

Fall 2018 Sixth Grade Level Parent Meeting
October 12, 2018

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Purpose of Grade Level Meetings:

- Find out what is developmentally appropriate for kids at this age/grade level
- Networking with other parents for better understanding of what other parents do and expect and for sharing information about kids that they may not tell their parents
- Partnering with school to raise happy, successful students

Changes in children since last year (parent observations):

- Confide in trusted adults
- Opinionated
- Emotional
 - Funnier
 - Angrier
 - Sadder
- More affected by school pressures (Tests and assignments)
- More anxious in general
- More independent
- Less confident
- More confident
- Questioning decision-making. What's right, what's wrong, what to do in specific situations. Asking about best practices
- More private and not wanting to share time with family
- Wanting to grow up, but wanting "the process" to slow down
- Curiosity about sex
- More attitude (talking back more)
- More aware of the outside world, aware of nuances

Issues and Concerns in parenting our 6th Graders:

- Executive functioning
- How to support children at school and home
- Homework and ability to have a routine. Changing classes, deadlines, visiting numerous websites, etc.
- How to provide balance so school is more fun, offer more motivation
- Supporting kids when having social conflicts, making new friends. Note: Article on psychologists' website about social and emotional development for 6th grade parents.

Making sense of the observations: Consider the five areas of development:

1. Physical Development:
 - Puberty – bodies and hormones are changing and onset of puberty affects everything.

- The fact that they're physically able to do things creates need for more independence. They are physically capable of doing a lot, so they should be contributing to the household with household responsibilities.
- Organized sports: They are quite capable of developing athletic skills and participating in organized sports. However, kids and parents need to learn to say no, they don't have to do everything. They need downtime. We live in a competitive community and culture and kids can be hard on themselves, which adds pressure to children. They increasingly have to manage time: extracurricular activities, social life, school/homework, so even though they're physically capable of some/many sports, they don't have to participate. Physical activity is very important for physical and mental health, but should be fun and not too stressful.
- Girls are having their periods; boys are shooting up and developing secondary sexual characteristics. Self-esteem is an issue for kids who are late bloomers. They need reassurance that things will happen naturally.

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2. Cognitive Development:

They are really growing in this area. They are now beginning to be able to understand abstract ideas and think critically. This impacts much more than schoolwork. Keep in mind that not all 11-12 year olds are equally able to think abstractly, so more abstract concepts may be easier for some students and harder for others. Teachers are well aware of this and class discussions enhance cognitive growth.

- They are much more aware of the world and able to think abstractly – leads to interesting dinner table conversations. A Del Mar example of how their cognitive development has positive effects: Our TEA (Teach Equity and Acceptance) Club meets every Friday at lunch to help promote understanding and acceptance of diversity. All kinds of differences are discussed, as well as negative societal reactions to differences: racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, homophobia. The comments and insights of sixth graders really demonstrate their ability to think critically and with insight.
- You can really talk with sixth graders like young adults. For example, your family values are increasingly important. You can't just say, "because I'm your mom/dad". You have to be prepared to answer tough personal questions, when did you have sex, did you smoke pot, watching pornography, etc. These are all teachable moments. You have to discuss why something is wrong. What's wrong with watching pornography? For example, how does that bias these young people's expectations for relationships? What's matter with violent video games? When they ask us difficult personal questions, we don't have to tell everything, but we should try to avoid lying to them. We can certainly ask them why they want to know and how your answer

might influence their own thoughts and actions. You do have a right to your own privacy, of course.

- Kids still don't have a good sense of probability and perspective about news and events in the media. Parents need to be the buffer to help them process what's happening. The more you explain things to them, the better. This discussion will include your values about what is going on in the world, especially political events.
- Executive functioning is also developing at this age. Executive functioning is the process of managing time, being organized, remembering what to do, managing emotions and behaviors. Sixth graders should be able to manage their homework and bringing material to/from school. Time management is still very difficult for kids, so they can't really plan a 2/3 week project. School understands this, and they benchmark along the way, but they need parents' help to plan these things out. Leverage ALMA to help them. They need to be doing their assignments, but they don't have to get the best score. If you see assignments are missing then you need to get involved.
- Another cognitive characteristic is Adolescent Narcissism. They very much want to be like everyone else (generally between mid-fifth and mid-seventh grades), so they don't want to be singled out. If something happens or they think they look different (even a pimple on their face), they feel like the whole world is looking at them. This is normal, but they may need help not being so embarrassed or putting themselves down for being different. Nevertheless, concern for their outward image in person or on social media accounts and comparing themselves to others are all normal phenomena at this age.

3. Social Development.

This is a time of great social turmoil and change.

It is normal to outgrow friends and how do you do that in a non-hurtful way? Interests and friends change and they'll likely not be friends throughout Del Mar with kids they started out as friends with at the beginning of sixth grade. How kids manage social interactions is every bit as important as reading/writing, etc. Parents have different roles (administrator, consultant). In the social area parents have the opportunity to act more in the consultant role and that's a very healthy role to be in. Parents should maintain consultant role (get to know the "client," ask questions, listen, brainstorm solutions, evaluate the solutions) as much as possible, and parents should not be 'judges'. Kids should not be judged or punished because that's how communication gets closed off. We often rush to solutions, but need to take time to help them process challenges... help them by asking good questions and supporting them. A major underlying social issue is figuring out who makes a good friend. If someone is not treating you nicely then that's not being a good friend. Encourage kids to make good friends. They are old enough to understand that a good friend is trustworthy, consistent with their friendships, and generally make you feel

good about themselves. Encourage kids to be independent and try to solve friendship problems on their own, or encourage them to talk to school staff, including Dr. Gold and Dr. Kover. They feel safe with school staff. Girls are more likely to want to talk things out, but boys' situations often have to get painful before they talk it out.

Social media is hurting kids. Difference between a knife and a gun, you stab someone you know what you're doing, but you shoot someone you don't see the immediate impact from a distance. Posting things on social media can be very toxic: putting each other down, or swearing via text, etc. -- all impact kids. Managing and monitoring electronics is extremely important. Use of technology is a privilege and students need to know that you are monitoring their online behavior including having access to their passwords. There are increasing concerns with addiction to technological devices – often video games for boys and social media for girls. How we as adults role model our use of technology is what kids get exposed to. There needs to be downtime at home where families are interacting, even watching TV together. As an “administrator,” you have the right to check up on their devices and make sure they're using them appropriately.

- Technology – Fortnite is a very popular game now. Kids are not good at moderation, so it's much easier for them to understand black/white. Trust is also a key consideration and we want to be able to trust them, so they have to earn their trust. How they earn it: Responsibility, moderation, communication, complete homework without reminders, chores, if they go someplace they report back.
- Optimal hours of sleep – 8/9 hours, but depends on the child.

4. Emotional Development:

- Hormones are kicking in so everything is much more dramatic. They are more easily angered, frustrated, and their emotional state is important to monitor. At school they generally hold it together, but outside of school after holding it together all day you'll see much more demonstrations of emotions.
 - Listen to them if they're willing to talk. Look for times of the day or situations where they may be more willing to talk – dinnertime, bedtime, in the car alone with them.
 - Give them an opportunity and time to cool off. You won't be successful pressing them to tell you everything.
 - If it appears that they are depressed, anxious, angry for a longer time, say several weeks, then it's a good idea talk to teachers to see if they're seeing the same changes in behavior. You are welcome to consult our school psychologists if you are increasingly worried about your child's mental health. Kids were happier years ago. Now, there's more pressure from the community, the culture of meanness, increased competition,

increased uncertainty and fear. We all feel it as adults and we can't hide it from our kids.

- Their self-esteem is impacted when they compare themselves to others, so it is important for them to develop a growth mindset and compare themselves to themselves.
- Disequilibrium is common at this age, because of their ability to see beyond their world. They want to act grown up but they can observe enough to be afraid of growing up and may act babyish sometimes.
- You can be a role model for your kids. Be open and honest with them, so they understand how to be open and honest with you and so they communicate properly. They still listen to your personal stories of situations and how you handled them, especially if they were very similar situations.

5. Moral

Students are well able to understand the difference between right and wrong. They have empathy and can monitor what they say/do because they're aware it might hurt someone, but sometimes emotions take over.

- Moral Imperative vs. Rules. Kids can understand that rules are just to make society run smoothly – play games by the same rules, don't talk while others are working, etc. Moral Imperatives are about respect, kindness, treating others as you want to be treated. It is very difficult to try to counteract what's going on in the real world: sports figures losing their temper, dirty politics, etc., but we still have to try by letting them know our own values. A huge concern is if your child is not remorseful for what they've done. Those are kids we should worry about, potential sociopaths. Only external consequences work for them.
- For most kids "Restorative Parenting", and "Restorative Justice" are effective ways to deal with misbehaviors and mistakes. They need to understand the impact of what they did to someone else to help them get past it and make it right. It is very important to protect self-esteem and not make them feel like they're a bad person. If they insult you, you need to tell them how it made you feel so they can make it better. If it involves another student, they need to hear from the other student how the action made him/her feel. You can help them figure out their own consequences, such as: sincere apology, write a letter, do something helpful around the house (if you are the "victim" of the misbehavior), do something nice for the other kid, etc.

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