

Listen to Your Mother ... *H.E.R.E. in Barrington*

When my mom, Lita, passed away six years ago, my brother, sister, and I wrote down what we called her “Lita-isms” — words of wisdom she gave to us during her lifetime. Mom was a first-grade teacher in Niles for 30-something years before she retired, so her advice covered three domains: the mother category (15 items), the teaching category (five items), and the miscellaneous category (16 items). Obviously, this article doesn’t lend itself to sharing all 36 bits of counsel, but I think she would find it appropriate given this topic and time of year to share at least three.

Mom believed in family, which she felt was the first line of support for any person. Not surprisingly, my siblings and I recalled her first bit of advice in the mother category as No. 1: “Family, family, family. Love your children; they are your greatest gift.” Not only does the first position in a list hold a special place, but so does the last; therefore, we chose the final item in the mother category as No. 15: “Nobody (and she meant nobody) loves you like your mother.”

Mom was trying to teach her children that we all need help sometimes, whether it is a shoulder to cry on, a friend who will listen, or a person who can offer much-needed guidance. Mom believed support falls into three groups. First — you guessed it — family. Second, friends. In this group she would include teachers, counselors, coaches — people who spend a lot of time with children. And third, but extremely important, is community. This final group is less defined, but over the past six months I think we, here in Barrington, are trying to put a face on the multidimensional elements of local support.

While in this holiday article I am emphasizing the assistance children may need (particularly adolescents), such support is important for all ages. Deep down, we all hope we can handle

any difficulty life throws our way at the family level. In truth, home is where most support is found, especially for children. But we all know some problems, for whatever reason, transcend the family. Even a young person with the most compassionate parents may feel the need to turn elsewhere for certain support. And I think my mom was right: The next level of defense comes at the friend level.

Students at Barrington High School figured this out. Student members of H.O.P.E. (Helping Open People’s Eyes) are shining a light on the tragic decisions some young adults made over the past two years. H.O.P.E. students feel it is critical that their classmates know they can, if necessary, turn to each other for support. In addition, this group wants to make sure those who are sought out understand they serve a vital role when directing a friend in need to certain professional resources, if the difficulty is beyond their own capacity to help.

To complement and extend the efforts of H.O.P.E., a new coalition was formed to promote positive mental health, reduce risk factors associated with common teen stressors, and ensure local support is available to everyone regardless of age or income. *H.E.R.E. in Barrington* (Help, Encouragement, Resources, Education) is adults and students working together to change the culture by spotlighting various mental health issues, programs, and resources in an ongoing series of educational events for students, their families and friends, and the entire community.

My mom would have endorsed *H.E.R.E. in Barrington* because it meets all three of her criteria, and because concerned and passionate parents like her motivate its efforts. *H.E.R.E. in Barrington* provides information for families on how they can best meet the needs of their children in difficult situations, makes sure we all know our friends (including school personnel)



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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can be helpful if a person is at risk, and connects many organizations in our community to provide professional services for all ages. By joining forces, these three groups — family, friends, and community — can weave a strong safety net.

We are blessed this holiday season to live in an area that cares about its residents. We have strong families, students who support each other, and resources that most communities envy. As we enter this special time of thanksgiving and goodwill, I hope families will continue to strengthen their bonds, friends will come together, and we will all learn more about the many local resources for those in need.

And since it is that time of year when we celebrate together, often with food, I’ll share one more “Lita-ism” (although I think she may have taken this from someone else). In the miscellaneous category, No. 3: “If a cookie is broken, it doesn’t have any calories.” OK, so she wasn’t a chemist, but she was a wise and generous mom. Best wishes for a wonderful Thanksgiving and a beautiful holiday season with your loved ones. U