

Sixth Grade Parent Meeting  
Wednesday October 21, 2009

Dr. Allan Gold, Reed School District Psychologist, Kit Pappenheimer, Principal, Alan Vann Gardner, Assistant Principal, Teresa Oefinger, Seventh Grade Teacher, Ilene Pearce, Volunteer Counselor

Accessing the District Psychological Services website:

Go to Del Mar to Parents link to Psychological Services link (on the side). Check out What's New, Parent Meetings, Parent Resources, and Useful Links.

The 6th Grade Parent Handbook is in the What's New section, as is Dr. Gold's recent talk on respect.

Changes in our children since 5th Grade (as suggested by parents) – a picture of sixth graders, in general

Argumentative

Independent

Parents are becoming "stupid"

All issues are magnified

Organization can be better or worse

Forgetful

More emotional

Changes in relationships

Physical body development

Moody

Girls are becoming social, trying out new social behavior

Midway between 6th grade and mid 7th grade a period of intense discovery

Easily Stressed

Cheeky / Dismissive / "Whatever"

Grades much more important

Computer and social networking become more important

Four areas of development: Physical, Cognitive, Social, Emotional

Physical – changes are becoming more obvious and are happening faster. Kids entering puberty now are about average, so should adjust reasonably well. Middle school can be harder for the slower developing boys and girls. These kids need encouragement that they will develop at their own pace, though it may be hard for them to accept.

Cognitive – this is the beginning of the "Formal Operational" period, where students begin to understand abstract concepts. Their world opens up considerably and they see what might be, not just what is. It is the parents' responsibility to answer questions as best as possible. This is the beginning of a time that can be very rewarding in terms of children's ability to engage intellectually, discuss values, possibilities, world events, even though the kids can be challenging

Social – this is a time of fluidity and change in social relationships. Friendships change, often as the result of physical changes, which lead to changes in interests. Kids are not very good at detaching from old friendships, so they may hurt each other in the process. It's a natural time for experimentation with new friendships.

Emotional – because of physical/hormonal changes, kids this age can seem to have less control over their emotions than a year or two earlier. They can be moody, have highs and lows, sometimes seem very mature and adult-like, and other times revert to childish behavior. It is important for parents not to react to every up and down in emotion; home should be a safe place for kids to let their feelings out, as long as they are not being overtly disrespectful. Do watch out for prolonged periods of sadness or depression (several weeks or more) – and get professional consultation if your child does not snap out of a period of seeming depression.

### Issues, Questions, Concerns in Parenting our 6th Graders

#### *What about dances?*

The first Del Mar dance will be on November 20, 2009. Dances are appropriate for students this age and sixth graders, particularly enjoy them and have fun. They are well chaperoned and time limited, so there isn't much for parents to worry about.

#### *What about the Rec Center dances in Mill Valley?*

These dances were developed by Del Mar students but there are a lot of middle school students from the Tiburon peninsula and Mill Valley and there is not enough supervision for many parents. The consensus is that sixth graders are probably too young to attend these dances, though some, undoubtedly will do so.

#### *What freedoms are appropriate?*

This is a period of time when students will be asking for more freedoms and they will need the opportunities in small steps to prove their trustworthiness. Parents felt that, depending on their current trust in their particular children (and they all very on this), it's ok for kids to go with a friend downtown as long as they have a specific activity, keep in contact by cell phone, and come home at an agreed upon time. Letting kids go greater distances, such as Northgate Mall was seen as inappropriate at this age.

#### *What sort of experiences do we share with our kids?*

Kid this age begin to ask difficult questions about our own experiences as young people, particularly around drinking, drugs, dating, and sometimes sex. Every parent has to decide how honest to be with their children when these questions come up. It's best to craft answers long before the questions arise. It's always safe to ask kids what they're thinking about doing, why they want to know, how their parents' answers might affect them. Dr. Gold believes in honesty as much as possible about drugs and drinking, but feels that parents are entitled to the privacy of their sexual behavior. Honesty, in general, allows parents to relate to children their own dilemmas, their own

lessons learned, and provides the opportunity to encourage their children to reflect on the tough decisions that they will have to make for themselves.

*What do parent do when kids don't open up to the family?*

This is where knowing your children's friends and families really begins to pay off. Some/many kids still will share at least some of their experiences and problems with their families. Others stop doing this and you may find out much more from other kids or even the parents of other kids. Be a good listener when you're driving kids around; get off of the cell phone and just be an invisible driver – you'll learn a lot.

If/when you get information from another parent about something your child has done, try not to be defensive. If you have to communicate difficult information about behaviors observed or heard about, do it in a gentle way – “I would want to know this about my child. Maybe this is true or partially true – I just thought you'd want to know. I know there are always two or more sides to a story, and I'm sure my child is not innocent here – but this is what I heard happened, etc.”

*Issues around Grades – Monitoring, Stress*

Up to date online grades are now available for students and parents to be informed. However, this is an invitation to parents to fall back into the micromanaging that we at school have tried to discourage all through the Bel Aire years. So here are some rules of thumb:

- A. Students should become their own advocates
- B. Students should be independent - Parents should stay out of daily
- C. Self assessment is important; it leads to learning that is:
  - a. richer
  - b. deeper
  - c. more meaningful
- D. Students share learning
- E. Parents should emphasize that it is ok not to be perfect, that failure (however defined – even a B in some students' and parents' eyes) is an opportunity to learn how to do better the next time. Take care of your kids in regards to academic stress – monitor your own reactions to your children's performance. Don't get “hung up” on one or a few poor grades on homework or even tests. These three years are a time for learning how to become responsible, independent, and develop strengths and improve weaker areas. There needs to be a balance between motivation and perfectionism.
- F. Check grades weekly (not daily)
- G. Encourage your children to use iCal
- H. It's ok to provide the structure (time, quiet place, materials) for your children's homework
- I. Kids this age may still need some guidance in planning how to break down longer term projects into smaller parts and to set up a time line for completing the projects.

*How can we help our children manage technology?*

This is a huge area and parents need a lot of help and guidance with this. Students still need to be monitored in their communications online, though you won't be able to monitor everything. They have been and will continue to be trained in "cyberethics," but there is a great temptation to send controversial and inappropriate messages (not to mention pictures). Emphasize to kids that before they send anything online they should say it aloud and ask themselves how they'd feel if someone said these things to them. Kids should report anyone talking about anything unsafe, where people could be hurt physically or emotionally.

Check out: [www.common sense media.org](http://www.common sense media.org) This website and organization has a lot of helpful ideas for parents.

Now is when you really need to know your kids friends.