

The Scarsdale Inquirer

EQ: The secret to securing success in school and career

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FRIDAY, MAY 24, 2019

Interacting with others is important across all cultures, religions and background. It's something that seems simple, and yet, a lot goes into it, including eye contact, focus and a certain level of empathy.

Social interactions are becoming more of a challenge for today's young people, whose social lives are heavily influenced by social media—sometimes to the detriment of their social-emotional and character development.

Dr. Maurice Elias visited Scarsdale at the invitation of the Scarsdale Middle School PTA May 7 to help parents understand how they can play a role in boosting their kids' emotional intelligence, or EQ, which is often listed as the No. 1 most valuable career skill in today's workplaces.

Dr. Elias, psychology professor and director of clinical training at Rutgers University, author of an award-winning weekly parenting column, lectures and writes about students' emotional intelligence, school success and social-emotional and character development.

"Parenting is a challenging activity at its least, but there are some things we can do that have an impact," Elias said. "In the rush of life, we sometimes lose track of what the things are that are so important."

One factor that's important for parents is to make sure their kids aren't simply thriving academically, but emotionally as well.

Dalya Kahn, programs chair for the SM PTA, said her hope in bringing Elias to address parents was to discuss the importance of that balance.

To kick off his presentation, Elias has audience members introduce themselves to someone in the room they hadn't met before by saying their name and how they were feeling.

The person who received the greeting had responded by mimicking the way the greeting was delivered and telling how they were feeling that day.

"The act of being able to give a greeting isn't such a simple thing," Elias said. "If a child cannot give a greeting, there's a lot of evidence that they're at a disadvantage in a lot of their relationships."

He suggested taking an approach influenced by philosopher René Descartes, who said, "I think therefore I am."

However, Elias said there's another important line of reasoning for people to practice, which is, "I see you, therefore you are."

Elias explained that while the Descartes definition focuses more on one's self, the latter sentiment is more about what people can accomplish together, which aligns with hiring standards at innovative companies like Google, which no longer make test scores a main priority. Instead, they look to hire people who have strong interpersonal skills, people who

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can adapt and people who aren't looking to take all the credit, but rather to be a team player.

Elias presented a graph to illustrate the skills needed for success in school and in life, including self-awareness, responsible decision making, relationship skills, social awareness and self-management.

Those skills are “deceptively simple but they’re very important,” he said. “Self-awareness is about recognizing your feelings and the feelings of others. This is the single biggest deficit in our kids—to accurately look at other people and know what they’re feeling.”

Self-awareness is at a deficit because kids are living in a culture that constantly amplifies things, according to Elias, with extreme sports, engrossing entertainment and “having to binge everything.”

And, he said, spending large amounts of time on a computer, phone or any type of screen can make it harder for people to focus when talking to someone in person.

“This is where kids get into trouble because they don’t know how to label their feelings and other people’s feelings,” Elias said, “Emotional management is a skill, not a trait. It’s something that develops.”

It’s a skill deemed so important that there are organizations at the state and national level dedicated to making sure students develop emotional intelligence and skills. One such group, the Social Emotional Learning Alliance for United States, or SEL4US, is a coalition that provides resources to help local organizers to influence their communities to implement high quality social emotional learning.

Studies have shown the positive effect of EQ on student academic achievement is at least as strong as other proven positives, such as small class size and after-school tutoring. Students with strong emotional intelligence also tend to score higher on achievement tests, Elias said, because those students have a stronger sense of reasoning and more self-

How to be well rounded

Dr. Maurice Elias’s presentation included this graph showing



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control, which enables them to spend more time on questions, focus on receiving the information and then problem-solve more effectively.

To bring it full circle, Elias said not only should parents want emotionally intelligent children, but children want emotionally intelligent parents as well.

Kids learn emotional intelligence in their own homes, he said, so parents need to learn about and develop the same social-emotional skills. For example, if a parent is feeling caring, he or she should learn to show that emotion, otherwise kids won't pick up on it, and it's the little things that make a big impact—the little extra hug or extra compliment.

“Life is very hectic; it’s not getting better and that’s what generates and fuels our frustrations and our quick expression of frustration,” Elias said. “Kids draw from you a powerful sense of who they are and who they can be... not because of their grades, but the confidence you show in them.”