

Ten Minute T(ea) with Mrs. Meredith Finch

Interview Conducted by Jon Mabie

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Q) How would you say mental health or mental well-being shaped your own high school experience?

A) Back when I was in high school, I thought I had a pretty good grasp on my mental health even though, especially looking back, social anxiety really affected most of my life outside of academics, the one place I felt comfortable. Social anxiety kept me from really having friends except for my freshman and senior years, kept me from stepping outside my comfort zone, kept me from trying new things (like the winter musical), kept me from accepting a position on the varsity soccer team as a junior, and actually lead me to switch from playing softball to lacrosse after two years. I was in a constant state of trying to keep a distance from people with a lot of social capital, which I lacked and which made me feel very uncomfortable.

Q) Being a teacher at a high school now, having been through school already, what would your advice be to students regarding mental well-being?

A) I think there are two things. First, a takeaway from my experience. High school is hard in so many ways for so many people. In general, people are less judgmental and kinder than you think. I have since spoken with many former classmates who I was too afraid to interact with before, and they are incredibly friendly. The other is a more general suggestion: there are a lot of people who want to help: we just might not know that you need it or where your mental health needs support. Being at the peak of mental well-being will help you get the best experience out of a tricky period in your lives.

Q) As someone who was involved with athletics throughout high school and college, and now as a coach, what would you say is the relationship between mental health and athletics?

A) Mental health and athletic success are inextricably tied together. Just like you can't perform your best when dealing with a physical injury, it is impossible to be at the top of your game when your mental health is compromised. Depression, anxiety, and obsessive tendencies are all things I witnessed first-hand in college. The difference in performance with and without help is outstanding, both at an individual level and in ability to be a part of a team. With crew, I can think of two instances when people with top-five erg scores ended up in the bottom boat while struggling to get their mental health on track.

Q) What would you say are three of the most stressful or stress inducing things facing high school students today?

A) I think that social media causes a huge amount of stress. Having successes (real or perceived) being constantly visible can make one frequently question his or her own value. I think other

stressors can really depend on the region, school, and individual. At the public school in which I taught, a huge stressor was financial: many teenagers were supporting their families while going to school full time, or simply didn't have enough to eat if they weren't working. In other places, it is doing everything possible to get into a good college so you can get a good job and have a successful career. I think one more common stressor though is just the process of growing up: it's hard!

Q) Have you faced similar problems as a teacher that you faced as a student, similar stressors?

A) That's an interesting question. As an adult, my stressors are drastically different from when I was in high school, and I also feel better equipped to deal with them. I do still battle social anxiety amongst my peers, but in many fewer situations than when I was younger. That being said, even though times have changed, I watch high schoolers struggling with many of the same stressors I remember from being a teenager.