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Michael Simon to Talk at Campo About Adolescent Behaviors

By Sophie Braccini

Michael Simon's biggest concern is with the sanity and well being of our teenagers. The marriage and family licensed therapist has had a private practice in Rockridge for 13 years, he was the Director of Counseling at Bentley School in Lafayette until last year when the position became full time, and is an acclaimed speaker who appears at conferences all over the country. On Thursday October 2nd, Simon will return to the Acalanes School district with a free talk for the community in the Campolindo High School library, starting at 7 p.m. He will present "Parent Primer, a Year-to-Year Guide of What to Expect in High School." According to Simon, one element in reducing adolescent stress is to get parents not to worry too much themselves and stay connected to their students. "My presentation will help parents to understand each grade level's development and get a good sense why their kids are doing what they're doing; what's normal and what's not." For example, in 11th grade the parents are very conscious of how important the results of that year are for college admission, while at this age their children need to reinforce the wall between themselves and their parents. "They talk less and less, especially when they get into trouble, when a 9th grader will still talk, and over-exaggerate the good part of what's going on." Simon will give parents ways to stay close and supportive to their offspring whatever stage they are in. He will talk as well about alcohol and drug use, will touch on sexuality and will explain how to handle difficult discussions, depending on the student's age. In his Rockridge private practice Simon meets adolescents who, for the most part, have difficulty handling the stress and pressure to meet their parents' expectation and find their dreams. "They have to look the best, get into the best schools and they lose sight of what they want and what they feel," says Simon. To handle the pressure, they have sex earlier, drink or do drugs, or engage in dangerous behaviors to draw attention to themselves. On the surface they are very successful, but the suffering is present deeper inside. "When you grow up in an affluent democracy you get the message that if you don't succeed, since everyone is equal, there must be something wrong with you," says Simon. In addition, the media sets the standard of the only way to success, and adolescents have more and more difficulty keeping up with expectations. Simon is finishing a book with Laura Konigsberg about status and teens. It discusses whether there is only one way of succeeding at life, and how anxiety over status rules our teens' lives. The provocative title will be "How to Hate Yourself." The 90 minute presentation will be followed by a question and answer period. It is sponsored by the Campolindo Parents' Club and the Acalanes High School District Adult Education Center.

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