

Simple Preparations For Confident Parent-Teacher Meetings

by Ruth Bonetti

The new school year settles in and all too soon come the dreaded PT meetings. What is worse than a wriggling audience of reluctant school kids? Their parents. All those eyes fixed on the teacher, assessing: will this person see the hidden talents in my precious child? Have you sometimes experienced a few nerves on the night? Shaky voice, dry mouth, gasping for air? Presentation anxiety is the Number One Fear in society above those of flying, dying and bankruptcy, according to the Book of Lists. It's normal, but you are not defenceless. Here are some simple preparations which you can do in the privacy of your car while driving to school. A few red lights can be put to excellent use to build your confident presentation.

First, let's look at the source of the problem. When we're under pressure in basic survival mode, the Primitive Reptilian brain takes over, initiating and regulating the Fight-or-Flight response. Unfortunately, neither fighting nor fleeing is an appropriate behaviour in front of the parents. All those unsettling symptoms of excess adrenaline rush are bred here, as the brain stem regulates:

- heartbeat; as this races, so we tend to rush our speech
- breathing becomes strained, shallow
- equilibrium and muscle tone, hence the wobbly knees and shaky hands.

The secret is to channel the adrenaline into energy, and by tapping back into the cerebral cortex, all those unpleasant symptoms fall away. How? It's simple.

At the red lights, or when you park in the grounds, take a few moments to breathe deep and slow. This is enhanced by placing a hand on your forehead, in Brain-Gym terminology known as the "positive points." This curbs excess fight or flight response, releases your memory box (you've seen students do this when asked a question and they say: "It's on the tip of my tongue") and allows full frontal lobe thinking. Another advantage is that this links to the stomach's emotional stress-release points, calming queasiness.

Dry mouth? Stress can cause dehydration. This is unfortunate for speakers as the vocal folds need fluid to vibrate freely and resonate with good projection. Water is also a brain-food, enabling us to think fast on our feet. The electrical and chemical actions of the central nervous system and brain depend on efficient conduction - via fluid - of electrical currents to pass messages between the brain and sensory organs.

Reach for your water bottle at the red lights. Better still, increase your water intake in the days before. Think positive thoughts.

Shrill or thin voice? Warm-up your voice by humming along to the radio as you drive. This counters any tendencies for high-pitched, thin tone. Open your throat with a yawn (thus bringing in the "inspiration" of vital oxygen) or a laugh. Ensure an interesting range of modulation by humming siren type noises, up and down. Relax tight lips and jaw by making motor-bike type "brmm brmm" noises. (But first, check for cars in the next lane, in case a student's mother is eyeing you with interest.)

If you feel an instinct to pace the floor before the parents arrive, don't curb it; this instinctive reaction gets blood circulating, and the "cross-crawl" action activates whole-brain thought. A few drops of the homoeopathic Dr Bach Rescue Remedy under your tongue can aid centering, focus, alleviate panic, exhaustion, tiredness and fear. It is available at health stores and many pharmacists. (see [www.http://www.acorn.uk100.com/bach_rescue.html](http://www.acorn.uk100.com/bach_rescue.html)).

Similarly, Performance Plus is an Australian formula which is specifically compounded to ease performance nerves. Call 08/8363 5510 or check www.reedsaus.com.au/pp.htm
The parents are about to arrive. Take another slow, deep breath. Stand against a wall to counter that instinctive defensive hunching of posture. Stand tall, for you're fulfilling an excellent and very necessary role in shaping the lives of young people.
Smile. Be yourself. Enjoy your new-found confidence!

PS. If you suffer a bout of "brain-fog" during the PT question-time, casually pause, say "Hmm, that's a good question" while you thoughtfully place a hand on your forehead. No-one will notice. The pause adds gravitas and credibility, and gives you time to think and poise.

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References: Paul E. Denison and Gail E. Denison, *Brain Gym: Teachers' Edition* (California, Edu-Kinesthetics Inc. 1989 and 1994)

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