

# Teachers co-author book on raising teenagers

BY DOUG JOHNSON  
STAFF WRITER

"We tell parents they are not raising kids, they are raising adults," explains Plymouth-Canton teacher Rick McCoy, co-author of a new book about adolescence.

His point: Adolescents are not children and they are not adults. Parents often need special help because of the nature of this age group.

McCoy, a teacher in the Journey Program for ninth graders at Plymouth Salem High School, and Nic Cooper, a Saline middle school administrator, are publishing a book on parenting teenagers. The book is due out in late November.

Both started their teaching careers in Plymouth-Canton schools. McCoy lives in Canton

Township and Cooper lives in Manchester. Cooper has two teenage daughters and McCoy is a stepfather to two teens, a boy and a girl.

Their upbeat book is titled "How to Keep Being a Parent When Your Child Stops Being a Child." The two conduct seminars on parenting and those workshops led to the book.

"We found parents saying 'ahh' a lot of us explained adolescence," Cooper said.

The two say adolescents need the following to be successful in their quest for "independence and identity."

■ Safety.

■ Structure, boundaries, and a clear sense of roles for themselves and their parents.

■ Intimate communication between parent and teenager

about feelings.

■ Support and unconditional love.

■ Values, stated often and explicitly.

"One thing Cooper and McCoy tell parents first is that they must examine how they were raised."

"Understand this truth," Cooper said. "Unless you learn otherwise, you will do what your parents did, because that is the one thing you truly know."

McCoy says their central message is that you can be successful with teens.

**Kids need parenting**

"Kids have friends, what they need is parents. This is when parents have a hard time being parents. Roles become confusing. You are losing the child you

know and it's tempting to be a buddy. But when you're a buddy you are literally taking a parent away from a kid. And kids say they want their parents to be parents," McCoy said.

In their contacts with kids, McCoy and Cooper usually hear youths say parents are the most important people in their lives.

"We don't really dwell on bad parenting. No parent deliberately wants to ruin their kids. They want more than anything to do a good job. We believe that they can change, and that they can change their parenting skills," McCoy said.

"Parents must be explicit about values. When you're done something that involves values, tell your teen you're doing it and tell them why. Explicit means being very clear."

Cooper adds that good parents can do everything right and a teenager can still get into substance abuse and have problems.

"What comes across from kids is that they want limits," Cooper said. McCoy uses the analogy of an swimmer who hits the wall to make a turn in a pool. "If there is no wall there, they're pushing up against nothing... just floating. Kids need that wall."

The book reminds parents that almost no parent-teen relationship is without conflict.

**Conflict normal**

"If there are no conflicts there is something wrong," McCoy said. "Kids are pulling away and they should be. The conflicts are a natural part of the process."

Totally overbearing parents can produce empty offspring who can't function as adults and "buddy" parents leave kids with no structure, the pair said.

Other points from the book:

■ Drugs: The two say zero tolerance on all drugs. There are no flow or special occasion dosages that are OK for teens.

■ Sex: Be explicit about your values. Don't be lazy here, be active. Talk about healthy relationships and the huge risks and long-term consequences. Teens need a large dose of reality. The book contains an appendix that helps parents talk about sex.

■ Forbidding a behavior is not teaching a value. Simply being tough is an oversimplification.

■ There are different types of family structures, including

estranged or divorced parents. Sometimes one parent practices "protective parenting." The book is direct about an abusive parent: the spouse must make a change.

■ The book includes work sheets, diagrams and checklists to aid the reader.

■ One chapter of the book deals with angry parents absolutely must seek outside help with: substance abuse, eating disorders and depression, among others.

"No two children grow up in the same family," McCoy said, meaning what was true for your first child will not be true for the next. Don't expect seamless continuity from teen to teen.

"The book really comes out of a deep respect for adolescents and for their parents," Cooper said.

McCoy has a B.A. from Albion College in psychology and an M.A. in special education from Eastern. Cooper has a B.A. in psychology from Wittenberg University and an M.A. in counseling and student personnel from Western. Both have extensive experience with troubled teens, including Cooper's stint as a probation officer. Both are state-certified social workers.

Cooper is in the final stages of work on a doctorate in education.

The book can be ordered through Willow Creek Publishing, 6506 Paul Revere Lane, Canton, MI 48187. Send a check for \$12.95; for advanced orders that price will also include tax, shipping and handling.

## Students gathering goods for homeless

BY STEPHANIE ANGRIM, CASOLA  
STAFF WRITER

As the season of giving approaches, Plymouth-Canton Academy students are demonstrating the true meaning of generosity.

Staff and students from kindergarten through 12th grade are working together to collect goods for homeless men at The Detroit Rescue Mission.

While the charitable activity became an annual event eight years ago, and the contributions have changed to suit the needs of the organization, teachers and students agree it is a special time of year.

"It's always a highlight of the year," said Beth Houston, second-grade teacher. "The kids participate really well. It's a great hands-on kind of thing."

Seven-year-old Matt Zanone of Canton is one second-grader who enjoyed painting gift bags which will hold the clothes and toiletries they are donating to the rescue mission.

"You got to give people things," he said. "It makes them feel happy because they never get Christmas gifts in their life."

Matt's classmate Jaelyn Stothers, 7, of Canton, agrees, saying it was fun to make the bags because "you get your hands all messy."

While the younger students are honing their creative skills decorating the bags, it is truly a school-wide service project. Each of the 180 gift bags contains a pair of gloves, a cap, socks, a sweater and an assortment of men's toiletries like soap, deodorant, toothbrushes, shampoos and washcloths.

The items were donated by students from preschool to sixth grade. Fourth graders sold cookies, candy and popcorn during snack time to raise additional money for the project. Students in grades 7-12 collected money which was used to purchase sweaters for the gift bags. Upper-class students also assembled the gift packages.

Principal Caryn Huntsman is a proponent of the program.

"We wanted the children to have an experience of a community service project," she said. "We want them to be connected to the community and realize people have needs."

"Because it's a Christian school, that is something we want to instill in our young people."

Timing is everything. At Plymouth-Canton Christian Academy, November is "generosity" month. The service project is an example of just that. The students are aware of its importance.

**Parents involved too**

Parents have gotten involved as well.

Plymouth resident Kathy Polara is one of about 50 parents assisting in the organization of the service project for The Detroit Rescue Mission. She comes in to gather the items which have been donated by each class.

Just before the gift bags were sent to The Detroit Rescue Mission, the entire school gathered for Thanksgiving Chapel to pre-

sent the 180 gifts - which are displayed in the shape of a Christmas tree - to a representative of the mission. Polara said the school is doing its part to fill a need.

Joy Wolfe is a parent of a Plymouth-Canton Christian Academy student who's helped get the word out about the service project. She feels it's worthwhile for the students to learn how fortunate they are.

"They learn how to share and be thankful for what they have," she said. "Most of the time they don't know that there are people right in the community who are in need."

**Caryn Huntsman**

—principal

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