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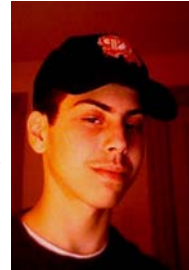
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Interview: Mike Tanenbaum

We are starting a new feature in the newsletter in which we will occasionally spotlight former A+ students who are now in college. The students will reflect on various issues such as the college application process and college life. This month we spoke with Mike Tanenbaum, 19 years old, a graduate of Abington Senior High School. Mike is currently a sophomore at Johns Hopkins University.



Mike, how many colleges did you apply to?

I applied to 8 colleges: NYU, University of Pittsburgh, Boston University, Lafayette, Vassar, Brown, Wesleyan, and Johns Hopkins.

Why did you decide to go to Johns Hopkins?

I'm very interested in writing, and Johns Hopkins has a program that attracted me called "Writing Seminars" where all types of writing are taught, including fiction, poetry, and screen writing. I'm also interested in International Relations, and Johns Hopkins is well known for that. It was an academically strong school where I could combine both of my interests. Also, I didn't want to be too far away from home and wanted to be able to come home on a weekend if I felt like it. Last but not least, Johns Hopkins offered me a generous scholarship.

How would you describe Johns Hopkins?

It's an urban school located in Baltimore with about 4,400 undergraduates.

Did you feel prepared academically for college?

Yes, I felt prepared, although there have been challenges. You have to adjust to being away from home and handling the workload, but I am really enjoying the classes.

What about socially? Did you feel prepared?

The social aspect of college life has been the most overwhelming and the most fun at the same time. Meeting new people from all over the world has been great. Johns Hopkins attracts a lot of international students, and there are quite a few students from California as well as from all along the East Coast. In the second semester of my freshman year I decided to join a fraternity, which is not something I anticipated doing. But it has been a good experience.

What advice would you offer to high school students who are starting the college application process?

First, there is an end to it. Keep your head straight and apply yourself, especially in your junior year of high school. That is a very important year, so do your best to do well. Also, try to find a school that matches your interests. While in high school I attended a summer writing program in Tennessee where I met a fellow student who was an undergraduate at Johns Hopkins-he was the one who told me about their Writing Seminars program.

What was your experience with A+ SAT prep?

I took the SAT three times and really needed SAT prep to boost my math score since math is not my best subject. I had done well on the writing and critical reading sections, so we focused primarily on math during the sessions. Taking the practice tests--the sheer repetition of it--was the most helpful thing about SAT prep. It was also helpful working one-on-one with my tutor and going over each question I got wrong.

Teens, Schoolwork, and Motivation



This article was contributed by Judith Rader, Family Therapist, Penn Council for Relationships.

Parents frequently worry that their child lacks motivation to complete schoolwork and homework. And as their sons and daughters go through the high school years, this worry often intensifies. Mothers and fathers understandably hope that their teen's high school transcript will afford a full range of choices in college selection.

Consequently, many parents "step in" and give unwanted advice, comments, or lectures about the need for a higher degree of motivation--which their teen typically shuns or "tunes out". So what is a parent to do? How should parents effectively intervene to help children become more motivated? At what point should parents intervene? And what particular pitfalls might parents expect?

As a family therapist, I often see parents and teenagers entering therapy to address upset with schoolwork. Typically, the teens are "shut down," the parents are angry and anxious, and thus, there is little effective communication. To understand how a parent's desire to be helpful can be a source of conflict, it is important to first understand the developmental needs of teens. Adolescents are developmentally driven to embrace independence, self-initiative, and greater control in their lives. Meanwhile, they find themselves at a critical point in their development between childhood and adulthood--a period that draws them to "try on" different beliefs, opinions, and ways of conducting their lives towards the goal of forging an identity of their own. This confusing and often distressing time is truly a rite of passage, and is part of growing up.

As they progress toward a mature identity, teens understandably sift through immature, or irresponsible behaviors. They may "try on" a lackadaisical approach to homework completion and test preparation. Or they may test out the belief that because they deem a particular teacher "boring," for example, they do not need to "reward him" with carefully completed homework. In such instances, parents will typically notice poor grades or teacher comments indicating a lack of motivation and effort that will indeed require parental intervention.

In order to effectively intervene and avoid your teen's tuning you out, here are some important tips:

- Accept that your daughter will make mistakes in judgment (including some related to schoolwork)

- as she embraces her developmental task of "trying on" new behaviors.
- Do not become over-anxious and "move in" too abruptly or intrusively by using a shameful tone, lecturing, or hyper-vigilantly questioning your son about his schoolwork.
- If your daughter receives a poor first report card, sit down with her and respectfully discuss whether she senses her low grades are due to: 1.) difficulty with understanding the subject matter (which might require tutoring, after-school teacher help, or parental help); 2.) a lack of time and effort devoted to schoolwork; or 3.) depression (in which case professional help should be sought immediately).
- If your son admits that his poor grades are due to his "cutting corners" on schoolwork, institute an appropriate, short-term consequence such as: "For two weeks there will be no television or non-academic computer use until you finish your homework and show it to your father/mother and me. If you demonstrate during those weeks that you have carefully and thoroughly completed your homework, we will allow you to assume control of your homework completion again."
- If your relationship with your daughter is already distressed to the point where she ignores you or hurls nasty comments at you for your rightful involvement, it is probably time to seek the help of an experienced adolescent therapist.
- If you feel your son is getting good grades on tests and report cards, but you still feel he demonstrates a certain lack of motivation (in terms of time devoted to homework, for example), it is best not to intervene. Parents lack leverage to complain when their teens are achieving good grades-and they will most likely find our admonitions to spend more time on homework both intrusive and annoying.
- Know your child well, encourage her to do the best work she can, and foster her ability to identify and solve her own problems. But avoid the common pitfall of asking for or expecting certain grades. Children who are pressured to get better grades than they are capable of typically experience shame- which is often externalized as anger. And teens who are satisfied with a B/"above average" grade (and who may not be interested in getting into the "best college"), but hear their parents cajoling them to study for an A/"superior" grade, will most likely experience their parents as intrusive.

The most important gift we can nurture in our children is healthy self-esteem. Three important ingredients of healthy adolescent self-esteem are:

1. A sense of self-agency and independence (vs. being over-monitored or micro-managed).
2. The satisfaction of having done good work borne of careful attention and good effort (as opposed to their "dumbing themselves down" by laziness or a lack of focus).
3. The sense that they are accepted for who they are (for example, a solid "B" student, or a teen who feels too pressured both studying and going out for a varsity sport).

While parents must become involved when they determine that their teen's poor or mediocre grades result from lack of motivation, that intervention risks triggering the very powerful adolescent drive to maintain as much control over his or her life as possible. Understanding the "when" and "how" of such interventions is critically important. The ability to balance parental intervention with a teenager's developmental need for independence will greatly enhance their mutual relationship.



The Road to College

SENIORS:

- Finalize the list of colleges to which you are applying. Take advantage of any long weekends or days off this fall to visit any remaining schools of interest.

- Do your homework ahead of time: visit the college websites and find out about visiting the campus (including their policies on interviews, campus tours, and sitting in on classes), and ask yourself: Do these schools have programs that truly interest me? Are they located geographically in a place that appeals to me and that is near (or far!) enough from home? Am I comfortable with the size of the school?
- Send for application forms or find out if you can apply on-line.
- Make a list of teachers, coaches, employers, or others to contact for recommendations.

JUNIORS:

- Junior year is a critical year academically. Some of the toughest courses you take in high school will be this year since you are completing the highest level of some core classes. (Many high schools allow you to drop math after junior year, for example.) Some of you will take AP Exams in May and AP classes are notoriously rigorous.
- Do your best academically and vow not to get too far behind in any subject and to seek extra help if you are struggling.
- Determine which SAT Subject Tests you plan to take in the spring. Ask your teachers for their input on Subject Tests--some may offer extra help before or after school for interested students.
- Most of you will be taking the PSAT in October. Check out the following information about the PSAT, including sample questions: <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/psat/prep.html?CampaignID=28803>

SOPHOMORES & FRESHMEN:

Dive into your studies--your grades "count" in that they will appear on your high school transcript which is then forwarded to colleges where you apply. But don't forget to balance good grades with being involved in extra-curricular activities. Seek out opportunities both in and out of school to be active. Consider the following activities:

- School sports (intramural, junior varsity, and varsity)
- The arts: Music (band, choir, other singing groups, school musical), dance groups, art club, dramatic productions, set design, and stage crew
- School government (your school's student council offers a variety of positions, from president to class representative)
- Community service: This can be performed both through school (since many schools now have a community service requirement) and outside of school, through your place of worship, for example.

2007-2008 SAT/ACT Testing Dates

SAT/SAT Subject Test Dates:

October 6, 2007
 November 3, 2007
 December 1, 2007
 January 26, 2008
 *March 1, 2008 *(no Subject Tests on this date)
 May 3, 2008
 June 7, 2008

ACT Test Dates:

September 15, 2007
 October 27, 2007
 December 8, 2007
 February 9, 2008
 April 12, 2008
 June 14, 2008

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