



From Empathy to Action: Teacher & Parent Master Seminar on Supporting Adolescents

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Parents and teachers in Armenia are facing increasingly complex challenges in supporting adolescents. Rapid digital transformation and artificial intelligence, rising exposure to cyberbullying and misinformation, and broader social stressors place growing emotional and psychological demands on families and schools. Many adults feel underprepared to respond constructively when young people experience anxiety, aggression, disengagement, or identity confusion.

The training emphasized that trauma operates across multiple levels – individual, horizontal, generational, vicarious, and collective – and that trauma not consciously transformed is often transmitted to others, reinforcing cycles of distress. Adolescence is a critical developmental stage marked by identity exploration versus role confusion, making emotionally grounded adult support especially important.



On December 20, more than 50 parents, teachers, school leaders, and community members from Ashtarak and Nor Hachn for an online Teacher & Parent Training Master Seminar entitled “From Empathy to Action: Supporting Adolescents.” Participants represented Ashtarak N. Sisakyan High School No. 5, Nor Hachn High School, and several other schools.

The seminar was organized locally by Nver Sargsyan, representing participating parents and school leadership. The session was led and facilitated by Dr. Ani Kalayjian, founder and

CEO of MeaningfulWorld and a global leader in trauma-informed healing and peacebuilding. Lida Asilyan, ATOP MeaningfulWorld intern, supported facilitation and documentation. Originally planned as a one-hour session, the training extended to nearly two hours due to high engagement.

The seminar brought together mothers, fathers, teachers, administrators, and community members. A particularly positive element was the strong participation of fathers. As emphasized by Nver Sargsyan, parenting is often culturally framed as a mother's responsibility, while fathers are viewed mainly as providers. The discussion reinforced that adolescent development and emotional modeling are shared responsibilities. Participants openly shared challenges related to

digital exposure, bullying, emotional overload, discipline dilemmas, and communication breakdowns.

A central insight was that adults must regulate their own emotions in order to effectively support adolescents. Key learning areas included:

- **Empathy and Assertive Communication:** Introduction of the 4-Step Assertiveness Model for respectful, non-escalatory communication: empathy and appreciation, clear observation, expression of feelings, and constructive recommendations
- **Trauma Awareness and Generational Transmission:** Exploration of how unresolved trauma and parenting patterns transfer across generations if unaddressed
- **Adolescent Development:** Understanding adolescence as a stage of identity formation requiring consistent emotional validation and safe experimentation
- **7-Step Integrative Healing Model:** Practical tools including mindfulness, gratitude practices, emotional release, compassion meditation, and body awareness exercises.



Simple daily practices were shared to promote stress regulation and emotional sustainability. Participants were also introduced to digital tools such as mindfulness and gratitude apps to support ongoing self-care. Many participants reported leaving with one or two concrete strategies they could apply immediately in family and classroom settings, reinforcing the seminar's practical relevance.

In closing, Dr. Kalayjian emphasized that authentic care for youth begins with adult well-being and intentional self-development, stating: *“The best way to show our love for youth is by becoming healthy, mindful, compassionate, and loving ourselves.”* Participants expressed appreciation for the depth of discussion, the actionable tools, and the opportunity to learn collectively across roles and generations.

Based on participant engagement and identified needs, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Scale the seminar model** to additional schools and communities, prioritizing regions with elevated psychosocial stress.
2. **Develop follow-up workshops** focused on digital safety, bullying prevention, emotional regulation, and family communication.
3. **Produce concise toolkits** summarizing the 4-Step Assertiveness Model, mindfulness practices, and trauma-awareness strategies.
4. **Strengthen father engagement strategies** to sustain inclusive parental participation.
5. **Integrate trauma-informed practices into teacher professional development** and school counseling systems.

6. **Track longitudinal outcomes** related to family communication quality, student well-being, and school climate.
7. Continue supporting the community through WhatsApp chat discussions, support groups, and educational resources!

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