

## Hopes and Fears:

### Working with Today's Independent School Parents

Robert Evans and Michael Thompson

*Independent schools exist because of the hopes and fears of parents. To understand parents, you have to know something about their dreams and worries.*

*Independent schools run on the hopes and fears of teachers. Teachers need insight into what triggers teachers. (It would be nice if parents did, too.)*

#### The Home-school relationship is more complex than ever

1. Rising tide of anxiety in parents; uncertain future.
2. Enrollment worries and parent as customer
3. Lack of teacher training in working with adults and with conflict
4. The so-called "Parent-School Partnership"

#### The Basic Toolkit

1. Key perceptions:
  - a) Parents are sincere and----this is especially important to remember---anxious
  - b) Problems are inevitable and often valuable.
  - c) The educator is the senior partner and can apply with parents the very skills that work with students .
2. Key Skills
  - a) Active listening
  - b) Asking questions, especially about parental hopes and fears
  - c) Claiming the child
    - Straight talking
    - Clarity: the rule of three

#### The Advanced Toolkit

1. Key perception: parents fall into two groups
  - a) The 95% (workable)
  - b) The 5% (can't be reasoned with); come in three types:
    - Anxious and Incompetent
    - Unresponsive
    - Intimidators
2. Key Skills
  - a) Try not to get defensive. It's business, it's not personal
  - b) The goal isn't insight, it's behavior change
  - c) Don't just talk about the student, but about the impact of the parent's behavior on the community
  - d) Above all:
    - *Limits...limits...limits*