

Why is it appropriate for my child to have a healthy struggle, and how can I help make that struggle successful?

Nearly every student that attends Oakley will struggle to meet expectations at some during their stay. This is due to a variety of reasons most of which center around three factors:

1. Increased social, academic and clinical pressure.
2. Increased freedoms and opportunities
3. Increased expectations of self reliance.

When these three factors combine most students try to avoid making responsible yet difficult decisions. In short, avoidance becomes the coping mechanism of choice. This avoidance can take many forms. The three primary tools the child will use to avoid maturity and responsibility are as follows:

1. Projection of Responsibility- Rather than saying I cannot meet expectations, the student will blame the teacher, the parent, the therapist or any number of people or things that are easy targets. “The teacher doesn’t like me” is much more likely than “I did not use my study hall time effectively.” The child projects the responsibility of academic success on the shoulders of the teacher rather than onto themselves. This approach keeps the child immature and dependent. The best response a parent can give when faced with this projection is to place the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the student. “How are *you* going to handle this?” Is a much better parental response than “Let me call the teacher and find out what is going on.”
2. Parental/School/Staff Splitting- Closely related to *Projection* is *Splitting*. Most bright, verbal, and expressive and avoidant teenagers use *Splitting* as the keystone in their manipulative arsenal. Many Oakley parents have never had the desire to have their child away from home. Parent’s oftentimes feel anxiety, guilt, shame and trepidation when they place a child at Oakley Most students know this and work on these feelings to their short term advantage. If the child can collude with the parent against the school, the child will remain emotionally immature and dependent. Parents must send a message that they support the school by clearly stating their support time and time again. By placing the responsibility for emotional and academic growth with the child, parents can avoid this pitfall.
There are times when a child will try and split parents by going to the “softie” rather than the “enforcer.” Parents (especially those from divorced families) should be careful not to fall into this trap.
3. Physical Avoidance- “I am sick,” or “I am broken,” is another avoidance tool students use to stay on the path of dependence and negative scheming. By getting “sick” the child says “I can’t do it, so you can’t hold me accountable. Remember, feigning illness or injury is guaranteed to pull on any parents heartstrings. Think of how often you are sick. Most parents don’t miss more than 5-days of work a year (if that). We have students that are “ill” one to two

days a week! Luckily we have a tremendous nurse, clear protocols and trained staff to help the child make it to class in time for the test.

None of the above tools are used because the student is in some way psychologically impaired. They are used for one reason only: somewhere in the past IT WORKED! By repeatedly sending the message to your child that they *can* do it, and you will *not* give them false rescue, they will learn that they are capable. This is when you will see independence, maturity and ultimately, happiness. This is a struggle for many students. If we can allow them to work through this struggle they will develop new tools built on a foundation of productivity, investment and responsibility. This outcome makes the struggle worth it!