**Getting Ourselves Organizing Routines**

Middle School Student, English Class

Needs to focus on organizational skills and control

**10 minute introduction:** Take part of a class period to explain how teen brains, like those of 1 to 18-month-old babies are suddenly growing dendrites and axons at an alarming pace. Share how for babies, it simply means quicker learning capacity, but for teens it means a disruption of normal pathways. Then explain the executive functions of the brain that the prefrontal cortex handles are disrupted by the sudden appearance of lots of brain pathways.

* Response Inhibition
* Working Memory
* Emotional Control
* Flexibility
* Sustained Attention
* Task Initiation
* Planning/Prioritizing
* Organization
* Time Management
* Goal-directed persistence
* Metacognition

Focus particularly on the challenges of planning, prioritizing and organizing. Explain that if we develop routines for our ordinary tasks, these challenges are far less troublesome, especially during the teen years when brains are so easily distracted or confounded.

(Send the parents an email explaining the same thing, and tell them what actions you are going to take, and invite them to participate in supporting their student(s) in developing strategies to make executive functions more routine.)

**12 minute application:** In class, have each student examine his/her backpack, and determine a place where he/she can keep various items (pencils, texts, journals/notebooks, vocabulary booklets, etc.) Have students share with the ones around them what their organizational strategies are and how they maintain them. Each student is to determine his/her own strategy and rearrange the backpack like that.

**10 minute application:** Then, in lieu of a vocabulary drill, have each student complete a handwriting page, tracing their vocab words, and definitions, and then writing them again, keeping lower case letters touching the top and bottom lines consistently.

Point out that when we write poorly, people unconsciously think that we are not very clever, and may even dismiss what we have to say. If a professor or boss cannot read our handwriting, that person may subconsciously think poorly of us, and grade us lower, or maybe pass us by for a promotion. Pleasant, legible handwriting is an asset in life, and during these teen years, a lot of the kids lose that ability.

The kids will realize that this is a helpful task, to retrain their hand-eye coordination for fine motor skills, so that they will not be handicapped by that in the future. This can be a good time to point out that the brain is not only growing connections like mad, but also pruning them! That means that whatever function they are not putting into active use may be trimmed away from their brain.

Enabling the students to focus their attention on personal accuracy in handwriting, helps them remember that personal accuracy in all areas can become suspect. (I found their focus to detail improved in several areas!)

Repeat this lesson two or three times, enough to be sure they are keeping up with their organizing routines, and enough to cement their awareness of control in handwriting.

**5 minute closing:** Have each student share what he or she is noticing as being hard about trying to be exact in handwriting. Encourage one another!