The college is most grateful to Prof Paula Barrett for sharing with us over two evenings some of her wisdom and ideas on parenting teenagers.

Please note: These notes were taken during Prof Barrett’s presentation at San Sisto. I apologise if I have missed her intent or message anywhere. Please refer directly to her if needing advice. These notes, however, may jog your memory about some of her key remarks. Margaret Lee

Please note that I have marked her comments made in her first session that directly connect to our Habits of Mind and Spirit.

PART 1

Some key points from Prof Paula Barrett’s presentation at San Sisto on 22 October 2009.

90% skin allergies, headaches, stomach aches are connected to psychosomatic anxiety related matters and are stress induced.

These same people often can’t take risks. They have low self confidence and believe that they are not good enough to do the task at hand. They find it hard to do cope with new things, new classrooms, new teachers. They can’t risk doing a perfect job.

Intervention in primary school can fix most of these problems. Especially at the age of four.

1:5 children are born with a sensitive temperament. At birth they react instantly and in a prolonged manner to “stresses” such as light, noise. Blood pressure goes straight up and stays up. The other 4:5 react to a lesser degree and when the stressor goes, the reaction goes. This type of sensitive reaction doesn’t change through one’s life but children can be taught how to react differently. They can be taught how to react in a way that does not induce stress.

If they haven’t got these skills in lower secondary, by the time they are 15 yrs old they are experiencing depression.

These sensitive ones are also capable of being very brilliant (if they don’t fall into the anxiety trap).

100% people get some anxiety or some depression at some time in our lives. About 25% will suffer anxiety or depression to a more serious degree.

Boys particularly are more vulnerable and therefore need to talk about their concerns. Look out for lack of sleep, not getting pleasure out of activities, sense of hopelessness and helplessness. (Indicators of depression)

We can think either positively or negatively. People who tend to look at life negatively, will relapse into anxiety and depression even if they’ve learnt how to be more positive. They look for negativity through life.
We used to think that our brain developed until about 25 yrs of age and then neurons died. It’s now discovered that this is not so.

We can continue to develop our brains by spending one hour every day doing exercise. We need to be open to learning new things. Learning a new language and doing physical activity and learning a musical instrument are the best ways to grow your brain. The more you move the more you grow the brain and reduce depression. Learn something outside your comfort zone. This promotes brain development.

Adolescence is a high risk time for brain development. The frontal lobe of the brain, between 12 – 25 for boys and 10 – 21 yrs of age for girls, deteriorates to about half its development. This deterioration reduces considerably our ability to regulate our behaviour or do any forward planning. Neurons diminish during adolescence and then the frontal lobe grows thicker again at 25 or 21 (boys or girls).

Binge drinking, drug taking or negative life experiences have a HUGE effect on teenage brains.

Everyone needs unconditional love from another person, pet or God/spirituality.

You can choose to be negative or positive.

We must think about our thinking. It’s hard work but we must teach kids how to think about their thinking and we must teach children how to be positive and to be positive thinkers. Turn their conversations around. Put a positive spin on things.

One of the greatest things you can do is to teach your children to be positive. (Help them to stop blaming others.)

Every family/parents need 2 – 3 good family friends who they connect with weekly. This can be hard work. The parents must work to building these relationships – having dinners, visits, going out etc. These people become a family’s support network – and a network for the children. Kids don’t like their own parents but they think other parents are cool. So CAPITALISE on this. Make sure you have friends that are great role models for your daughters. (Your daughters will be impressed with what they say.) Then if you’ve got a message you want to get across to your own daughter, let these friends know. They can tell your daughter. Girls need positive role models. They are like the mask on the plane. (Put the mask on your own face first before helping others.) Be a strong woman yourself (as a mother). Be doing things that make you happy and that impresses your daughter. “Wow, mum is doing pottery!” Mothers must get a hobby, you must look after yourselves. Girls need strong positive role models.

Every woman must take her daughter, every school must take its students to the National Pioneer Women’s Hall of Fame in Alice Springs. Make students read every story.

Google: The heritage listed building houses a major exhibition featuring over 100 photographs of women who fought social convention to become first in their field. Additionally “Women at the Heart”, tells the story of the pioneering women of the Centre.

www.pioneerwomen.com.au
Tape your grandmother’s story. Every time you visit, tape her answers to your questions.

When girls are little, they connect with their fathers. But during primary school this crosses over and girls need their mothers. Boys need their dads and they need to spend time with them.

Teenagers need 9.25 hours sleep EVERY NIGHT or they cannot function and cannot concentrate. It is the equivalent to charging your mobile phone battery. Without 9.25 hours adolescent immune system is not being recharged.

The invention of the electric light was a major problem because it increased the “daylight” hours. But computers in bedrooms and mobile phones are addictive and FAR worse. Most teenagers are not getting to sleep until 1 pm.

If, as an adult, you can’t resist mobiles, emails etc, how can a teenager who has a seriously diminished capacity for self-regulation because of the thinning of the frontal lobe?

TWO MANDATORY RULES FOR HEALTHY KIDS 1. No computers in bedrooms 2. Mobile phones are stored in kitchen or away from bedrooms during night. Lead by example and put your own mobiles in your drawers at night. The Generation gap is getting wider with computers.

If we wouldn’t let our daughters go into the Valley at 3 am why do we let them access equally bad places on the internet at that hour? We must apply consistency with our expectations.

Kids must MOVE. They should do one cultural activity (musical instrument) and one sport.

Get a year 12 girls or graduates to talk to younger girls re diet and sport.

To form your own identity you must reject your parents’ identity. That’s normal. Make sure your kids’ friends’ parents are lovely. Because they won’t like YOU but they’ll like their friends’ parents. If they have this sort of network they will eventually come back to their parents.

Reduce SUGAR in diet. Juice only once per week. NO soft drink except twice per year (birthday and Christmas). NO cereals except porridge or hi-fibre weetbix (the rest are full of sugar). Two MAJOR problems (and they are avoidable) are anxiety & depression and type-2 diabetes.

One hour per week for one school term in primary school can prevent 7/10 depressed/anxious children.

Learning

Problem solving

Coping behavioural skills

Positive role models

Support networks
Attachment

Stable unconditional loving relationships

Empathy

Mirror self-worth

Accepting safety developmental readiness

Cognitive

Positive thinking skills

Physiological

Awareness of body clues

Parental happiness

Parenting skills

Developmental readiness

Rest and quiet time

Routines

Diet

sleep
Routines – always invite their friends over

Make routines predictable.

Parents must be:

- Healthy
- Consistent (at least 70% of the time) and cohesive (with authority systems in child’s life). That is, mum and dad must have cohesive views and application of expectations; parents and school must share cohesive values etc.

Healthy Family is a family where members know the hierarchy. I’m the parent. You’re the child. I’m telling you what is acceptable. There must be hierarchical respect. Children MUST respect elders. “My children do not get in a car with a person under 25. They are not able to self-regulate. I cannot put my child in such an unsafe situation.”

Parents should act proactively. Don’t take your child to the psychologist because they act out in the shopping centres. Simply, DON’T TAKE THEM TO SHOPPING CENTRES AFTER SCHOOL. They need to go to a calmer environment where there are no computers, no lights. They must be taken to a place where they can calm down.

Major issue today:

- Children have too much time on computers
- They consume too much sugar
- Issue of 1:5 temperament sensitive

Children then diagnosed with ADD and ADHD.

A major problem in girls is allowing them to dress as 17 year olds when they’re 7.

Have no more than FIVE rules in your house: Make them something like 1. 9.25 hours Sleep 2. Cohesion 3. Respect 4. Encouraging positive behaviours

If there are other behaviours that don’t fit into your set five rules, IGNORE them.

Parents, if you’re happy, the kids most of the time will be happy.
The cognitive side of children and youth, needs exercise, diet and sleep.

Their social and emotional/resilience building development needs good training in community-building, citizenship, doing service for others.

“We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future.”

STOP TALKING ABOUT PROBLEMS. You know what to do. Look for the solutions.

Good reading: The brain that changes itself” Doidge 07

Every year, go to The Happiness Conference

www.pathwayshrc.com.au

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Anxiety and depression are the most common illnesses, but some excellent medications have been developed in the last couple of years to make it treatable.

PARENTING SKILLS

Bad behaviour in children would never get too bad if we implemented good strategies.

1. DESCRIPTIVE PRAISE
   a. When things are going wrong we jump on kids. Learn to CATCH out our kids when they are doing things right, being brave, etc. Notice and praise anything positive that is being observed. People like attention.
   b. Material rewards don’t mean anything to kids. If we give material rewards, kids are only happy when they get something new. This is unsustainable. Give something that involves your time. Take them on a picnic and invite their friends. Time with YOU is very important for kids.

2. PLANNED IGNORING
   a. If no one’s going to get killed, say nothing!
3. WITHDRAWAL OF PRIVILEGES
   a. Girls from 10 – 21, and boys 12 – 25 reject parents while they are forming their own identity. Boys NEED weekends with granddad. They need relationships with men. When people are sick/dying, they remember the good times.
   b. If you go for a job, there are rules. If you are late, on Facebook at work etc, you’ll lose your job. Adult life is about CONSEQUENCES. Boundaries are different for every family and there is always a problem with withdrawing of privileges but adult life is full of consequences and adulthood is about compromise. Kids need to know this. Withdrawal of privileges is a problem because (a) you must be CONSISTENT (when you get tired you let them?? Then they do a little wrong and you explode?? Then the kids go berserk!)
   c. If there’s a party, always ring the household and check if there’s going to be an adult over 25 present. Be there waiting at the end of the party. Remember, that at this age they’ve only got half a frontal lobe so cannot operate as a thinking adult. (Don’t let them get into others’ cars.)
   d. If they lie about where they are or insult you, you must withdraw things (such as no mobile phone – put it into boot of car). They’ll use their charm to win you over/weaken your resolve. They’ll tell you they’ll “report you”, “run away”. Withdraw privileges for no more than one week. Kids can only think ahead for about 5 days. Under 8s can only think for about 2 – 3 days ahead.

The two most important parenting skills: CONSISTENCY and COHESION

4. CONSISTENCY

When kids know the rules they feel secure and eventually they’ll comply. It’s not always easy. When they start asking and nagging (about withdrawal of privileges etc) say “I’ll talk to you tomorrow”. Consistency is the key. If you are consistent 8/10 times, you are doing very well.

If you are constantly changing your mind you have a massive problem. If you’re really tired, delay a decision. Major job of parenting is looking after and protecting their best interests.

Delay decisions, be consistent.

5. COHESION

Cohesion means that the authority systems must agree. Compromise on everything, or decide on the things that which parent will make the decisions on. One parent decides on these things and the other parent makes all decisions re this other area and then you both support the decisions of each other. Teenagers are experts on splitting parents. They tell you “He said... “. Support each other. Parents must agree and the school and the parent must agree.

All adolescents will push rules and stretch boundaries.

6. EVERY HEALTHY FAMILY IS HIERARCHICAL
Society is hierarchical. Family/School is hierarchical. Hierarchy must exist. Life experiences must count. We have to teach them that YOU are the parent. I’m the BOSS. Family relationships are HIERARCHICAL. So is work. There are BOSSES.

SLEEP

Sleep is a biological clock. Without it, the immune system breaks down. Adults need 7-8 hours, teenagers, 9.25, primary students need 10 hours every night.

So – all mobiles must be in a locked drawer at night. Computers turned off. Otherwise they will be addicted.

Teenagers need to sleep. Coffee etc does not replace sleep.

DIET

Give kids brown bread (White bread turns to sugar as soon as it hits the mouth!)

1 can of soft drink equals 4 times the sugar that a body can metabolize in one day.

ROUTINES

Kids need predictability – and jobs around the house.

The more hormonal they are, the more they need routines.

Rest and quiet time is EXTREMELY IMPORTANT.

CLASSROOM NOISE!!!! No one can think. This provides over stimulation. It's surprising that people don’t explode under seriously noisy circumstances.

Use time out/quiet time. Kids need it 3 times per day. Once after morning tea for 15 minutes, again after lunch and then 15 minutes when they get home from school.

Never take kids to shopping centres after school.

We need to start school later. Boys particularly suffer from being cooped into desks and made to listen/write for whole day. They should be running around kicking balls. They can’t cope with the pressure. Let them have a childhood. We are expecting far too much from them too early.

Boys need more male role models and more male teachers. They need a good male relationship.
The problem for girls is that media and shops encourage girls to dress like women when they’re 8. Society is putting pressure on these girls. Socially and emotionally they are CHILDREN. 15 yr olds are vulnerable from predators but 8 yr olds dressed as 15 yr olds are even MORE vulnerable.

Most children with happy parents are happy children. They need unconditional love – the most important thing in their lives.

PARENTAL HAPPINESS

Parents must go on a date with each other every fortnight. Take thermos and blanket – and go and have a cuppa together.

When you’re on a date together, don’t talk about the kids. Focus on each other. Your children will remember how kind you were to each other and they’ll do the same in later life.

Single parents – go to TAFE, take up a hobby. Your children will see that you are investing in yourself.

“Mother nature is providential. She gives us 12 years to develop a love for our children before turning them into teenagers.”

ADOLESCENT BRAIN

Between 12 – 18 years of age there is a loss of 50% of the grey matter from the frontal cortex. This is called PRUNING. During these years, social skills can be difficult, teenagers argue, over react. There is a tendency to make inappropriate remarks. They find it difficult to grasp the moral of a story, difficult to plan ahead, difficult to self regulate actions and emotions.

ANY ALCOHOL/DRUG WILL AFFECT THE BRAIN. One drunk party could take a year to get the brain development back to where it was.

ABC news has reported links of adolescent suicide to cyberbullying. 80% 12 – 17 year olds spent more than 2 hours daily on Myspace etc. 30% experienced cyberbullying. New disease IAD (Internet Addiction Disorder)

SAFETY IN CYBERSPACE

Rules must be same as in real world. Parents need to be educated about the internet. Would you allow your child to play cards to 20 hours straight? No. Same rules apply to internet use.

During week nights 30 mins is adequate. Weekends 1 hour only because they’ve got to be engaged in sport, cooking music, shopping – all sorts of other activities. They’ll never help you around the house if they’re on the computer.

Kids are picking up and using terrible language on social networks.

If you witness cyberbullying, demand the bully to stop, file a complaint with the site or service, call the police, consult a lawyer but DO NOT RETALIATE BY ANSWERING.
Following statistics % of teenagers who reported the event:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private messages made public</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumours spread</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received threatening messages</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received unwanted pictures</td>
<td>32%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Received unwanted sexual pictures by email</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received nudity or porn</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received pornographic/violent images (16/17 yr olds)</td>
<td>84%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exposed to violence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 – 3 yr olds</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – 5 yr olds</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – 10 yr olds</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10+</td>
<td>92%</td>
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</tbody>
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One in ten children has NOT been exposed to violence.

Emotional resilience is the ability to bounce back in the face of adversity.

**EMOTIONAL & SOCIAL SKILLS**

- Self regulation (All feelings are okay. It’s what you DO with your feelings that’s important. Find strategies to self regulate. A lot of kids use self mutilation as self regulation.
- Self soothing – have a lunching bad; read, have a massage, laugh, feel calm.
- Empathy – ability to feel what others are feeling, make others feel better. Every child from Year 1 needs to be involved in SERVICE work. (RSPCA, aged care, hospital etc Have 3 month rotations all year) Research has shown that students who do more than 2 years of community service or giving to others have the highest level of self esteem. They also know what they want to do as adults.
- Friendship skills
- Social Awareness
- Planning ahead.

Consult websites:

Safekids.com

Csriu.org
Cberbully.org

NetFamilyNews.org

Staysafe.

Cybersafety.org.nz/kit/policy

Read:

Blame My Brain – the amazing teenage Brain – Nicola Morgan

The Brain that changes Itself – Norman Doidge

Me, My Space, and I – Parenting the Net Generation – Larry Rosen