

**Fall 2019 Eighth Grade Level Parent Meeting**  
**October 21, 2019**  
**Dr. Allan Gold, Psychologist, Dr. David Kover, Psychologist,**  
**Brian Lynch, Principal**

**Introductions**

**Purpose of the grade level meetings:**

- Provide an opportunity for parents to meet, create relationships, and work together to support each other and they raise children of similar ages.
- Learn what is developmentally appropriate for different age levels
- Opportunity to discuss specific parenting issues and gain perspective and suggestions for how to handle social, emotional, school, and home issues.

Intro: Name of parent and 8<sup>th</sup> grader.

**Changes in our 8th graders since last year (parent observations):**

- More private
- More social interest
- Much more authority, autonomy, independence
- Body image, awareness
- Mood changes rapidly
- Parents are much more embarrassing
- Much more mature, planning, smart (i.e topics like Animal Farm) etc.

**Questions, Issues, Concerns in Parenting Our 8<sup>th</sup> Graders**

- Managing increased interest in dating
- How do we find out what's really going on with them?
- How to help them manage stress
- How much do we push them academically?
- Social Media

**Physical Development:**

At this age physical changes are happening for most kids, and kids are becoming aware of their sexuality, gender identity. Kids are more open to differences in these areas; micro aggressions, which are small biased comments, not overt aggression, are more the focus for educating students not to do. Because of their heightened sexuality, alone time with another potentially romantic interest isn't recommended (although rare, some kids are sexually active). Keeping them pretty busy is the default, versus downtime (which often means electronics, dating, etc). Parents need to recognize that they can't control their kids all the time, but they need to have open discussions about activities and it is critical that they develop trust in their kids before granting privileges. As they are going into high

school, direct conversations about sex, protection, etc. is recommended. Consent is added in the family life dialogue at school and needs to be emphasized at home, both for boys and girls. Limits are family dependent, but kids should know that they are still being watched. How do you say “no” is independent of gender – they all need to learn how to say “no” to unwanted advances and peer pressure. Kids this age are exposed to or already have been exposed to pornography. Upfront discussions about your values and concerns about what the wrong messages that kids get from seeing pornography is very important to communicate.

Physical development ranges widely at this age. Now it is the late bloomer who is often embarrassed. The need to be reassured that they don’t have control over their body development, but that they will catch up.

Knowing information and communication is very important. It is perfectly okay to call other parents and check in for outings, gatherings etc. (especially 1-1 dates). It is important to remember that good listening, respect, communication are all part of good relationships, not just with parents but with each other.

### **Cognitive Development:**

Puberty also means change of interest, social changes, cognitive changes. 8<sup>th</sup> graders have a maturity and can discuss things they couldn’t before. This is visible in their school assignments as well. Kids are more aware of worldly issues and politics. They are very keen on the why they are not allowed to do something, and will ask for logical reasons why there are rules and restrictions. . Family culture may be different from social norms, and kids will want to understand that, even if they don’t agree.

Executive functioning, which regulates judgment, time management, organization, self-control, setting priorities is based on the prefrontal cortex of the brain. This isn’t fully developed until men are 30 and women 28, so, while kids this age are much better at organizing and setting priorities, they still need some guidance and still may do impulsive things. So don’t back out of parenting, just yet. The question becomes, “when do you be quiet and listen and when do you get more involved?” A good book for advice on just this topic is *I’d Listen to My Parents If They’d Just Shut Up* by Anthony Wolf, Ph.D.

### **Social Development:**

Students are starting to develop out of the “I have to be like everyone else.” Mindset. Challenge Day was helpful for that. They begin to accept each others personalities and differences. Kids also think everyone else is doing much more than what is actually happening (i.e vaping, sex, etc). They do care about each other and will come to Dr. Gold and Dr. Kover if they think other kids are harming themselves etc. In 7<sup>th</sup> grade they all had the Signs of Suicide Program, so they are aware of

what to do if a peer is expressing depression or self-harm. If kids feel safe and not judged, they will communicate with you.

Kids start to recognize that being a good friend is multi-dimensional, that no one person will satisfy all of their friends needs. The tricky part for them is getting out of a friendship, and this is where they may need some guidance from you, if they ask for help. They are like scientists; they are very good at observing other friend groups and even their friends. Some good questions to ask are, "What are you observing about your peers?" "What do you think about what you're seeing?"

Social media is most concerning to this age. Managing all the electronics is very important and probably the most challenging aspect of 21<sup>st</sup> century parenting. They shouldn't be taking their smart phones and tablets to bed, sleep is very key. Mean texts are regularly send or posted. It is often necessary to get kids face to face to remedy situations. They are also looking to you and observing how you are using your technology. Be aware that they have or will in the future throw that back at you (according to Mr. Lynch). Have kids do their work in a "public space" at home, so you can check from time to time what they are doing, even if they are good at switching off a website or social media, if you come to observe. How do we monitor social media at this age (question from a parent)? It is good to have the passwords of the kids. Check texts periodically...sometimes they have code names for certain friends. It's good for kids to know that parents can check.

### **Emotional Development:**

Social media ties into the emotionally areas of development. Two major emotional issues for kids this age are: 1) Stress, 2) Depression. Kids follow how many "likes" they get on social media and if some comments are negative that can be very upsetting to them. Watch out for prolonged changes in their mood. This could be a sign of real depression or anxiety. Also, addiction to social media is prevalent. If your child can't get off it when you say to, then that is very concerning. Devices simulate chemicals in brain which keep them (and us) addicted. That is when you have to move from Consultant to Manager. You are still their parent. There are also ways to block certain sites. On the Del Mar web site, in the parent resources link, link on how to limit time and block certain sites. They are quite capable of surviving without constantly being on devices. A good earlier example of that was Outdoor Ed, where kids couldn't use electronics and they enjoyed themselves.

Are there differences between boys and girls with moods and/or emotional outbursts? Both have outbursts, range, but they containe them at school due to not wanting to be embarrassed. Girls still cry more and it seems like girls get more upset about social issues.

Academics: Often kids put pressure on themselves. Sometime pressure comes from parents, but often it will be internal. It is okay to put limits on other activities, if they aren't working reasonably hard, but if they are and are being very

hard on themselves, try to incorporate a growth mindset, so that they can put performance in perspective – that we all make mistakes, and we learn and grow from them.. Kids should be encouraged to be self advocates, especially as they will be in high school in less than a year. It is their job to ask a teacher to explain something in a different way. If kids don't do their best/push themselves, there is usually a reason (i.e. fear of success, comparisons to siblings or other children, etc.). Letting teachers know that your kids need more motivation to work harder is useful. Up to 7<sup>th</sup> grade, if they liked the teacher they liked the subject. Now they are starting to realize the difference between the subjects they like vs. the likability of the teacher. Remind those that get over stressed (anxious), it's one test, one assignment. Have them look back and see what they could have done differently... maybe they need to start studying early, ask for help, etc. Also, 8<sup>th</sup> graders learn that you need to study differently for different subjects.

There are generally two main stressors: 1) Not knowing how to do something and fearing failure 2) Too much to do and not enough time to do it. Sometimes kids can be over scheduled. Rest and sleep are very important. At the beginning of week ask them: What do you have to do this week. Let's plan out your assignments. Prepare for what they have to do and adjust their schedule with them. Have kids estimate the amount of time their assignments will take and have then monitor their accuracy. Sometimes kids will think work will take longer or not as long. It is very helpful for them (and for us with our own work) to have a reasonably accurate estimate of the time to allot. It makes doing the work much less stressful. Also at this time there is much more pressure to succeed, especially with applying to private high schools. All of this needs to be put into perspective, that effort pays off, but that too much stress results in being less productive.

Dr. Gold' talked about a "self esteem bank," a mental storehouse of good thoughts about oneself – things you're good at, good personality qualities, good actions. If a child cannot identify things they like about themselves, then that is a concern. If the "bank" is full, then when someone else says something negative or when we say something negative to ourselves, the impact can be lessened, because we know all of the good things about ourselves. Accepting mistakes and working through them is key...and they are watching you parents as role models –how we handle our own mistakes, whether we beat ourselves up, or express what we've learned and how we're going to fix it. Have them ask themselves before they go to bed, "what did you do today that you were proud of today?" It doesn't have to be a big, momentous action – just something that they felt was good and can build their self-esteem as a good person.

### **Moral Development:**

Morally, kids just beginning to understand the differences between rules and right and wrong. They understand the link between morals and how people treat each other. Trust and respect are the most important qualities at this age. At this age, kids want privileges (they may think everything is a right, but it's not!). For

example, they be wanting to drive in a few years, so how do let them do that without your trusting them? You can ask them, "how do you think you can build our trust in you?" Some ways kids this age can build trust with their parents are: open communication, doing what they say, using their phone properly, having kids take responsibility for their behaviors, doing their school work and home responsibilities, being respectful to parents. As far as respect is concerned, they can be mad or frustrated, but not disrespectful (no "you're the worst mom/dad in the world").

Empathy is also key, and they seem to display this. Challenge Day was important for that. Restorative Parenting is useful for growth when challenges come up, especially for them to realize the impact of what they have done on someone else, and figuring out how to rectify (letter, community service, etc). Is your child able to admit to their mistakes vs. trying to wiggle out of it.

When deciding whether to allow them privileges, you have to look at the specific situation and friends...e.g. shopping in San Rafael or SF Ferry trip. What are you comfortable with? You can discuss a setting or activity and help them think about and anticipate how they would handle unexpected events. You don't have to scare them with everything that could go wrong, but see how they would handle specific - e.g. someone offers you liquor or weed at a party, a homeless person approaches you on the street, a strange teen or man whistles at you at the mall or tries to talk to you. You can't always anticipate every unexpected occurrence, but as a parent, you want some idea that they have some good sense and reasonable strategies for self-protection.

This is a time of tremendous potential for your kids, but it is also a very tricky time. Whether they admit it or not, they need you! Also, keep in contact with your kids' friends' parents. Check on their restrictions, and values. Do you want your kids at a friend's home, or are you uncomfortable with a different rule and value system than yours. Rather than forbidding a friendship, which is hard to do and can backfire, just invite the friend to your house with an explanation why. These 8<sup>th</sup> grade prep years lay the foundation that can help and maintain a structure for dealing with high school challenges.