

May 3 Pascack Hills High
6:00 pm Mental Health Resource Fair
7:15 pm Keynote Speaker



**SPLIT
 I M A G E**

Secret Struggles of Teens



Kate Fagan, ESPN Journalist and Author of
WHAT MADE MADDY RUN

www.hillsvalleycoalition.org

8:30-9:00 pm—Optional book discussion and dialogue in library

www.hillsvalleycoalition.org



S.A.F.E. Homes is a network of parents committed to keeping our children and families safe and substance free. Families sign a pledge committing not to serve alcohol to minors.
 John S. A. F. E. Homes
www.hillsvalleycoalition.org/SafeHomes.html

Hills Valley Coalition
 The Hills Valley Coalition for Resilient Youth
 Pascack Hills High School
 C/O Gale Mangold, Student Assistance Counselor
 225 Grand Ave, Montvale, NJ 07645

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Hills Valley Coalition NEWS

Spring 2018

Parent Newsletter of the Hills Valley Coalition for Resilient Youth: Serving Hillsdale, Montvale, River Vale & Woodcliff Lake

Perfectionism and Mental Health: Should We Be Concerned?*

I have strong personal and professional reasons to care deeply about perfectionism. As a psychologist, I have seen how unbridled perfectionism can be detrimental to mental health, creating increased vulnerability for anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and other mental illnesses. As someone who has struggled with perfectionism and is now raising 3 young boys, I am personally invested in adopting compassionate and flexible expectations, as well as teaching others that it is OK (and even a good thing!) to be imperfect.

Why should we care about perfectionism? Perfectionism is a dangerous trend among young people, and it is on the rise. Curran and Hill (2017) conducted a meta-analysis of 164 samples of 41,641 college students examining changes in perfectionism since 1989. The results suggested that young people are increasingly demanding of themselves, are more demanding of others, and perceive that others are more demanding of them. The authors speculated that the generational rise in perfectionism is accounted for by cultural shifts including increased competitiveness and controlling parenting practices. The authors also mentioned rising anxiety, individualism, and meritocracy (i.e., power based on one's ability) that may influence this trend. (Curran & Hill, 2017)

What does this mean for us as concerned parents, teachers, and community members? America today is arguably more individualistic than ever, and social media offers a "perfect" platform to display one's "best self." In the case of Madison Holleran, Kate Fagan has argued that her perfectionism, characterized by perpetuating a "split image," contributed to her mental illness, and decision to end her life.

On a personal level, I have wrestled with perfectionism since childhood. I put a tre-

mendous amount of pressure on myself to succeed in school, sports, and to be well-liked by everyone. Like most perfectionistic kids, I didn't like making mistakes. In college and graduate school, my perfectionistic tendencies continued as I assumed leadership roles in various organizations, and continued to expect perfection in my work and relationships. Fortunately, as an adult I have learned to become aware of the critical nature of my own perfectionistic "voice," and adopt a more gentle and com-

passionate stance. Therapy, introspection, and talking about my struggles openly has helped. Even writing this newsletter helps.

I have worked with hundreds of college students and young adults who display varying degrees of perfectionism. In my opinion, many of these individuals typically do not consciously start therapy because of their perfectionism, but rather because of the toll that their expectations take on their mental and physical health. The good news is that perfectionistic beliefs, once recognized, can be challenged and replaced with healthier ones.

As a psychologist and parent, I have observed a tsunami of a cultural shift. I have noticed an increased emphasis on excellence in performance, coupled with the "split image" phenomenon perpetuated by social media (i.e., being perfect on social media, but secretly struggling). On a personal level, I know how hard it can be

to shift an entrenched style of relating to oneself and to the world. Perfectionism thrives in secrecy, but talking about it may help. Therapy and professional support can be helpful to foster resilience and healing. Check out Brene Brown's book, *The Gift of Imperfection*, for more information about engaging with perfectionism, shame, and vulnerability.

Although my children are young, I have had ongoing conversations with them about perfectionism given the cultural shifts and my own personal tendency. **There is reason to be hopeful!** Based on my own experience, I am confident that, with increased awareness about perfectionism, we can effect change in ourselves and in our children.

We live in a "Stigma-Free" community with excellent access to mental health providers; if you suspect that you or your child is dealing with mental illness associated with perfectionism, you are not alone and professional help is available to you. Do not be afraid to reach out for help. Together, we can combat what appears to be a rising tide of perfectionism and split image, and help foster wellness among our children and within our community.

Marianne G. Dunn, Ph.D.

Dr. Dunn is an Assistant Professor at The College of Saint Elizabeth in the Psychology Department, a Licensed Psychologist in Private Practice in River Vale, and a mother of 3 kids 4 and under. Dr. Dunn can be reached at marianne@drmariannedunn.com

References:

Curran, T., & Hill, A. P. (2017). *Perfectionism Is Increasing Over Time: A Meta-Analysis of Birth Cohort Differences From 1989 to 2016. Psychological Bulletin, doi:10.1037/bul0000138*

*Please note, this is not intended as medical/psychological advice or diagnosis, and only reflects Dr. Dunn's personal viewpoints. This does not constitute or replace professional support or service.

Check out this table for some examples of challenging perfectionistic beliefs:	
PERFECTIONISTIC BELIEF:	HEALTHIER BELIEF:
"I have to try my best, and be the best at everything I do."	"I strive to work hard, but I don't need to be the best in everything I do."
"Failure is not an option"	"Mistakes are part of life and learning. It's OK to fail and make mistakes."
"I can't be less than perfect"	"I don't have to be perfect to be good enough."
"Others expect more than I can give them. They expect me to be perfect"	"I don't have to be perfect to live up to others' expectations of me."

On a Coach's Radar

As a high school track/cross country coach and Student Assistance Counselor, I felt a strong connection to Kate Fagan's, *What Made Maddy Run?* For the past 22 years, I have coached hundreds of high school athletes. I have cherished my relationships with them. I have even had the privilege of coaching my own three children!

Reading Fagan's book, reminded me of so many of these relationships and to those athletes who, over the years, raised concern. I wish I could say that having these concerns is unusual. It isn't. In fact, I cannot remember a single season when I didn't have several athletes who were "on my radar." I know I am not alone. As high school coaches, we have all watched our athletes struggle with everything from mild anxiety to life-threatening eating disorders and everything in between. It is important to note that these issues are not unique to the high performing athletes. We see it at all levels. Occasionally, we are given details

by a school counselor, administrator, parent or the athlete themselves. Rarely, strategies to help intervention efforts are shared. More often, we make note of and question certain behaviors and as our concerns grow, we simply wonder what the proper intervention would be.

As I reflected on these athletes and their lives, Kate Fagan's account of Madison's life nagged at me. It raised so many questions. **What role do coaches play in early identification and intervention for our struggling athletes? Do we hesitate in reporting our concerns and having difficult conversations? Who should we approach first with these concerns? Our athlete, their parents, a school counselor? How do you phrase questions without jeopardizing the sacred coach/athlete bond?** These are questions we, as coaches, have all asked ourselves.

When coaches are unsure of who to consult with or how to approach the sensitive topic of mental health issues, there are several options. Seeking advice from a mental

health professional is a great place to start. The Stigma-Free movement holds even more answers. Through the Bergen County Stigma-Free Movement, there have been many Mental Health First Aid Training Courses offered locally. Taking this valuable course can give coaches tremendous insight and concrete strategies for starting these difficult conversations.

The Bergen County Track and Field community mourns Madison Holleran deeply. It is my hope that we can unite with our athletes, their families and mental health professionals in our efforts to raise awareness, eliminate stigma, and refuse to stay silent.

Written by Christie Rossig

Pascack Valley High School Student Assistance Counselor and Pascack Hills Track and Cross Country Coach

Care Plus is offering Free Mental Health First Aid Training on May 10th. To sign up go to:

<http://www.careplusnj.org/free-youth-mental-health-first-aid-training-being-offered-to-bergen-county-community-members/>

One reason that it can be so challenging for parents, educators, caregivers to know how to best understand and support our teens, navigating life via social media, is that we never had to do so when we were growing up. We have no ability to reference our own personal histories as any kind of guide. Compounding the problem is the rapidity of digital change. Facebook, which is now under fire for privacy concerns, for selling personal data and potential election interference, was THE thing for my daughter's early teen Years. Now as she is a sophomore in college, it seems to no longer be so appealing to high school age teens. In the recent NY Times article, "How the Parkland Kids Got So Good at Social Media," student Emma Gonzalez noted that, "Facebook is not really used by people in my community." (Bromwich, 2018) I have noticed my son, 16 has little interest, but created an account to keep up with certain school events.

Another recent NY Times article explores the question, "Are Today's Teenagers Smarter and Better Than We Think?" (Parker-Pope, 2018) Basically answering YES, (I agree), and citing, among other things, the incredible savvy that built the unprecedented mass movement around gun reform, using social media as a platform to do so. Another teen survivor summed up

Teens and Social Media

the less good news aspect of it all, "I'll start typing a tweet and delete it...I'll think 'what else can I say' then type and delete again. I do miss having that teenage twitter account. But we don't get to have that regular teenage life anymore. It just doesn't exist." (Parker-Pope, 2018)

Clearly she is referring to the loss of her pre-shooting life. Across the country, all current teens have had active shooter drills since kindergarten. **These same teens see the news nearly non stop on their phones via social media. These teens have to manage their lives, including, tragedies, victories (college acceptances or not), breakups, party lives (or not), in a highly public way with a "curated self" as Kate Fagan calls it.** (Fagan, 2017)

We all know by now the addictive components of social media. How "likes" give us a shot of dopamine, how watching other people's lives endlessly on Instagram and Snapchat can lead to the comparison trap (e.g. she is sexier, more popular than me), and FOMO (fear of missing out), to name a few. According to a CNN article, "Instagram Worst Social App For Young People's Mental Health," which was recently assigned as a Physical Education Discussion, at PHHS. The survey of 1,500 young people aged 14 to 24, indicated that these **culprits for mental health were ranked worst to best:**

1. Instagram 2. Snapchat 3. Facebook 4. Twitter 5. YouTube (the only platform with a positive net impact). "Socializing from behind a screen can also be uniquely isolating, obscuring mental health challenges even more than usual." (Fox, 2017)

We also know the positive sides. Social media is not going away, so learning how best to navigate it, is the order of the day. As MIT psychologist, Dr. Sherry Turkle, author of, *Alone Together* and *Reclaiming Conversation* says, "...the challenge of our new technology is not just to manage it better, but to practice being human in the face of it." Some of the things she recommends: have real time conversations; embrace human imperfections of everyday life; show vulnerability to others; expose yourself to perspectives you disagree with; and cultivate non transactional relationships, not even expecting a "like" or "follow" from people we want in our life. (Magister, 2018)

Sometimes I do miss the 'old days'.

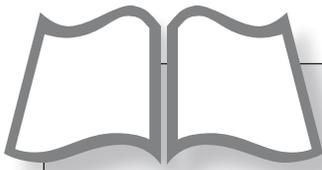
By Anne Earle, LMSW, CARC

Bromwich, J. E. (2018, Mar 7). How the Parkland students got so good at social media.

Fox, K. (2017, May 19). Instagram worst social media app for young people's mental health.

Magister, C. (2018, Feb 6). How to practice being human: an interview with Dr. Sherry Turkle.

Parker-Pope, T. (2018, Mar 30). Are today's teenagers smarter and better than we think?



Book Club Corner

What Made Maddy Run

The Secret Struggles and Tragic Death of an All-American Teen

From noted ESPN commentator and journalist Kate Fagan, the heartbreaking and vital story of college athlete Madison Holleran, whose death by suicide rocked the University of Pennsylvania campus and whose life reveals with haunting detail and uncommon understanding the struggle of young people suffering from mental illness today.

IF YOU SCROLLED THROUGH THE INSTAGRAM FEED of nineteen-year-old Maddy Holleran, you would see a perfect life: a freshman at an Ivy League school, recruited for the track team, who was also beautiful, popular, and fiercely intelligent. This was a young woman who succeeded at everything she tried, and who was only getting started.

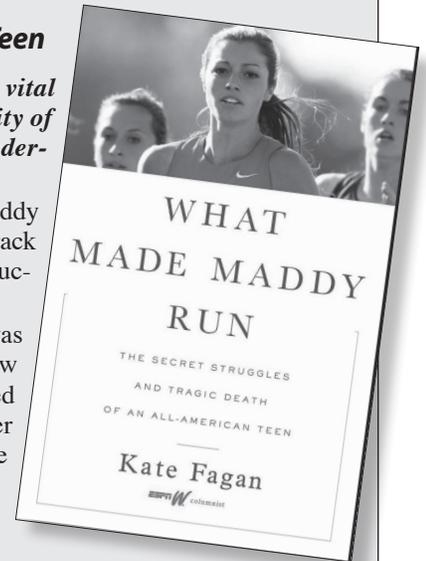
But when Maddy began her long-awaited college career, her parents noticed something was different. Previously indefatigable, Maddy became withdrawn, and her thoughts centered on how she could change her life. In spite of thousands of hours of practice and study, she contemplated transferring from the school that had once been her dream. When Maddy's dad, Jim, dropped her off for the first day of spring semester, she held him a second longer than usual. That would be the last time Jim would see his daughter.

What Made Maddy Run began as a piece that Kate Fagan, a columnist for espnW, wrote about Maddy and her experience. What started as a profile of a successful young athlete whose life ended in suicide became so much larger when Fagan started to hear from other college athletes also grappling with mental illness.

This is the story of Maddy Holleran and her struggle with depression, but it also reveals the mounting pressures young people, and college athletes in particular, face to be perfect, especially in an age of relentless connectivity and social-media saturation.

Fagan, K. (2017) *What Made Maddy Run*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company

Kate Fagan, author, is a columnist and feature writer for espnW, ESPN.com and *ESPN The Magazine*.



Worried about Suicide? Learn the FACTS

- F**EEELINGS –Expressing hopelessness about the future.
- A**CTIONS –Displaying severe/overwhelming pain or distress.
- C**HANGES –Showing worrisome behavioral cues or marked changes in behavior, including: withdrawal from friends or changes in social activities; anger or hostility; or changes in sleep.
- T**HREATS –Talking about, writing about, or making plans for suicide.
- S**ITUATIONS –Experiencing stressful situations including those that involve loss, change, create personal humiliation, or involve getting into trouble at home, in school or with the law. These kinds of situations can serve as triggers for suicide.

1. Express your concern about what you are observing in their behavior
2. Ask directly about suicide
3. Encourage them to call the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (8255)**
4. Involve an adult they trust

Remember, if you have **IMMEDIATE concern** about someone's safety, **call 911 right away!**

* Taken from an updated version of the FACTS handout available in the *Lifelines Curriculum* and "Making Educators Partners"

PERFORMANCE PERFECTION –Blessing or Curse?

What Is Perfectionism? According to psychology, perfectionism is a personality trait. It is characterized by striving for flawlessness, setting high performance standards, critical self-evaluations, concern about others' evaluation. General perfectionism can affect all aspects of life. Perfectionists often measure their self-worth by productivity and accomplishment.

What Is Performance Perfection? It is the action of a perfectionist in academics, athletics, personal relationships, at home or on the job. According to psychologists, there are two types of perfectionists: adaptive, and maladaptive. Adaptive or normal perfectionists are often high achievers who do not compromise their self-esteem. They derive pleasure from their efforts. Maladaptive or neurotic perfectionists set unrealistic goals for themselves, and are disappointed when they can't reach those goals.

Thus, performance perfection can be positive or negative. Talented people who made lasting contributions in the arts and sciences engaged in performance perfection. Students who set realistic grade goals, and allow sufficient time to utilize efficient study strategies will reach his goals and be content. An athlete who sets a reasonable improved running speed will be satisfied with his improvement. Conversely, a professional who procrastinates submitting a report because he can't tolerate criticism may be dismissed. A neighbor who sets an unrealistic weight loss goal may suffer disappointment, overeat and gain weight.

Why Is Performance Perfection Important To Our Teens? Teens yearn to be accepted by their peers. Our culture stresses body image, beauty and success. Social media encourages preoccupation with these values. Girls want to be thin, have sleek figures, and doll-like facial features. Guys want to be "jocks," tall, and "macho." In their quest for popularity, girls have almost starved themselves to reach their weight goal; guys have injured their muscles from excessive weight lifting, and taken supplements. Performance perfection has brought about the concept of "split image" for these teens.

Maladaptive perfectionism can be associated with eating disorders like anorexia nervosa, anxiety and depression. It is a hidden factor in addiction because failure often leads to a desire to escape. Perfectionism which leads to performance perfection can be a risk factor in suicide, as it was with Maddy, profiled by Kate Fagan in her book, *What Made Maddy Run*.

What Can We Do To Help Our Children Avoid The Pitfalls of Performance Perfection? Start in early childhood. At the least, avoid negative criticism, discourage ongoing competition, assist with realistic goal setting, and understanding "stigma free" mental health. Most of all, love your child because he is your child, and encourage him to be the best person he can be.

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