



## ***Counselor's Corner***

May 3, 2012

By Tosha Haynes

### **Clear, Consistent Academic Boundaries For Your Child**

The grades, the projects, the papers, OH MY! As our semester speeds to its end, the stress level and expectations are at their peak. How do we as parents find the balance between drill sergeant, confidant(e), enforcer and nurturer? We want our children to be successful; we want them to “do their best.” We want the best for them even when they seem content with mediocrity. WHERE IS THE BALANCE? WHERE ARE THE BOUNDARIES?

I think the answers to these questions are different for each child. I also think there are some principles and tools we can use to remove the grey areas and help us to be good disciplinarians while maintaining positive relationships and mutual respect with our teens.

One thing I recommend to help with establishing and maintaining healthy boundaries is to decide on and communicate expectations and consequences regarding academics ahead of time. Have a meeting with your student, talk about it, write it down and then stick to the plan! You can have a conversation with your teen and establish a “range of acceptability” with their grades. For example: *Nothing below 83, or 80 and above in every class.* Make sure the range is reasonable and appropriate. It will be different for different children. You can also state other expectations such as *all assignments turned in on time (no zeros)*, etc.

Once the expectations are clear, then discuss consequences for when those expectations aren't met. For example, if my child is out of the range of acceptability or has a zero on an assignment, then she will be restricted from going anywhere after school except for school events. I would communicate our plan like this: “I will check PowerSchool every Friday afternoon. If you have a zero, or fall out of our agreed grade range, the consequences are in effect **for the week**. I will recheck PowerSchool the next Friday and will lift consequences if back in range. If you are in range and have no zeros, I will not check PowerSchool again until next Friday.”

The problem is that your student might say things like, “I turned that assignment in, so I don't know why my teacher hasn't entered it” or “I only have one test grade and everybody failed it.” The beauty of this plan is that you can simply say, “I'm so sorry that happened to you, but we are going to follow our agreement. You have a week to get it worked out.” No screaming, no lecturing, no need for you to be the drill sergeant, no need to check PowerSchool daily because the consequences are in

effect for the week. If your child brings you a note from the teacher stating that it truly was the teacher's error (yes, they do make mistakes), you can lift the consequence. If not, the consequence stands. You will be surprised how quickly children start turning in all assignments and raising their grades when they see that you are going to be consistent and follow through with the plan.

This idea of "range of acceptability" regarding grades I learned from Katherine Koonce, our Academy's Academic Dean, and I have seen it work successfully with many families. It allows the student to take ownership and maintain the responsibility for their academics. It allows the parent to lay down the pressure they feel to ensure their children's performance. It has healed relationships.

The key to maintaining boundaries is communication and consistency. The key to having balance is making sure you are not so focused on grades, assignments, projects and performance that you forget to make time for FUN! Have your student take a study break and go for ice cream. Spend two hours watching a movie together. Spend time together talking about things other than academics. Our children will be graduates all too soon.

If you would like more information on how to implement this in your family, please feel free to contact me at [tosha.haynes@cpalions.org](mailto:tosha.haynes@cpalions.org)

Blessings to you,  
Tosha Haynes

#### Our Mission

Christ Presbyterian Academy, an educational ministry of Christ Presbyterian Church, assists Christian families in helping students come to know God, evaluate all knowledge and all life by His truth, and live transformed by His truth for His glory.

#### Our Motto

*Soli Deo Gloria* — To God Alone Be the Glory