom to begin with. For teens who did not work, their inability to structure time, which may have seemed like 'freedom' on the surface, was likely a string of boring, endless days. Although there usually are a number of worthwhile highlights in the summer, as well as more time to surf, swim, skateboard and "hang out," the structure of school and the return of a predictable routine feel somewhat reassuring and stabilizing. Teens will indeed complain about homework, tests, and boring, uncaring teachers, but they will be reunited with friends, rejoin their clubs and teams, and as long as they follow the rules and complete most of their assignments, they will reenter a predictable pattern of activity that will provide a needed sense of purpose

and a justification for maintaining dependence on parents... Unless, of course, they are entering their Senior year.

The typical senior year ambivalence looks somewhat like this: Trying to feel as if this is just another school year beginning, but deep down, knowing it isn't. This is the final year, and the year when all the pressures are going to squeeze your insecurities in an unrelenting vice.

First, there are those college applications. They are overwhelming, especially the essays that require discussing things about yourself and your future you more guess than know, and about which you've only recently begun to consider, primarily because you have been forced to. And you are certain you can't write well enough anyway. You are apprehensive that the colleges you, your parents, and your counselors have selected may not accept you, and then what?

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Second, your grades have to be brought up to the standards the colleges to which you are applying require. Now in the world are you going to get your index up when you have to pass Chemistry and Shakespeare English, especially if they're A.P.? And, if you're hoping to "get in" because of your athletic ability or special talent, this season you're going to have to run like L.T., drive the golf ball like Michelle Wie, sing like Jewel, or paint like Picasso.

Third, there are some steps you just have to climb on your social ladder. You can't go to the Senior Prom with just anybody. And, before you go away to college, if you get a college to go away to, you need to arrive with some experience. You've got to "go a little further" with your dates than you have before, or even want to. Your friends say they already have, at least many of them, if they are telling the truth.

Finally, you've got to find a way to get your parents to "get with it." You need more use of the car, more hours on the cell phone, more time on the computer, more money, and a curfew that's not meant for a twelve year old. Overwhelming!

In my private practice, in which I test, treat and mentor adolescents and young adults, I find that the mentor role is especially needed for teens in the senior year. They require help with college applications, with learning the unique ways they need to study, with planning a structure that will help guarantee they get things done, and very often with their therapist's careful and consistent monitoring of what they are doing. They require encouragement and a safe place to lift their defenses so that they can express their fears and anxieties. They seek help with their parents. And they seek guidance and clarification about their social/sexual concerns and explorations, not the least of which involves the establishment of guidelines (rules are unacceptable, but guidelines are "cool") for thinking, drugs and surrendering to peer influences.

I also find that I must help them wrestle with the senior slump. Shortly after college applications have been submitted and acceptances have begun to arrive, usually in March, many of the seniors find themselves

"burned out" and they begin to relax their intensity and effort. As a result, early in April, when report cards arrive, seniors are in panic about how their grades have fallen, and they are sure they will never be able to recover in time. Often they are in trouble with their parents who have begun to panic as well. Fortunately, most of the teachers, familiar with the senior slump, are kindly liberal in allowing their remorseful seniors time and ways to repair their grades. During this period, there is a high demand for hypnotherapy and other relaxation sessions, some help with projects and papers, as well as help with parental pressure.

Happily and thankfully, June arrives, and the seniors graduate. I find myself invited to many ceremonies and celebrations. I enjoy final sessions with many happy and excited youngsters. I receive calls from parents who are concerned that their emancipated eighteen-year-olds want to drive to the Mexico beaches and camp out in mixed groups for four or more weeks. And my realization is reinforced: that although the senior year is an agonizingly difficult coming of age for the teens, it is also an agonizingly difficult coming of aging for parents, and their consulting psychologist!

Nevertheless, I laugh a lot, love the closeness, and truly enjoy this volatile, ever changing, ever in trouble, delightful clientele.

Richard Schere is in private practice in La Jolla where he tests, treats and mentors adolescents and young adults.



The Board of Psychology is asking for comments on proposed regulations which would now allow an applicant for licensure to accrue hours of required Supervised Professional Experience (SPE) in a postdoctoral training program that is a member of the California Psychology Internship Council (CAPIC).

Written comments to the Board must be received by November 15. More information about the proposed regulations and how to submit comments is available online at:

http://www.psychboard.ca.gov/laws_regs/psp.htm

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