

Fall 2017 Sixth Grade Level Parent Meeting
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Dr. Allan Gold, District Psychologist, Dr. David Kover, Del Mar Psychologist,
Brian Lynch, Del Mar Principal

Reasons for Grade Level Parent Meetings:

- Networking with other parents is good,
- An opportunity to ask and share information,
- Knowing you are not alone,
- Talking about what is developmentally appropriate,
- Discussing issues of concern to everyone

Dr. Gold provided articles available to take home (Reed graduate expectation, positive parenting articles, what not to do, technology – smart phones, addiction)

Changes in our 6th graders since last year (parents' observations)

- More independent
- Want more independence
- More stress
- Talking back more
- More drama
- Things starting to go on that we don't know about
- More time with peers
- Physical changes
- More sense of responsibility
- More time pressure
- More organized
- More push back
- More homework
- More sleep problems
- More social pressure
- More holding in of emotion

This is a great time of great change in child development AND there is a wide range of changes among kids this age.

There are 5 areas of development to consider:

Physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and moral – all are in a state of flux now.

1. Physical development –girls are having their periods, boys are shooting up. There is a difference of approximately 2 years in the onset of puberty between girls and boys. Differences in rate of development can be challenging for the kids, both within and between genders. At 6th grade, some have not started puberty yet, so may feel uncomfortably small or

underdeveloped. Those who are developing may have more status, for example taller boys and more developed girls. As parents, validate that everyone is different and everyone will get there. Who they are is more important.

Because of their increased physical capabilities, kids can and should help with household chores. This may be the last year that you can persuade or expect kids to help out. They should be appreciated for their efforts to help.

Kids' physical capabilities show up in their ability to participate in all kinds of competitive sports. However, they may start to burn out with sports, especially competitive sports, or want to try new sports.

Remember, physical activity is very good, but the stress and anxiety from being in overly competitive situations is not good. In any case, don't let them stay in their room and do computers all day – physical activity, whatever it is, whether organized or not, is important for both physical health and academic success.

2. Cognitive development – kids move from being able to well understand the concrete world to being able to think abstractly. There are tremendous implications of this growth in cognitive development: Academically – they can handle more, understand literature and history and the past and look at the future. Kids are not oblivious anymore. They are exposed to the news. Parents have to act as buffers, because between school and news and social media, they are exposed to a lot of information, which may cause confusion and anxiety. Parents can act as buffers to assure them that they live in a safe place, that there is low probability for war, and natural disaster, etc. Sometimes sleep problems arise because of what they are exposed to and their lack of understanding of probability, that most of what they hear about, read about, or see on TV or social media is actually rare. Because of cognitive development, social life can be affected – they are more likely to understand other people's point of view now. Middle schoolers also experience a type of narcissism – “This is happening to just me and no one else” concept, ” but they are also able to understand intellectually that other kids may experience the same things. On a wider view, they can understand that they have good fortune, they are more privileged than many people, and can be engaged in community service such as food bank, pet care, library, etc. Their beginnings of adolescent idealism can be harnessed and channeled into trying to make the world a better place. It is very important to empower them to understand that they can make a positive difference in the world.
3. Social development – Friendships are very fluid at this age. Their friends whom they entered middle school with may not be the same friends when they graduate from 8th grade. Parents' role changes from managers to consultants as kids want more independence, particularly

around social issues. A consultant asks good questions, helps kids to articulate problems, brainstorm solutions, helps them to evaluate, rather than just telling them what to do. Kids are very sensitive to the judgments of their parents, so parents need to be good listeners rather than judging especially in social situations. If they feel safe about telling their stories, kids may come to parents more often. It is critically important for parent-child communication to be preserved during these years. Parents should try to empower kids to solve their own problems. Sometimes in social situations, the outcome is worse with parental involvement. As a consultant you can help them figure out what to.

Mid 5th through about mid 7th grade is the period of greatest desire to conform; kids don't want to be different and don't want to be left out. But still kids need a lot of help in determining what makes a good friend and whether to continue friendships that are not positive. Intellectually they can understand what makes a good friend, e.g. trust, sticking up for one another, being nice and kind, consistency (being treated well in different settings most of the time), but emotionally they may have trouble detaching from kids they want to be friends with or who may have some status, but who really aren't good matches for them. Parents need to support their kids as they explore relationships and make sometimes difficult decisions.

It is also very important for parents to talk to each other. Not everyone has the same privilege, even though kids will say, "everyone else gets to do that." **Trust** is the keyword to focus on. Parental trust in the kids is necessary before according privileges. Ways to build trust from parents include: taking responsibility for chores and homework, taking responsibility for mistakes, sharing information with parents, being where they say they're going to be, checking in with parents, coming home on time, being respectful, showing they can get off technology when asked to. The more trust is built, the more comfortable you'll feel according them new social privileges. When they make mistakes privileges can be suspended for a while and then try again.

4. Emotional development – with puberty comes emotional ups and downs and drama. There may be more explosions, tears, anxiety, stress about grades and social relationships. Smart phones impact them. The biggest challenge of 21st century parenting is monitoring the technology. Kids need to be monitored. They should not close the bedroom door and text in the evening as an example. Tech gadgets hurt the kids. The addiction piece is important. Setting limits on these devices is a good clue as to whether the kids are addicted or not. Parents should have access to the kids' phones content. You need to set a good parental example with technology, by not immediately going to your own email right after

dinner. Family time is precious and short-lived, so it is important not to be ruled by your own attachment to technology.

You also need to identify your own values to the kids when dealing with such emotionally laden topics that may come up (often because of technology) such as why not playing violent video games, listening to bad song lyrics, looking at pornography, swearing, etc. Think about how you want to communicate your values in clear and strong terms. You may get pushback from the kids, but these are good “teachable moments,” and it is great to be prepared, rather than taken by surprise. In these discussions kids need to know the impact of their behavior on their parents. Also, with technology and other activities, kids do not understand moderation yet, so it may be better to just not allow something (like technology other than homework, on a school night).

While not obviously an emotional issue, organization is one of the more important skills in middle school. However, lack of organization increasingly contributes to the stress apparent in middle schoolers. Organization also relates to their cognitive ability. So there is the potential for a significant increase in organizational skills at this level. For example, they are not yet too good at time management, but they are much better at material management. Executive functioning (management of time, setting priorities, remembering what to do, managing emotions, etc.) is developing now. Some kids are still pretty disorganized. It is important for parents to have some understanding of school work. Parents can help kids in getting more organized – set the stage and parameters and consequences. For Alma – some discussion arose among the parents that it is confusing, some kids felt that they were not trusted, when parents check their grades without their permission. A good idea is to sit with the students once a week or two weeks to check their grades with them, rather than going behind their backs. Use the feedback as information to encourage self-advocacy. If a child didn’t do well on something encourage them to ask the teacher for clarification or help. It is important to look out for missing assignments and work with the child to make sure that homework gets done and turned in. Ultimately, this builds self-confidence and empowerment, two very important emotional qualities.

Resilience is important. Kids need to learn what resilience means, can they bounce back from frustration, disappointment? Depression does happen; parents need to watch out for that. Look for symptoms and seek out the school psychologists.

5. Moral development – kids up to this time will not do something because they don’t want to get into trouble. They do understand that there is a right and a wrong, and how they act has an impact on others and they want to protect other people. Honest apology is important. They need to

figure out what they can do to make a mistake or misbehavior right with the other person(s). Kids will easily think that they are no good, if they are not given an opportunity to figure out their mistakes and make it right. They begin to understand the difference between a “rule” (something to keep society organized and fair) and a “moral imperative” (not hurting people, Golden Rule, etc.) Kids do have empathy. The more parents talk about empathy and helping others the more kids will realize how important caring is.

In order to counteract the tendency for kids to be hypercritical of themselves and see themselves as bad kids, they need to be able to articulate what they like about themselves.

TEA Club (Teaching Equity and Acceptance) meets in room 11 on Fridays at lunch to discuss moral issues. It is all about diversity, but topics include stereotyping, racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, sexism, privilege. All 6th through 8th graders are invited and the discussions are a great demonstration of how kids this age really do understand right and wrong and have the capacity to become moral adults.

Some reading suggestions:

Article:

New York Times

“Why are more American teenagers than ever suffering from severe anxiety?”

Book:

I'd Listen to My Parents if They'd Just Shut Up – Anthony Wolf