



JIM MACLEAN/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE

Terence Houlihan gesticulates during his presentation.

## 'Survival Tips' ease sting of teens' snark

By Colleen Michele Jones

When the child who once idolized you hits their teens and suddenly looks at you as if you're the devil, "It has nothing to do with you, and everything to do with them," Terence Houlihan reassured

a group of parents Tuesday night at Irvington High School.

Houlihan, an educational consultant and school counselor, presented his "Survival Tips for Parenting Your Teenager" program, a well-attended event that was sponsored by the Irving-

ton PTSA and Rivertown Parents, a coalition of quad-village school groups. "Sometimes you look at them [a teen child] and wonder if this person across the table is even biologically connected

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## School notes

### Binghamton dean's list

The following students were named to the dean's list at Binghamton University for the spring 2013 semester: Andrew J. Menfi, Joseph S. Keller, Lauren Filler, and Michelle Minoux.

### Binghamton graduates

Michelle Minoux, Andrew Menfi, and Andrew Jacob Block recently graduated from Binghamton University.

### National Merit scholars

The following seniors at Irvington High School were semifinalists in the 2014 National Merit Scholarship program: Anna Canning, Emily Friedman, and Michael B. Thibault.

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## Teen talk

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to you," said Houlihan.

And with good reason. Throughout his presentation, Houlihan used research in the field of neurobiology to explain the physiological and psychological changes that impact adolescent development.

For one, a young person's brain circuitry is immature. Because the limbic system, which controls emotions, is more developed than the pre-frontal cortex, which controls thought and reason, teens can be hypersensitive, moody, and impulsive. Add hormones and the challenges of school and social transitions into the mix and it's easy to see why parents and their adolescent sons and daughters can seem like alien beings to each other.

They also have trouble interpreting facial cues and can exaggerate or misconstrue parental reaction, according to Houlihan.

"Use your words; don't expect them to read between the lines," he went on. "Tell them you're disappointed; tell them you're angry."

Teenagers are also naturally self-centered.

"There is no more egotistical animal on the planet," Houlihan said, adding that this is nature's way of helping adolescents prepare for adulthood and separate from their parents.

Houlihan warned his audience against enabling or shielding their children, saying life experience — including failure — builds character and the skills teens will need to navigate their adult lives.

"They won't listen to you, but they do listen to experience," said Houlihan.

Teens will make mistakes, no doubt, especially when their brains are still maturing. While adults respond quickly to what Houlihan called "no-brainers," teens may mull over the pros and cons of a choice, especially a negative one, and even be tempted by the excitement of risk.

"They might actually think about taking Molly [a street drug similar to ecstasy] because it looked cool on Facebook," said Houlihan.

Having empathy for what they are going through at this time in their lives also helps. Because teenagers are so focused on their image and what others think of them — often to the point of distortion — they often feel as though there is no way a parent can understand them.

Houlihan recommended not asking questions that could be interpreted as prying, but rather waiting for your teen to approach you and be open and ready to listen.

"Don't take it personally, that's another rule," Houlihan continued.

He recalled times when he and his son, now 20, got into screaming matches, with his teen hurling words like "idiot" and "jerk" at him.

Simply stepping back from the situation and saying, "When you're ready to talk about it calmly let me know," really seemed to help, Houlihan found.

Parents can also model behaviors like time management, organization, and responsible decision-making.

"It's our responsibility to tell them what needs to happen to get from point A to point B," said Houlihan. "But don't do it for them; show them and back off."

**Question: Why do I have so much lower back pain and my MRI only shows disc bulges and small herniated discs?**

**Answer: You may have sacroiliac joint syndrome. These joints can misalign and cause pain with activity, while sleeping, sitting and even after standing up from a seated position. Sacroiliac joint problems do not appear on MRI and can be successfully treated without drugs or surgery.**

Dr. David Klein