

Five to Thrive: Concrete Support & Who Should Ask

We started our series last week with Resilience ([click here if you missed it](#)). Our next topic, **Concrete Support in Times of Need**, tucks neatly in beside Resilience among the five resources that all our Knights need to thrive in high school and beyond.

We talked last week about the importance of taking risks to develop Resilience. I suggested that you resist the natural parent temptation to protect your student from failure. Our teens need to feel the stress that results from serious challenges that involve failed attempts.

Managing that stress as a learning tool requires that our students have access to Concrete Support from families, peers, and our community.

Stress has a bad reputation, but there are three kinds of stress. One is quite useful:

- **Positive Stress** steps up our physical ability to perform, sharpens our senses, and helps our brains make decisions. That critical adaptation kept early man from getting eaten by stronger creatures with less brain power. When teens feel these useful doses of stress, it can enhance their performance.

More importantly for teens, experiences with positive stress develop a healthy stress-response system that gives students a sense of mastery and control. Without this exposure, how is a teen to learn how to effectively manage stress, regulate emotions, and think under pressure? Developing these abilities prepares teens to function in the adult world.

- **Toxic Stress** gives all stress its negative reputation. Exposure to intense and sustained stress inhibits the ability to learn. Violence, abuse, and neglect cause Toxic Stress. Constant but lower levels of stress also can become toxic.
- **Tolerable Stress** falls somewhere in between. For students, families and community make the critical difference between Tolerable and Toxic Stress. Having supportive relationships and environments protect kids of all ages from the effects of Toxic Stress. Supportive parenting, positive peer relationships, and community resources all matter.

Keeping Knights Thriving: A Role for Knight Allies

Coming back around to today's topic of Concrete Support, I want to encourage you again to take an active role in our school community. Reread the above description of the antidote to Toxic Stress: students need family, peers, and community. Without engaged families at our school, there is no community.

There are volunteer tasks that we rely on heavily, but the real value in many of our volunteer opportunities is the meaningful ways they give families to connect to our community. You do not need to lead a committee. Volunteering an hour or two here and there connects you to a few community members. Those acquaintances connect you to many more. That network becomes our community. (Ski Swap jobs below offer short, weekend volunteer spots.)

Our community, and all its connections among educators and families, gives students the Concrete Support that they need to thrive. Without it, teens feel isolated in a school environment wholly

disconnected from their family life, they lack the supportive relationships that protect them from too much stress, and those Concrete Resources in times of need may not be easily accessible for them.

Mastering the Art of Getting Help

To effectively tap Concrete Support when they need it as teens and as adults, students experience and develop skills in five concepts during high school:

- **Formal Help:** Knowing that it is the job of various professionals to provide supporting services (e.g., teachers, doctors, mechanics, bus drivers, etc.).
- **Informal Help:** The support students get from family, friends, and other significant (but nonprofessional) people in their lives. And understanding that relying on that support means maintaining those relationships.
- **Self-Determination:** Taking responsibility for their lives and making both the everyday and the life-directing choices that will get them there.
- **Help-Seeking:** Discerning when independence and self-reliance (and sometimes even pride) should be set aside to obtain the tools to solve a problem.
- **Self-Advocacy:** Effectively communicating, negotiating or asserting their interests, desires, needs, and rights.

Data tells us that a critical difference between those who successfully navigate adolescence and those who get lost is the ability to use formal and informal sources of support. That ability takes a combination of understanding the resources and the skills to decide what they want and then access it and advocate for it. The best ways to teach these are modeling them from you at home and coaching students while they practice their own skills. Students learn self-advocacy at different rates, so you may have to participate to some degree, but I strongly encourage you to coach your student and support them as they step into the work of figuring it all out now, before moving off to college.

Between last week's discussion of building resilience through risk taking and now urging you to help your students practice self-advocacy, today's high school environment must feel challenging, but it should NOT feel harsh. Your student should feel challenged. They also should feel and be able to access the Concrete Support our community offers with increasing capacity over their 4 years with us.

On rougher days, remember to ask, "**What Went Well?**" Remind them of all they know, of all the skills they have mastered since learning to walk. Help them remember that feeling of competence and confidence. In time, they will follow that pattern on their own. They will assess what went well and the competencies they have. Their confidence will return.

The last skill-building of childhood happens in high school and bridges the gap toward college and the adult world. Your critical role during these years is supporter and ally—of Concrete Support. Our maturing Knights must do the work of mastering these "soft skills" as they prepare themselves to thrive now and in their transition towards college, career, and life.

Principal Dion Yahoudy