Importance of Role Models

At the Senior School assembly on Wednesday the students gathered to wish the Year 11 and Year 13 classes success and good luck on their upcoming exams. The two representatives who spoke on behalf of the student body both lauded the senior groups for being good role models, who taught the younger students many important lessons by example. Across the College, our Year 6 students were working with Year 2s, showing the excited DUCKs children how they made their amazing stop motion animation movies. The younger children were enthralled by the older students, and are obviously looking forward to making their own movies! These stories help us understand why it is so important for children and adolescents to have good role models.

Social scientists have shown that much of our learning is acquired through observation and imitation. Children imitate the behaviour of people they admire. These role models are highly important for us psychologically, helping to guide us through life during our development, to make important decisions that affect the outcome of our lives, and to help us find happiness in later life. For instance, adolescents who identify with role models they knew personally show higher levels of self esteem and stronger academic performance. Positive role models can exemplify the value of intellectual curiosity, good health, and fair play.

For many children, the most important role models are their parents and caregivers. However, children also look to a variety of other role models, such as relatives, teachers and peers, to help shape how they behave in school, relationships or when making difficult decisions. Children may try to copy the behaviour and appearance of celebrities, such as athletes and entertainers, and characters from books, TV, movies and video games. Unfortunately, some of the people our children look up to can be negative role models – leading them to imitate behaviours that are harmful or detrimental to their happiness and wellbeing.

The following suggestions from the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry will help you discuss role models with your child and serve as a positive role model yourself:

- Have your child identify what qualities he admires in his role model
- Give examples of people in your community who you feel have positive qualities and are a good influence on others
- Talk about people you look up to for guidance and inspiration

As we know, negative role models also influence children. Children may assume that the behaviours of negative role models are typical, safe and acceptable. Parents and caregivers can intervene by emphasising that role models who embrace inappropriate behaviour, violence, sexuality, race and gender stereotypes, and drug and alcohol abuse are not acceptable.

Some suggestions to help you talk to your child about role models who have made mistakes are:

- Remind your child that all people have good and bad qualities and that anyone can make a mistake. Explain that it is important to apologise and to learn from our mistakes
- Ask your child what he thinks of the role model’s behaviour
- Ask what he would have done differently in the situation
- Give examples of more positive and healthy ways to handle the situation

If you have concerns that your child is being negatively influenced by his role model, work with your child to identify more appropriate role models.
• Encourage your child to become involved in activities that reflect your values, such as religious programs, athletics, after school programs, clubs and volunteering.

• Remind your child that he or she does not have to do everything that the role model does. Your child can copy what he or she likes but still be him or herself.

• Give examples of people in your community who you feel have positive qualities and are a good influence on others.

Articles cited: Children and Role Models