

EVERYONE experiences high school differently. Some love it, some hate it, and some are just doing time. Here are some examples of how rules, restrictions and realities play out in high schools around the country. Take a good look and see if you recognize your own high school experience here.

## THE DAILY GRIND

Today, when I woke up, my heart was an emotion darker than black. I bet it's going to be a bad day. Why do I have to be me? I hate myself. I'm ugly, stupid and unlucky. I'm so unlucky that if I picked a fortune cookie out of a box of a hundred, I'd pick the only pessimistic one. Life is frustrating, complicated and confusing. It's 6:30 A.M. so I better go take a shower and shave, not as if it's going to help my appearance.

In the mornings, I'm already not in a good mood knowing that all I have to look forward to is going to a class to learn about dead guys and math formulas that I will never use again.

—Anthony, 15

Figures, I missed a couple spots. I got a lot of bloody slashes from the blade. Oh well, a few Harry Potter Band-Aids will fix that. Next, what should I do with my hair? The only thing I like about it is the black gleam to it. Oh man, the curl is coming in the back. I better brush my hair before the curl discovers a counterattack. Finally, my face, wow . . . when did that get here? I'll need some concealer for that. I reach in the cupboard and pull out some shivery powder the color of vanilla and dust it on top of my freckled cheeks.

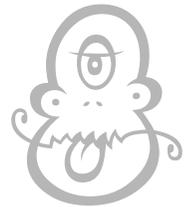
This is a good as it's gonna get.

Mom made breakfast for me—some chai tea and two eggs, looking at me. They seem to mock me.

Okay, I'm at school for first block . . . oh wait, did I brush my teeth? Damn it! I'm so tired, I'm getting paranoid. Why do some days I feel like I want to cry? It's probably just a hormonal/mental thing; something else to add to my list of problems. Anyways, I have to go to next block.

The day is only half over.

Oh wait, my friend is up ahead but when I call her name and wave, she must have not seen or heard me but the rest of the hallway did and now they're staring. I look like a complete idiot. Ummm . . . was that the final bell or warning bell? Gotta run.



I'm in Non-Western World and we are learning about Asian rulers. I can't concentrate. I wish I were an Empress—Ahhhh! No, bad Emily, bad. Focus on the teacher. Unfortunately, the teacher has a case of Voxoplilia (a situation whose symptom is a love of hearing one's own voice). As a result, the rest of the class was blah blah.

Getting through the hallways is like hell with the people who can't walk and talk at the same time, the "popular" people who act like they are inevitable Gods and the rest of us are Untouchables, and the very tall ones you can't see around

no matter what angle you crane your head. They should really put traffic lights in here because I'm beginning to feel herded. Dang it, I missed my freakin' class door. I'll get it in the next round I make. Cool! I think that cute guy just smiled at me. Nope, wait one sec. He was smiling at the pretty blonde behind me.

I'm at lunch and I still feel like crying. I spilled salsa on me and now I wanna' burrow into a hole and die.

After lunch, I got my math test back from Tuesday. An F! Why doesn't the teacher put "You're a stupid cow" or "How did you make it to high school?" on the front of the test. The girl next to me says "Man this test was a killer!" I look down at her score and she got an A.

Shut up! I think to myself. I just glare at her.

Whew! Last class of the day. Thank God. Today nothing special happened . . . again. I wake up each morning hoping that maybe, just maybe, a guy will actually take interest in me or I'll get no homework. But who am I kidding? That won't ever happen but I hang on to those ideas by a thread.

When my mom picked me up and drove home that day with the windows down (but in the "loser cruiser" so I sat in back with the tinted windows), I feel . . . I feel . . . like an exotic princess—beautiful and full of passion. Maybe I won't go home and blast Rob Thomas' song "Living Dead Girl" because no longer do I sense a warning of a mood swing screaming at me to slowly back away from humanity before I blast off. I actually feel quite good. The only problem I have now is how to last until the weekend.

—Emily, 17



What I remember best? Not fitting in. Having so-called friends I could never trust. Having a chip on my shoulder about a mile high. Not feeling visible except for all the wrong things, like being fat or not having the right clothes. Humiliation on a regular basis. Having people use me or avoid me.

What makes you  
a success in high school  
is the exact opposite  
of what makes you a  
success in life.

—JoAnne Allen

Having the people I needed support from simply tell me what they thought was best for me or how my behavior, my grades or how I looked affected *them*. Having teachers I hated and teachers I loved, and feeling like I would have done anything for any adult who treated me with the least bit of dignity and respect for my intelligence. Counting days until graduation. Calculating daily, once I got accepted into the college of my choice, exactly how much or how well I had to do to just pass the classes I didn't like. The glorious elation when they gave me that stupid little piece of paper. It says something like "diploma" on it, but for me it still reads, "Free at last."

—Beverly

Whoever called high school "the best years of your life" must have started college at thirteen.

—Ralph Keyesi

## LIFE IN THE EYES OF A LOSER



*Why am I forced to wake up in the early morning?  
All I do is go to classes that are boring.  
I sit here and realize I still have a year to waste.  
The school food has one bad taste.  
We've shared the good, we've shared the bad.  
We frown on others when we are mad.  
The lessons we learn in this damn pit:  
"You'll succeed in life if you're rich, popular or a jock."  
In my opinion, I say, "F\*\*\* that shit."*

*I pick on some, get harassed by others,  
I have even had to kick the shit out of a couple people's brothers.  
All my friends are either losers or class snoozers.  
We band together and with that I say:  
enjoy school—it's ONLY a four year stay.*

—Alex, 18

Well, I despise today fairly vehemently, and it's only 11 A.M. Isn't that some sort of a record? Technically, it's the first day of school, but it's just assembly, registration, and a bunch of papers from homeroom. Tomorrow classes begin. I'm feeling pretty down right now. I've come to the conclusion that no matter where you go, really, high school is quintessentially the same: it's typical in all the same ways, it's frustrating in all the same ways, it's scary in all the same ways, and it's good in all the same ways . . . although not so much of the latter for me, since I've been in here. Yet at the same time, life can differ so much from one school to another. Don't ask me how that works—I haven't come close to figuring it out.

I've been to three high schools in four years, and I'm tired. I'm tired of being new, I'm tired of never being surrounded by anyone of my caliber, I'm tired of "giving it a chance" and "making the best of the situation," I'm tired of most people my age, I'm tired of this country, and I'm definitely tired of being tired of all the above, and the worst part, actually caring. But I am, and I do, and I hate it.

**School's gone from being a place of education to a place where competition and fighting for the top come before learning. We have to deal with the continual pressure to keep up the pace, stay in the game, be the best at all times, never settle for less than the ultimate . . . it's exhausting for a teen to always be fighting.**

**Fighting grades, teachers, other people's attitudes, society . . . the list just goes on.**

—Katie, 18

I've said it many times before, and damn it, I'm going to say it again.  
High school: call me when it's over.

—*Rachelle, 17*



## TOP 10 LIKES AND DISLIKES ABOUT HIGH SCHOOL

### LIKES

10. Open campus, being able to leave or get lunch off campus
9. Learning new things, getting an education
8. Meeting new people, making new friends
7. Career opportunities, work internships
6. After-school or extra-curricular activities, clubs and sports events
5. Social life (including dances, parties, the prom)
4. Vacation days, half days, early-release days
3. Certain teachers
2. Spending time with friends, socializing
- #1. Phys ed, specific sports activities and classes

### DISLIKES

10. Classes are too long, sitting too much
9. Bad food, school lunches
8. Homework
7. Waking up early, not getting enough sleep
6. Annoying, mean, hypocritical, back-stabbing, narrow-minded or interfering students
5. Tests, quizzes, finals
4. Standardized tests
3. Dress codes
2. Projects (class projects, senior projects, projects required for graduation)
- #1. Bad, mean, rude, angry or unfair teachers and administrators

## WHO'S BRIGHT IDEA WAS THIS ANYWAY?

The summer before I started high school, a lot of people told me “Oh, you’re just going to love it. It will be some of the best years of your life!” I didn’t really believe this, because, honestly, if you peak when you’re about 16, that’s pretty pathetic. I did think I’d have a good time though. I thought that it would be just like junior high, except more kids, and kids that were four years older than I was.

High school can be a blast for some kids. But if it sucks for you, you are not alone. I thought everybody in my school was a lot happier than I was. That really wasn’t true, but I didn’t know that at the time.

—Clare

Now that I’ve actually started high school, though, it isn’t anything like I expected. Most of my friends and I are split up in different classes, and we don’t even see each other at lunch. Plus, these classes are

*hard*. I have all honors classes—just like last year—but the difference is huge. Unlike junior high, there is no week of “easing into academics.” And the teachers grade a lot harder than before.

I’ve learned this the hard way. See, English is my strongpoint, and I had never gotten less than an A– on an essay. So imagine my surprise when I got back my first essay and saw that the grade was a B–. I was so upset that I almost cried.

High school is an oppressive place, rooted in antiquated systems and traditional practices that neither promote excellence nor provide a safe and nurturing environment for the vast majority of students.

—Aaron Trummer,  
high school principal

—Morgan, 14



## THE FACTS

Ever wonder why, in so many high school classes, we sit in straight rows of desks, with everyone doing the same things at the same time? Well, if you go back a few years—when schools were training large numbers of kids to go to work in factories—an emphasis on uniformity and behaviors like compliance, conformity, hard work and obedience made sense. Now, things like individuality, independence, initiative, freedom and flexibility, which, back then were seen as threatening, and were strongly discouraged, are the very traits many business leaders are looking for in today's information society! Schools just haven't caught up.

I wish the school would stop focusing on sports and do something for the arts like drama and dance. They just built a brand new gym but the stage is a mess and needs to be fixed. The curtains are falling apart and just painting the stage isn't a solution.\*

We need interesting things to do. Boredom is at the bottom of a lot of problems in school.\*

Some of the myths (lies) I was told when I was in junior high school were:

- that high school was very easy
- the teachers don't really care if you miss classes just show-up and they will pass you to the next grade
- females have to change our appearance to have a boyfriend
- we have to have sex to fit into a certain group

—Dorraine, 20

I think that every so often there should be an interesting assembly when someone our age comes in and talks about an experience that has changed their lives. The only way a kid will listen is if someone on their level had it happen to them.\*

We need an air conditioner in this building! It's too hot to concentrate, or even stay awake. Even the prison near here has air conditioning. The animals at the zoo have air conditioning. It's insane that this school is so hot.\*

Turn on the heat. It's really cold. I have three shirts on and I'm cold. Seriously, turn the heat on.\*

I think the institution of high school encourages a here-and-now mentality by only addressing critical present issues: If your clothes are up to dress code, if you're 30 seconds late to class, if you have the right pass to get to your locker, if you're waiting in the right line. I remember very few people ever saying, "This doesn't matter, focus a little forward and your perspective will undoubtedly turn brighter." If I'd heard that a little more, I think it would have made all the difference.

—Joel, 21

By the time I get to school, the first bell's ringing. I'm already late and I haven't even been to my locker. With just five minutes between the bells, I can never get to class on time. So I rush through the door and my teacher sends me to the office because I'm late. By the end of first block, I'm almost asleep because I've been in the same chair for 100 minutes and my teacher just puts notes on the board and doesn't explain what anything's about. Sometimes she reads the notes but never gives us something creative or hands-on assignments. It seems like school is where we come to copy notes and get lectured. I can't use the restroom at all and get gum stuck to my leg because our

High school does not prepare you to grow up. It only prepares you for high school.

—Ralph Keyesii



campus is filthy. It's like the principal wants us to suffer. I can never talk to her about the problems at school because I've never even met her. You see her in the beginning of 9th grade and then she vanishes. Everyone is so noisy. By the end of the day, I'm wired.

—Clara, 15



## THINGS THAT MAKE SCHOOL SUCK

### Rules:

- ✓ Not having enough choices or input in decisions that affect you
- ✓ Rigid rules and punishments
- ✓ Being wrongly accused or wrongly punished
- ✓ Not being allowed or able to express feelings without fear of negative reaction or consequence
- ✓ Not being able to go to the bathroom when you need to go
- ✓ Not having any privacy

### Adults:

- ✓ Adults who don't treat you with respect
- ✓ Adults who act impatient, annoyed or disgusted with you
- ✓ Adults who ignore you or don't take you seriously
- ✓ Teachers who favor some students over others
- ✓ Unpredictable, inconsistent or "explosive" teacher behavior
- ✓ Not being recognized or acknowledged for positive behavior, achievement, effort, cooperation, etc.

- ✓ Not being supported or protected by adults when they see other students or adults mistreating you in any way

*Class:*

- ✓ Unclear directions, not knowing what you're supposed to do
- ✓ Not getting enough help when you need it
- ✓ Not having enough time to answer questions or process information
- ✓ Having to sit too long
- ✓ "Gotcha" tests, pop quizzes, useless tests or evaluations
- ✓ Being told you're not applying yourself
- ✓ Feeling afraid to share, speak up or say anything in class
- ✓ Having your grades read in class (whether low or high)
- ✓ Too much noise, visual stimulation or movement in the classroom

Which three of these bother you the most?

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What else would you like to add to this list that is not already there?

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## RULES, RESTRICTIONS AND REPRESSION

The first thing I hate is the dress code. I hate it. I can't believe we can't wear hats. I feel naked without my hat. It doesn't make sense. The second thing I dislike is the ID cards. What's the purpose of them? It slows the line up. It makes it a million times slower. Then I only get like five minutes to eat, because I was waiting in the line the whole time.

—Andre, 15

It's always been hard for me to sit quietly. I would get fidgety or start to doodle on my book covers. Chewing gum helped, but of course that wasn't allowed. I was always in trouble in school.

—Dale

Look at your student handbook.  
Which rules might trip you up?

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Which rules might you try to change?

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Which rules are actually there to help?

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## ACADEMICS

High school has probably been the biggest source of stress in my life. It's really the last place I want to be. I don't like coming here every day to sit through classes—most of which are really uninteresting—and lunches where we're all crowded down in the basement. I especially don't like almost all of the people around me. I don't understand their interests and their constant need to be either putting someone down or center of attention with their idiotic antics. The only people I can stand are my friends (of which, in this school, I have few). They're the only ones I can talk to without getting severely annoyed.

—Sammi, 17



## ADVICE

**A**long the journey through high school, many students face the issues of addiction and recovery. If you are abusing anything (drugs, alcohol, sex, gambling, etc.) and want to change your life, here are some things to consider.

- Change is hard. You will need to ask for help
- Some people may not want you to change. You might have to say goodbye to them.
- Others may not understand why you seem different. Be patient with them.
- If you hang around the same people that you were with while using, chances are strong you will use again.
- Using occupied a part of your life. Find something healthy to fill that time. (Exercise, volunteer, go to a 12-step meeting etc.).
- Learn from others who have gone through a similar experience. Ask your doctor, teacher, counselor or any other safe adult about finding a support group in your community.

*www.al-anon.alateen.org*

Part of Al-Anon, Alateen helps families and friends of alcoholics recover from the effects of living with a problem drinking of relative or friend.

*www.na.org*

Narcotics Anonymous is an international, community-based association of recovering drug addicts.

*www.alcoholics-anonymous.org*

Alcoholics Anonymous® is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

**W**hat causes the most stress for you?

- Whenever a teacher is in a bad mood and takes it out on you.
- Stupid school drama
- Smarter kids in the class and the teachers favor for them.
- When teachers and parents put extreme expectations on you that you feel like you have to meet.

Anxiety for me came in the form of panic attacks, general anxiety about performing well on exams, and embarrassing myself in front of others. The panic attack problem stems from general anxiety, so coping with this part was the first task. I went to a psychiatrist and was given a medication, which helps resolve the chemical imbalance inside the brain. This helps, but isn't the entire solution.

Learning how to breathe can really help. You can relax your mind and your body by doing this simple exercise.

1. Place your hand just above your belly button. You will notice that as you breathe in, your diaphragm pushes outward and as you exhale it moves back inward.
2. Now for relaxation breathing we need to reverse this. As you inhale try to pull your stomach inward and as you exhale push it outward. Keep practicing this with your hand above your stomach until it becomes clear.
3. Inhale slowly through your nose for a 5 second count, hold that breath for 5 seconds and then slowly let it out through your lips for 5 seconds. Try to make a slight hissing sound as the air passes out of your lips.
4. Imagine your lungs are like pear shaped balloons. Picture them filling up with air slowly from the bottom to the top.

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**I NEED TO TALK:**

*I need someone to talk to.  
Please call me or come  
find me to talk.*

**I NEED TO TALK:**

*I need someone to talk to.  
Please call me or come  
find me to talk.*

*I PROMISE I will not hurt myself.  
If I feel a desire to hurt myself I  
will call the numbers on the back of  
this card and seek HELP instead.*

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

*I PROMISE I will not hurt myself.  
If I feel a desire to hurt myself I  
will call the numbers on the back of  
this card and seek HELP instead.*

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

**I CAN LISTEN  
OR  
BE THERE  
FOR YOU.**

**I CAN LISTEN  
OR  
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FOR YOU.**

**MY SAFE ADULTS:**

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# Angel Certificate

A SPECIAL THANK-YOU TO AN ANGEL IN DISGUISE

This certificate acknowledges

\_\_\_\_\_

As an Angel in Disguise. A special thank-you for:

\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

*Your kindness and thoughtfulness  
are appreciated.*

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



# Service Certificate

## A GIFT OF SERVICE

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To the following gift of service:

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Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_