

Parents advised to avoid knee jerk reactions

PARENTS: Make teens think

Psychologist says influence over teenagers remains a key

BY BILL BITTAR

REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

SOUTHBURY — Teenagers saying things like, “my Shakespeare report is due tomorrow and I didn’t start it yet,” “I don’t think I even want to go to college” and “I met this really cool guy online,” could elicit knee jerk reactions from parents such as, “give me your phone,” “you’re not going to live off my dime” and “it’s not happening.”

Dr. Susan Bauerfeld, a clinical psychologist and public speaker, said knee jerk reactions like that should be avoided because it can anger teenagers and hurt their connection with their parents.

“You have no control. Nada. Zip,” she told nearly 200 parents gathered for an event at Pomperaug High School Thursday night. “What you have is influence and it’s powerful. It’s

your most powerful tool as a parent. You have no control, but a ton of influence.”

Bauerfeld, a mother of three grown sons, said building relationships with your children that are supportive, nurturing and safe provides the foundation for parents to have a positive influence on their lives.

Bauerfeld was the speaker for the event on the book, “How to Talk So Teens Will Listen & Listen So Teens Will Talk,” by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, sponsored by Southbury and Middlebury Acting Responsibly Together (S.M.A.R.T.) Inc., with support from Region 15 public schools and funding from the Connecticut Community Foundation. S.M.A.R.T. offers a series of these events as part of its Parent University program.

Bauerfeld told parents to practice recognizing when their bodies tense up and to avoid knee jerk reactions, name calling and criticism when talking to their teenagers, as

well as teaching consequences rather than punishing them.

Of raising her sons, she said, “what I’m most proud of is they’re kind, when it is needed they pay attention, they take care of themselves and they think. I think that’s what parents find most important, not how much money they make.”

Bauerfeld said parents should accept the fact that life is full of discomfort and conflict and their child will make mistakes.

The frontal lobes of teenage brains are not fully developed and they are dealing with puberty and finding who they are, Bauerfeld explained. She said listening to teenagers without judgment and acknowledging their feelings helps to communicate and make them more likely to *See PARENTS , Page 5B*

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do their chores and homework.

If a child had a party when his parents were not home, Bauerfeld said it is perfectly fine to show anger by saying something like, “I am furious and disappointed that I got a call from the neighbor about noise coming from the house and

Rather than a punishment, which may make the teen think about how to avoid getting caught the next time, Bauerfeld suggested showing how to make amends, having the teen clean up the mess and apologize to the neighbor. This shows the consequences, she said.

Kara and Brian Steenburgh of Southbury have two teenage daughters and a younger one. “She gave really good examples of how

their self esteem and how we want to make them responsible,” Kara said.

Santiago Valencia of Southbury has a nine-year-old daughter and said he found the event helpful. “When she’s a teenager, I’ll be ready,” he said with a smile.

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had to come home early to find a party in progress and the house a mess.”

to respond to children, not to belittle them, how it affects