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Five to Thrive: Cognitive & Social-Emotional Competence

Over the past four weeks, we have talked about what makes teens thrive. Our **Five to Thrive** series wraps up with this installment on Cognitive and Social Emotional Competence. You can find our discussions of the first four elements of thriving by clicking on the following titles: [Resilience](#), [Concrete Support](#), [Social Connections](#), and [Adolescent Development](#).

I started this series with **Resilience** because that internal resource can protect our students while they navigate the challenges of being a teen. The next three in our series described the various external supports teens need from nurturing relationships with adults and peers who understand the timing and impact of physiological changes in adolescence. Adults in particular can help teens most when they understand how that timing and the demands of preparing for a career can create paradoxes for teens.

Together, the first four factors of **Five to Thrive** equip our teens to develop a long list of **Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competencies** that do more than allow them to succeed at career and life. It is ultimately these competencies that enable our students to thrive even in the face of challenges that will overwhelm those without these powerful tools.

Four Key Skills Everyone Needs

The components of these competencies fill a long list, but they fit into just four categories that are highlighted in the following discussion.

Character Strengths have new importance thanks to some recent research. Characteristics like grit, curiosity, and optimism were once thought to be innate—born in us like hair color. We know now that each develops over our entire lifetime. Throughout the challenges of adolescence, followed by starting a career and a family, and then later adjusting to an empty nest and retirement, these skills evolve and see us through.

As teens, though, what started as habits we learn through imitation become conscious choices that we develop through aspects of **Executive Function**—a newfound ability to examine our thinking that arrives through the development of our brain's frontal cortex, which occurs in adolescence and through our mid-twenties (see last week's column on [Adolescent Development](#)).

As the frontal cortex develops, teens become more self-aware and begin to analyze their thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors. Suddenly, teens can find themselves quite ashamed of a character failing—such as a few harsh words in a hormone-driven disagreement.

All their lives, such transgressions were a violation of guidelines someone else had set. Those were not taken lightly. But now, a teen finds that those failings call into question who they are and what kind of person they had become. This stage is when a teen, using all you have taught them, must decide for themselves two life-altering things: “Who am I?” and even more overwhelmingly, “Who do I want to be?”

Throughout childhood, we teach our children rules about social interactions. As teens, their own **Social Cognition** emerges. With it comes the ability to examine their perception of others, to recognize and adapt to the norms in various situations, and to learn to project themselves in a way that builds healthy relationships.

Those relationships and the development of their frontal lobe allow teens to begin to see into their future where their **Possible Selves** await. They knew before that the future would come. They had been waking to a new day all their lives; the evidence was there.

With the uniquely human functions that occur in our frontal lobes, teens can begin to picture themselves in their future and understand that their choices determine who that person will become. With that knowledge begins an internal questioning of who they want to be, and just as powerfully, who they don't want to be.

In that same package of awareness and evaluation of themselves **Self-Regulation** arrives. As children, rules and the acceptance of others shape our behavior. Teens not only learn to regulate their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, but they begin to adapt how they think, feel and behave to achieve outcomes that matter to them.

Yes, they did these things before, but it was because you said so. Now, two things have changed:

- First, they understand how powerfully those choices impact their future; and
- Secondly, they internalize the notion that only they can take the reins and make the choices that determine the outcomes. As nurturing adults, we help them with boundaries and guidance, but ultimately, control must shift to them.

Taking responsibility for **Self-Regulation** happens subtly throughout adolescence, but the combination of anxiety and excitement in that newfound power—in the possibilities and risks it brings—feels a lot like the first time they took the wheel of your car. Can you remember how frightening and tenuous that brief experience felt for both of you? Do you remember your stream of encouragement and guidance?

Draw Them a Map

Here again is an example of why I constantly invite you to attend events here at Newport and be involved in our community. How can you effectively guide them through their early attempts to

navigate self-regulation if you cannot see the bumps in the roads they choose and if you don't know anyone else with a map?

I don't invite you here to help with the work of running a school community. I invite you because I know how powerful your knowledge of the landscape can serve your family in learning to thrive through adolescence and beyond.

The Power of "What Went Well"

As these elements of **Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competence** take hold, those "What Went Well" conversations take on a powerful new dimension. Done with curiosity, patience, and careful listening, nurturing adults can help teens surface their internal evaluations.

Left silently in our minds, self-talk lacks perspective and tends to remain harsh. Out in the open, adults can help teens build a self-compassionate and growth-minded perception of themselves. The internal voice declaring, "What an insensitive idiot!" can become, "What went well, what did I learn, what will I change?" And of course, "Do I need to apologize to my friend/parent/sibling?"

[\(Click here to learn more about What Went Well?\)](#)

You can [click here](#) to find an attached list of the essential **Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competencies**, with their definitions. We will keep that list and all our articles about **Five to Thrive** on our website for your reference.

A Word of Caution

Think carefully about whether and when you introduce this list of competencies to your teen. Its daunting length and complexity should not appear as a checklist of tasks to accomplish. I offer them to you not as a road map but as signposts you might watch for along your family's road. Most importantly, make sure that your teen realizes that weaving these elements together and building their strength takes a lifetime of growth and learning. Each of us develops a few areas of great strength and harbors weaknesses. Help our teens to recognize their existing strengths.

For now, please look to them for guidance in selecting experiences where teens can learn, in encouraging relationships on which they can depend, and in informing those "What Went Well?" conversations that I hope can become a regular tool in your parenting toolbox.

Word Has Reached Your Teen

I will not name names, but word has reached some of your teens that parents are meeting later this month to talk about Resilience. A curious buzz has started about what might come of that gathering. Some of our teen leaders are wondering if they can help promote Resilience.

I confess to a little excitement as well. I am blessed to learn with these teens through four exciting years. The opportunity to learn with the nurturing adults who have brought them this far intrigues me as well.

Build Resilience in a Toolbox Workshop

Join us for our first Knight Ally Toolbox Workshop on Resilience on Wednesday evening, 11/29, at 7 PM in our library. We have settled on a list of about 10 easy-to-implement tools for building Resilience. Like Resilience in general, the impact of each tool will expand with each use.

Please RSVP for the workshop. We want to prepare materials and space to accommodate everyone. [Click here and add your name and email to the list.](#)

(Please note that some families had trouble with the link that came with this week's invitation email. If you have any trouble with the link above, please send an email to NHSKnightAlly@gmail.com. We will add you to the list and send a confirmation within 24 hours.)

We want our Knights thriving while they master their academics. I hope you will partner with us. Nothing can substitute for a community of caring adults in building an environment where students thrive and grow into resilient, resourceful adults.

Knight Wins International Photo Contest

Andrew Foti, our AP Photography Instructor, is extremely proud of William Zhao. First, because this young student had the courage to enter his work in an international competition. And second, William placed second for "The Voiceless Children" and received honorable mention for "The Rain."

The Voiceless Children photo series tells the stories of young Cambodian children deprived of expression. The pictures of child laborers were taken in the province Siem Reap, the gateway to the ruins of the Angkor Wat temple complex. [Click here](#) to see these photographs with high technical quality in the details and shadows along with beautiful artistic quality in their composition and content.

On a moonless August night, the Perseid meteor shower peaked overnight as Earth passed through the long trail left by Comet Swift-Tuttle. William set his camera to take consecutive 30-second exposures from midnight to 3 AM. [Click here](#) to see how he layered all the exposures containing shooting stars to create a rain-like effect.

Who Pays for Public School Education in Bellevue?

Learn the ins and outs of funding education in Bellevue Schools from Melissa deVita, Deputy Superintendent, Financial Services & Operations. She will detail how state and local taxes, such as levies and bonds, fund public education. Other pieces of the funding puzzle include Bellevue

Schools Foundation and Bellevue's PTSAs. Those roles will change in light of recent legislative actions.

[Please register here.](#) Four free sessions:

- Monday, 11/13, Sammamish High School, 7 PM
- Tuesday, 11/14, WISC Rainier Room, 12-1 PM (includes a light lunch provided by Newport Knives Culinary students)
- Thursday, 11/16, Bellevue High School, 6:30 PM
- Monday 11/20, Newport High School, 7 PM.

Interpreter Training

Do you know someone interested in becoming an interpreter for the district? Please invite them.

To become a district interpreter, you must attend a training session. The training is scheduled for Monday, 12/4, 8:30 AM-3:30 PM at ESC (12111 NE 1st St, Bellevue 98005). Interpreters are paid for their service, but the training time is not paid. Space is limited and the registration deadline is Nov. 17. To register, [click here](#).

We are especially in need of more Albanian, Cambodian, Chinese, Indian languages and dialects, Korean, Punjabi and Vietnamese interpreters.

To learn more about the training session or becoming a district interpreter, contact the district Communications Office at 456-4000.

PTSA Meets 11/15

The next PTSA Membership Meeting is Wednesday, 11/15, at 7 PM in the NHS Library. Follow-up on Grants and Ski Swap tops the agenda.

Admissions Essay Support at Newport

College Corp volunteers are here every Tuesday and Thursday after school in the library to help seniors with essays. They help students prepare for the college application, essay, etc. Check in with Ms. Lopez-Kopp in our library early this week.

Also, encourage your students to ask their Senior English teacher for feedback on their essay during tutorial.

Get Them Going

Winter Sports Conditioning is Here! The Newport Girls Basketball coaching staff is proud to announce the start of a winter sports conditioning program. The sessions will run every Tue/Thu from 5:30 to 6:30 PM. All Newport High School students are eligible. Activities will vary among track

work, hills, stairs, plyometrics and more! The program will help any winter-sport participants prepare for their upcoming season. Open gym will follow each workout from 6:30 to 7:30 PM.

Dates to Remember:

- Tryout and Practice for Girls and Boys Basketball, Boys Swim & Dive, Girls and Boys Wrestling: Monday, 11/13
- No School/Thanksgiving Break: Thursday & Friday, 11/23 & 11/24
- Winterfest Week: Monday, 12/11 to Friday, 12/15
- Semester Finals: 1/24/18 to 1/26/18
- End of First Semester: 1/26/18

Useful Links:

[Daily Bulletin](#)

[Newport Website](#)

[PTSA Website](#)

[Bell Schedule](#)

[Calendar](#)

[Counseling Assignments](#)

[Newport Television](#)

[Naviance](#) for college admissions planning and information

[Counseling Center](#)

[Community Service](#) for volunteer listings

[Athletics](#)

[Club Directory](#)

Newport Athletic Hotline at [425.456.7522](tel:425.456.7522) for daily updates