



# **STUDENT ASSISTANCE NEWSLETTER**

**MOUNTAIN LAKES SCHOOL DISTRICT**



## **Special Edition: Navigating the Teen Social Scene in 2018** Tips for Parents on Friendships, Parties, Social Media, Mental Health and More

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The New Year brings a fresh start and new beginnings. It also tends to bring more social media apps we can't keep track of, another iPhone your child must have, and friendship drama that makes you feel like you are on a reality show. As a parent, keeping up with the generation our children are living in can feel like a full-time job. Not to worry! Here are some tips on how to help you and your teen navigate high school social life in 2018.

## Friendships

### **Navigating Arguments**

When talking your child through a friendship drama, it can be helpful to discuss core values such as empathy, respect, and humility. It can be easy to get caught up in the he said-she said. Have your child explore the different points of view that might be involved in the situation. When kids practice putting themselves in another's shoes, it allows them to see the situation differently. Try to keep the focus on the big picture and the lesson to be learned.

### **When Friends Drift Apart**

It is common for social circles to change as students move from middle to high school. You may find your child is feeling excluded from a group. The first step for parents of the child feeling left out is to empathize. Letting your child know that you have been in a similar situation can help to normalize feelings. If your child is the one leaving someone else out, it can be helpful for him or her to again view the situation from another's perspective. Work on practicing empathy and see if you can come up with a solution to the problem together.

### **Working Through Heated Situations**

As a teenager, social life is a big deal. It is easy for peer conflicts to escalate quickly. When things are off kilter in your child's social life, it can turn the world upside-down (even though it might not seem like a big deal to you!). If your child comes to you angry, sad or worried, have him or her calm down before beginning a conversation. When we react out of stress, a reaction, rather than a response, is likely to occur. A good rule of thumb is the 24 hour rule. If an immediate response is not required, encourage your teen to wait 24 hours before responding to the situation. This will allow time for calming down and choosing a more positive course of action.

Adapted from <https://www.care.com/c/stories/3307/teen-social-issues-how-to-help-without-hover/>

## Parties

### **Communication and honesty can keep your child safe.**

Teens are 42% less likely to use substances when regular conversations with parents about drinking and drugs occur. When talking to your child, make your expectations clear: using drugs or alcohol is not acceptable.

### **Get to know your teen's friends and their parents.**

Parents can work together to prevent underage drinking. If your child is planning to attend a party call the parents. Make sure they will be home for the duration of the party and that drugs or alcohol will not be allowed. If you can't talk with the parents, don't allow your child to go. It's best to err on the side of caution.

**Parents are legally responsible for anything that happens to a minor who has been served alcohol or other drugs in their home.**

You could be held legally liable if you allow underage drinking in your home. If an underage teen brings drugs or alcohol into your home, you should immediately contact the parents. If a teen shows up to your home under the influence, it is your obligation to contact the parents and make sure the child has a safe ride home. Talk with your child about taking responsibility for these house rules as well.

**Know where your teen is going.**

Have the phone number and address of the party. Monitor your child's location by using the "Find My Friends" app on your phone. This app allows you to share your location and see the location of friends and family. Be sure to let your teen know how to contact you and where you will be during the party. Come up with a back up plan. If you don't answer your phone, go over who should be contacted next.

**Talk with your teen about how to handle a situation where alcohol is present.**

Come up with a code word to use so your teen can send a simple text or make a quick call that will let you know he or she may be in an uncomfortable situation and want to leave. Rehearse beforehand what to tell friends if your child wants to leave early. Remind your child that you will not be angry or upset- you will be happy to get the call or text.

**Make sure your teen has safe transportation to and from a party.**

Let your child know you will be available at any time for a ride home from any party. Make sure you are available and stay close to home while your child is out. Talk about situations where your teen might want to leave early. Of course, remind your teen NEVER to ride home with a driver who they suspect been drinking or using drugs.

**Be up to greet your teen when he or she comes home.**

Give your child a hug. Be awake and have a brief conversation about the night. If your teen is staying overnight at a friend's house after the party, verify this arrangement with the friend's parents and ensure that the parents will be home. Using the "Find My Friends" app can give you peace of mind knowing your child is at the agreed upon location.



## Cell Phones

**It should be made clear that the phone does not belong to the child but that the phone belongs to you, the parent.**

Sometimes teens have a misconstrued view of cell phone ownership, seeing the phone as "mine". However, I do not know of many 14 year olds paying the Verizon bill. When you ask for the phone, your child hands it over, no questions asked. If you feel your teen is misusing phone privileges, you can simply call your cell carrier and ask for the line to be suspended. Phone companies can do this at no cost and have the ability to easily reinstate the phone line when you are ready. This gives you a free and easy way to control your child's phone use.

**It is very important that you and your teen have an agreement about conditions regarding cell phone use.**

When you purchase your child a phone, come up with a written document that states the rules and conditions you have agreed upon in relation to cell phone use (visit the link below to find sample cell phone contracts). You and your child can sign it together and post a copy on the refrigerator. If there are any disputes about a rule, you can simply go back to the agreement and follow what is written.

**Do frequent spot checks.**

Let your child know you will be checking text messages and social media apps. You do not have to let your teen know when. Aim to do this once every 2 weeks or monthly. If you notice that something might be bothering your child, or that your child's behavior seems different, check the phone. It can be very revealing. Many parents worry that this is a violation of privacy. However, the phone belongs to you, and you are not violating any rights; you are simply being a responsible parent.

Adapted from <https://patch.com/california/pleasanthill/setting-appropriate-cellphone-limits-teenagers>



# Social Media



## **Posting Photos**

Peer pressure and the desire for attention can be reasons why some children feel the need to share inappropriate photos in social media apps or even with friends through text or group chat. Make sure your teen understands the impact pictures posted online can have not only now but in the future. This may cause your child to think twice before posting that embarrassing photo or a picture at a party. Talk about the importance of spending time with real friends without feeling the need to gain approval by getting a certain number of “likes” on a photo. And remind your child that more and more colleges are reviewing applicants' social media pages.

## **“Friend” your child.**

Most parents have social media accounts nowadays. Even if you don't use a particular app, friend or follow your child so you can monitor posts. Apps like SnapChat and features of Instagram allow you to choose the recipients of your photos, which means you may not see everything they are posting or sending. However, when your teen knows you are watching, it can make an impact.

## **Privacy**

Many times, teens will make social media accounts “public” which means anyone can see your child's profile. This decision is to gain popularity and earn more “likes” on photos. Your child's account should be private. This means teenagers have to first allow someone to follow them in order to have access to his or her profile pictures and information. Sit down with your teen to review social media account settings.

## **Stay Up-To-Date**

Social media seems to be changing faster than the speed of light. There is always a new app or game that our children seem to find out about the second it hits the market. Familiarize yourself with the top social media sites as often as possible. Do a google search every once and a while to find out which are the most popular. Create your own account, even if you don't use it, to understand how the app works. Look for workshops to attend in the community that address social media.



# A Few Social Media Terms to Add to Your Vocabulary

**Finsta:** Believe it or not, most teens have 2 Instagram accounts now. One is a real account where posted photos are hand-picked in order to receive a high number of likes. The other, a “finsta” (fake or fun Instagram), is a place where candid photos are posted and usually access is only allowed to close friends.

**“I’m posting that on my *story*.”:** Stories have gained rapid popularity. A story is a photo or a video that is made available to all followers or to a customized group for a time period of 24 hours. Stories can be live where viewers can comment as the person is recording.

**DM:** Direct Message usually refers to a messaging feature through Instagram.

**VSCO-**A social media site that is just for posting photos. It originally attracted artists and photographers as a way to show off creative work. The concern with VSCO is that the profiles are public. To see anyone's VSCO, just enter a name in google search (i.e. Jane Smith Vsco).



# **MLHS Parent FAQs**

## **Mental Health & Anxiety**

**Q: How can students and families access mental health services in school?**

**A:** Students and/or parents can reach out to the school counselor or student assistance counselor if there are any concerns. The counselors will be able to offer support in school as well as refer to out-of-school services when necessary. Remember, if there is a concern, it is always better to reach out to the many available resources than to struggle on your own.

**Q: How can the counselors help students in need?**

**A:** The student may meet with the school counselor and/or student assistance counselor. Other options may include individual or small group counseling sessions. Depending on the situation/issue, the counselors may also suggest healthy eating, exercising, seeking an outside therapist, stress management techniques, peer mediation, study skills, and time management.

**Q: How do you know when you should ask for help?**

**A:** Anxiety is a normal part of life, but when it interferes with daily functioning, the student or parent should consider reaching out to a counselor. Some common indicators to be mindful of are:

- Behavioral changes: withdrawn or acting out, sleep issues, eating issues
- Grades declining
- Absences or tardies from school increasing
- Social changes- leaving a friend group or joining new group
- Risk-taking behaviors (alcohol use, smoking, illegal substance use, unhealthy dietary behaviors, truancy, etc.)



# **MLHS Parent FAQs**

## **Mental Health & Anxiety**

**Q: Will my information be kept confidential?**

**A:** In most situations, information can be kept confidential. However, since our primary goal is student safety, several situations require that a counselor or other staff member share information. If a student indicates an intent to harm him/herself or someone else, or if a student reveals that he/she or someone else is being harmed, this information must be shared with the appropriate school officials and outside resources. Similarly, if a parents reveals this type of information, the school must act in the best interest of the student(s), and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

**Q: What are some warning signs of mental illness?**

**A:** Symptoms of mental health disorders vary depending on the type and severity of the condition. The following is a list of general symptoms:

- Abuse of drugs and/or alcohol
- Inability to cope with daily problems and activities
- Changes in sleeping and/or eating habits
- Excessive complaints of physical problems
- Defying authority, skipping school, stealing, or damaging property
- Intense fear of gaining weight
- Long-lasting negative mood, often along with poor appetite and thoughts of death

*For more FAQs on Athletics, and Pursuing Interests please visit the MLHS Counseling Website <https://www.mlschools.org/domain/140>*