

7TH AND 8TH GRADE PARENT MEETING

October 29, 2009

Dr. Allan Gold, District Psychologist, Kit Pappenheimer, Principal,
Dr. Alan Vann Gardner, Assistant Principal, Teresa Oefinger, 7th Grade Teacher

There are links from Dr. Gold on our Del Mar website; go to: Del Mar—Parents—Psychological Services. Here you will find parent meeting notes, news and resources for parents.

The following changes in their 7th and 8th graders have been noted by parents:

- Less communicative
- Physical changes (voice, etc ...)
- Grouchier, testier
- More independent
- Less drama (8th)
- More challenging of authority, “attorney like”
- Torn between being a child and an adult
- More Compassion as a result of Challenge Day
- Distracted/forgetful
- Sneakier
- Distancing from mom; wanting to be separate (8th)
- Realizing that parents do have some wisdom; there is more acceptance (8th)
- Widening gap in social skills between boys and girls (8th)
- There is more ability to self-assess (8th)

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Changes are dramatic in all four of the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional areas.

-Physically they are going through puberty and boys are now changing too. Biggest bullying is about body issues at this age.

-They are much more able to think abstractly, though not all students are there yet. All of the curriculum is geared to match up with their ability to deal with the abstract. Enjoy their increased intellectual capacity.

-Friendships change, often depending on their physical changes. As they develop physically, their emotions, interests, and choice of friends will naturally change. This is normal, but can be painful.

-This can be a time of resistance to authority. They put a lot of energy into separating themselves from adults, but it is a good idea to have them try to channel this energy to a positive “cause” such as community service, politics, the environment, etc, and towards the negative of fighting rules and putting each other down

--Emotions change often now. Watch out for depression! Notice eating and sleeping changes or locking themselves in their room.

-A new role for parents is to be a consultant to them. Be good listeners, ask good questions, help them brainstorm solutions to their situational problems, help them evaluate their friendships, and

their strategies for dealing with their problems. This is easier to do when you're not directly involved, such as social problems or problems with school or teachers.

SOME CONCERNS IN PARENTING OUR SEVENTH AND EIGHTH GRADERS

1. CONCERNS ABOUT STRESS RELATED TO GRADES.

Ms. Pappenheimer, Terry Castle, Ms Oefinger and others went to a conference put on by Stanford called "Challenge Success". There is a nationwide movement dealing with "Stressed Out Students".

- The movie "Race to Nowhere" brings up these issues and was recommended.
- Concerns that our students perceive that they are expected to perform like adults.
- Ms Oefinger said that *Power School* online grades were a blessing and a curse because grades were all out in the open.
- Ms. Pappenheimer said that grades were posted online to increase communication.
- At the conference it was said that grades and homework are stressors at an earlier age.
- Ms Oefinger said that it's better to give kids a chance to come to their teachers to address a bad grade before intervening as parents. The goal is to help kids develop the skills of self-assessment and self-advocacy.
- The types of questions a parent asks about a grade are important. "You may not have gotten the grade that you expected, but what did you learn about how you can approach the test or assignment next time".
- Some kids are developing an obsession with watching their grades that was described as similar to watching a stock ticker. A parent suggested limiting checking the grades to once a week.
- Stress occurs when kids label themselves based on the letter grades they've received.
- Our community has created more focus on grades with young students connecting grades with getting into better high schools, better colleges and better jobs.
- The hypocrisy is that many of the private high schools do select their students based on grades and test scores.
- Dr Gold said that in 7th & 8th grade that effort is not always reflected in the grade the way it was in Elementary school. He stressed that RESILIENCE is a very important trait to foster in our students.
- Self-assessment needs to be learned. It is important that we give our students the power to deal with their grades so that they can develop these skills of self-assessment and responsibility. This can be very liberating for the parents.
- Ms. Pappenheimer said that there will be a forum on "Challenge Success" coming up.

2. BOY/GIRL PARTIES

- Dr. Gold felt that these can be appropriate under the following conditions:
 - Parties need to be supervised by an adequate number of parents who are circulating among the teens. 1-2 parents are not enough to supervise 30 teens. Parents can't be socializing in another area of the house. Parents need to ask the host parents about the supervision and offer to help if appropriate.
 - There should be a set length of time: 2-3 hours is adequate.
 - There should be some structure or activities for the kids to engage in.
 - It's a good idea to have a code word that your child can use to let you know that s/he wants to be picked up. This lets them leave an uncomfortable situation without losing face.
- It is good to check in with other families about parties and what is going on in their house. It is okay to be the "mean parent" and say no.

3. CURFEWS, WHERE THEY CAN BE WITHOUT ADULTS

- It's not illegal in California for children 12 and over to be left alone. (There really is not set age specified). Leaving a child alone is highly dependent on how trustworthy they have already proven themselves to be. They should be briefed on not answering the door, using the stove and whether friends can come over.
- Most parents seemed comfortable allowing kids downtown and to the Corte Madera mall during the day if they have cell phones. Parents were uncomfortable with allowing them to be at Friday Night on Main with out an adult being there. It was clear that parents were not comfortable with their children being as far away as Northgate Mall on their own.
- Parents of mature looking girls need to discuss what they should do if an older boy pays attention to them. A book named "Speak" was recommended as a conversation starter. This book deals with the rape of a freshman girl.
- Most parents upheld a curfew of 10pm on the weekend.

4. AUTHENTICITY AND UNFAIRNESS

- 7th and 8th grade students can cognitively understand that some things are unfair and that the parents are still the person in authority,
- Parents need to make the transition to allowing the kids to make their own mistakes.
- Allow kids to earn responsibilities and privileges. They should be given the opportunity for gradually increased privileges with responsibility attached, for example, going someplace, but checking in by phone and being home when they say they're going to be. If they don't meet the expectations (and they won't all the time), it's ok to pull in the reins for a month and give them another chance as they mature a little more. Students this age also demonstrate their trustworthiness and ability to take responsibility by how well they manage their school work and home chores, and frankly, how respectful they are at home when given limits and reasonable requests are made of them.