

## Patty Wipfler – Connecting with your adolescent - Staying Close, Staying Hopeful.

By Kathleen Bisaccia

Parents from a number of Bay Area High Schools both public and private attended a full International High School (IHS) auditorium to listen to the wisdom of Patty Wipfler. Wipfler's comments were sometimes controversial (more about that later) but always were joyful and uplifting.

Wipfler approaches the subject of teen communication with humor. Wipfler took on a number of specific topics in her presentation. She starts by talking about US - the parents. Wipfler points out that many time parents will say that teens don't act grownup, and reminds us that as parents, we have to remember to make adulthood and responsibility attractive and not complete drudgery – your teen will say "why do I want to grow up, look how miserable you are!" Of course we have been parenting a long time by now and we are tired! And just when it gets the hardest - the teen years - we are the most worn out. But remember to have fun, connect with your teen, and enjoy the ride. Some other Wipfler highlights:

**Space and Boundaries** – Tip: ask "how do you like to be approached, are there times when you don't want to be?" As we have all experienced, the end of a long day isn't necessarily the best time to ask details about the day. Let the teens relax a little and get a snack. It's better not to drill the teen after they've been drilled by teachers all day. When you ask how the day was, don't assume something is wrong when you get an answer. You don't always have to say "what's wrong." Just let them have the floor and let them know you are listening. Teens also say they'd like us to recognize that we don't always tell them what is wrong when they ask us – they can tell

when we aren't telling them something. Sometimes parents can let their guard down, and be open about mistakes.

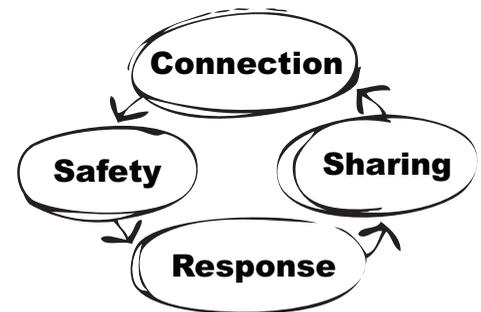
**Grades and homework** – There are levels here of pushing vs. cracking down. The goal here is to empower the teen to make the best choices. Rather than say "you could do better" you can say "we want to make sure you have great choices in your life." Also, teens have a lot of homework, parents can help with small administrative things they need to do when they are very busy.

**When teens are upset** – How can parents be supportive? Sometimes the best immediate thing is just giving a hug and waiting until the your child wants to talk about it (it's like fishing - keep dangling your line and they will eventually bite!). Also, make sure you are ready to hear what they might have to say. (Important reminder for parents - offload your problems on an adult listener, not your teen).

**Positive Interaction** – work in some "special time" doing whatever your teen wants to do with you. Even if it is must an hour, give them your undivided attention and participation. This habit will last until they are adults and beyond. When teens feel connected, they feel safe, and they are free, smart, creative and fun. Paying them positive attention helps with this connection.

**Discipline** – what is the best way to discipline teens so that they learn? Give your kids some space to calm down. Here comes the controversial part – Wipfler says that grounding and punishment just cause resentment, sometimes a teen needs to express exactly how they feel, even if it is to say "I hate you." If they know they will be punished for doing so then they will not want to talk to you, and a wall will be built between you. So let them express themselves, and later regroup to talk. Also when punishing think about what the real goal is – if you punish your teen by grounding them to home, this will equate to home = bad.

**Trust and Freedom** - teens want to be trusted, and state that if they can be trusted then not as much discipline will be required. Wipfler has seen many times when parents are too restrictive and it



backfires, and those kids can get very wild especially in college. Wipfler implores parents to NEVER say "because I said so" – give your teen the respect of an explanation. Instead of saying "you can't go," have a discussion to say what the concerns are, and maybe come to a compromise.

**Helping Teens Navigate High-risk Behavior** – Unfortunately, as a teen gets older if they feel they are ready for certain behaviors they are going to do it. Saying "no drinking" or "no sex" is just going to close communication but won't stop kids from doing it. Help keep them safe. Oftentimes the kids who end up in trouble are the ones with parents who just say "no" and aren't open to discussing safety. So help your teen be safe. For example, talk about guidelines "there will be drinking at this party – you can always come home no matter what state you are in and can always call me." Make sure they are educated, for example "one shot is the same as a whole beer." And remember that even if there is drinking, don't just assume your kids will be doing it.

Wipfler's final reminder - your teen is growing up and at some point soon will be out in the world. They will need to know how to make their own choices! And remember to think that your parents had different thoughts and values than you did as a teen, and how you felt about that. It helps give some perspective.

For more information, see Patty's website at: [handinhandparenting.org](http://handinhandparenting.org)

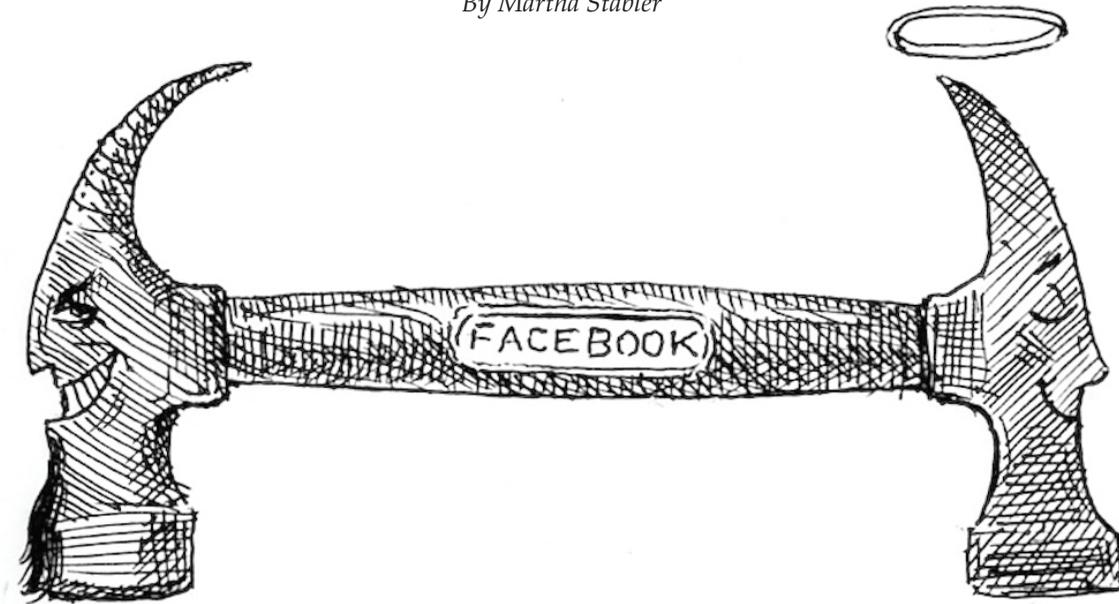
*Kathleen Bisaccia is the mother of two daughters, one of whom is a newly-minted teen and will be attending Drew High School in the fall. Kathleen is the editor of ParentTeen.*

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# Unlock The Secrets of Facebook: What Parents Need to Know About Social Networking

By Martha Stabler



**On Monday, November 14th a large crowd gathered at San Francisco Waldorf High School to hear well-known speaker and Facebook authority Linda Fogg Phillips. Fogg-Phillips is the mother of 8 children ranging in age from 11-27.**

Fogg-Phillips began her talk with an anecdote about how she was exposed to Facebook in a casual conversation with her brother who knew more about her daughter's life than she did through his relationship with his niece on Facebook. Up to that point, Linda relates, she did not allow social networking websites in her home. But from that conversation on, she embarked on a journey to understand what drew kids to this environment and what parents could do to avoid being left behind. When she began her search for information a tiny minority of the parents she met were on Facebook and although more parents use Facebook today, she still finds many parents who are not. Linda urged everyone in the audience to go home and set up an account or risk being shut out of their children's lives altogether.

Fogg-Phillips' core message in encouraging parents to use Facebook is as a means of strengthening families in both the real and virtual worlds. She likened it to a hammer, a tool with one side that is used for tearing down and one side that is used for building. Saying it is not a question of whether we use the tool but how we use we use the tool, she explained that her work on social media is aimed at making the experience productive vs. destructive.

She showed a short video entitled "Social Media Revolution 2011" which contained a number of startling statistics on the global impact of social media. It is available on YouTube and is a fascinating study of how much has changed in the world as a result of social networking technology in a short period of time. Fogg-Phillips said that in her opinion, Facebook is the #1 parenting tool of our age.

Fogg-Phillips noted that teen-ages generally won't communicate their feelings directly but will post them on their wall which offers parents an insight into their inner lives which they would not otherwise have. She defined terms such as "poking" (not

recommended) and "chatting" which can be monitored by parents to see who their child is chatting with although the actual contents of the chat cannot be viewed. She distinguished between "wall posting" which is public and private messages that are not seen by anyone but the sender and recipient.

She asked participants to identify their top 6 concerns about their children's use of FB which were: Safety; Privacy; Exposure; Bullying; Image; Addiction. After listing them she observed that these issues are not new, but the medium is. She stressed the necessity of "friending" your child, setting a "friending" policy with your son or daughter and, optimally, knowing your child's password in order to see exactly what they and their friends are posting. In addition, you need to check their site frequently, cull their "friend list" with them regularly and be sure you are not being blocked. If you encounter resistance she suggested having a friend whom your son or daughter trusts "friend" them and then keep you apprised of activity on his or her profile. She defined the term "Digital Footprint" she suggested that kids use FB to highlight positive achievements and as a marketing tool to call out their accomplishments, rather than to post potentially damaging or embarrassing photos or other information.

An interesting fact that Fogg-Phillips shared was that when a child goes missing the first place the police or FBI check is his/her Facebook account. This illustrates how much information about their relationships, activities and daily life is contained in those virtual "pages."

Fogg-Phillips stressed the importance of good digital citizenship broken down into the 3 P's: Post thoughtfully, Protect Privacy, Play Fair. This includes being conscious of your digital footprint and not revealing personal information that could endanger you. She demonstrated for the audience how to control privacy

settings and insisted they review them with their kids and stay up to date on changes within the FB platform that affect their teen-agers accounts. She also touched on cyber-bullying saying that FB does not cause bullying but can be a conduit. She noted that FB has an active anti-bullying campaign including a mechanism for reporting and coping with bullying. She directed the audience to the Facebook family Safety Center at: [www.facebook.com/help/safety](http://www.facebook.com/help/safety) that has resources for dealing with bullying as well as privacy and other safety concerns.

Above all, Fogg-Phillips urged parents to view Facebook as a portal into a hidden world of their teen-ager that they would not otherwise have. Her message is that it is our responsibility to become educated, engaged and ultimately empowered through our acceptance and embrace of this powerful new medium. Much more information can be found in her recently published book Facebook for Parents available online at [www.facebookforparents.com](http://www.facebookforparents.com).

## Hot Topic Discussion Circles

By Martha Mangold

**“Does your teen do this too?” “What do you do about it?”** Such was the nature of the conversation at the Parents’ Coalition’s second annual hot topics discussion circles on February 13, 2012 at the Bay School of San Francisco. This year’s topics included technology usage, achievement and performance anxiety, and ways in which to build a useful and supportive parent community.

### Technology Use

Many parents feel that many of their teens spend too much time in front of a screen – playing games, updating Facebook, watching movies, texting. While parents remember spending hours on the phone as teens, there is a concern that excessive computer usage is socially isolating. Is the teen interacting on social media sites or trolling for tidbits of information about others? Parents recognize instant access to the internet through hand-held devices is a reality of life. Parents agree that it is their responsibility to try to stay up to date, and to have conversations with their kids about privacy, bullying and maintaining face-to-face interactions. This can be achieved through asking questions about what’s going on with their Facebook friends, setting limits on screen time, keeping the bedroom door open and unlocked, and trying to maintain a healthy balance between on-line and off line activities.



“if you’re going to call, I’m not going,” or “of course parents will be there.” What to do? For starters, many parents do call about parties, especially to confirm that a parent will be present and that there is a no drug/drinking policy at the home. Parents can also email the host parent thereby not involving the teen. Some parents thought it best to frame it as a safety issue and set a clear obligation on the part of the teen to assume responsibility and keep the parent

updated. Once a firm rule is in place and the expectation clear there is often less pushback. Staying engaged with school through volunteering and attending meetings or in carpool is also a good way to build your parent community. Parents can also encourage the school administration to take an “it takes a village” approach and promote shared responsibility for the health and safety of teens.

### Achievement

As with most teen issues, communication is key. To ease stress, talk to the teen about setting achievable goals. Focus on whether they are engaged with the learning process and are trying to the best of their ability. Adopt the philosophy that they have not failed if they are trying. Some teens have found Skype study groups useful, so the teen does not feel isolated and alone when tackling a challenging academic problem. Some parents thought that the focus on achievement has created rather entitled kids: Teens retreat to their rooms immediately after arriving home to “study,” they are “too busy” to help with chores, they expect large allowances. Parents found it challenging to decipher whether their teen’s behavior was merely oppositional or whether it had to do with the makeup of the teen. All agreed that from the parent’s perspective, it was important to choose one’s battles carefully.

### Building a Useful Parent Community – Parties and Teen Safety

Parents often feel pressured by their kids about reaching out to and checking in with other parents. In elementary and middle school parents know one another and don’t hesitate to call, but this changes in high school. Teens say “nobody’s parents call,”

### Parents Share The Positive

Parents find that the following behaviors generated positive outcomes and bonding with their teen:

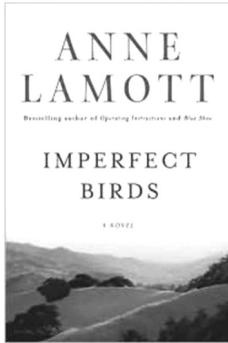
- Being a good listener and allowing the teen to work out his or her own solutions;
- Making decisions together;
- Appreciating that their teen experience is different than your own, and not expecting them to share your worldview;
- Being affectionate and warm with the teen;
- Relaxing about parenting and enjoying the ride;
- Learning not to “throw gasoline on the fire,” staying calm, and not engaging in moments of heated debate;
- Giving yourself and your teen time to reflect and say “I’m sorry” after an argument.

Parents left the evening realizing that they are not alone in their concerns, that their instincts are generally good and that sharing collective wisdom can take some of the stress out of the parenting journey. If you have suggestions for next year’s Hot Topics, please leave a comment on our website at [parentcoalition.net](http://parentcoalition.net).

*Martha Mangold is an attorney with two sons in college.*

# Book Review: Anne Lamott – Imperfect Birds

By Kathleen Bisaccia



Anne Lamott has taken on a parent's nightmare of out of control teen drug use and behavior in her fictional work *Imperfect Birds*. As I read this book, I found myself thinking that the descriptions of these beautiful teens couldn't be reality, that this was overdramatized for fiction's sake – but is it? There is a reason for the multitude of lectures, books, and resources on the topic of teen drug use. The situations in the book feel very real at times. At one point in the novel when her daughter is checked in a rehab center, the mother finds herself at a garden center frozen with indecision – bark or mini-bark? Bark or mini-bark?—and leaves the store rattled and empty handed. Such is the consciousness of a parent in

this situation. As you read, you will find yourself vacillating between thinking “no-way, that would never be my kid” and “please, don't ever let that be my kid!” It is difficult in the end to extend a positive take-away from this book. How does a parent successfully balance their fear for their child with the right of every child not to be a presumed addict-in-waiting?

## COALITION MISSION

“To support, educate, and inspire parents of adolescents in order to promote the health and safety of our youth.”

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Readers are encouraged to submit letters to the editor, ideas for articles or articles themselves.

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**Check out our new website!**

[www.parentscoalition.net](http://www.parentscoalition.net)



**Parents Coalition**  
of Bay Area High Schools



### Who We Are

The Coalition began in 1994 as a grassroots response to the challenges of parenting teenagers. We look at both teen and parent relationships. When teenagers struggle, parents and guardians often feel isolated from one another and do not know what would be most helpful for their child. The Coalition offers a variety of platforms to address these concerns.

[READ MORE](#)

### Events



2011 – 2012  
Annual Calendar of Events

**October 3, 2011**  
Jump Start Your Teen to Make Mature Choices

**November 14, 2011**  
Unlock the Secrets of Facebook

**January 9, 2012**  
Connecting with Your Adolescent

**February 13, 2012**  
Hot Topics Discussion Circles

**Mon, April 23, 2012**  
Annual Teen Panel Discussion

**And check out our Parents Coalition Facebook Page!**



[www.facebook.com/ParentsCoalitionBayArea](http://www.facebook.com/ParentsCoalitionBayArea)