

Fall 2019 Seventh Grade Level Parent Meeting
November 1, 2019
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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.

Changes in our 7th graders since last year (parent observations):

- More responsible: cooking, chores, beds
- More independence, making own social plans
- More private
- More out loud processing
- Less baby behavior – bed time routine changed
- More attitude
- Happier – smoother post-6th grade
- Greater interest in the world, news, events

Questions, Issues, Concerns in Parenting Our 7th Graders

- Is there too much computer / iPad Usage because of homework or other reasons?
- Elections coming – how to address current events
- How do you help them learn about news that is difficult to process
- How to express your own views (parent vs. child), ex. Women's equality vs. everyone is equal. Equality vs. Equity Graphic – Parents don't need to have the answers, sometimes just asking the right questions is the most important. Help them become critical thinkers. Don't take everything they say at face value. If kids have strong opinions, they need to be able to support them with evidence and critical thinking.

Five Areas of Development:

Physical

- This is a time of dramatic changes. Many kids are in the middle of puberty; others are just starting, and others aren't there yet. Hormones are likely active. The advent of puberty stimulates not only physical changes, but

changes in friend preferences due to outgrowing each other, changes in interests, including new romantic interests. At this time students who are slower in developing may be more sensitive. Earlier developing boys generally have more status; girls who haven't developed yet begin to feel left behind. It is important for parents to help all children understand that everyone everyone develops physically at different times/rates and they can not control that, but they do control WHO they are, i.e. what kind of person they are – caring, compassionate, empathic, helpful, or mean, aggressive, selfish, etc.

Because they are more physically able it is increasingly important that they spend time exercising their bodies. It doesn't matter if they participate in team sports, individual sports or just bike or hike, it is very important to keep them busy with physical activity. Down time is always necessary, given how busy students this age can be, but keeping them busy for the next several years, so they stay out of trouble during idle time, is also important to consider.

Children this age are quite capable of helping around the house and should have chores or home responsibilities. They have a duty to contribute to the household that has raised them so far. It is hard to impose chores on 12 year olds, so hopefully they have grown up with that expectation. Appreciating them for helping can be motivating. A helpful book is How to Raise an Adult, guiding parents as to what are appropriate responsibilities for kids this age.

Because of puberty, sexual interest increases. Don't be surprised if your kid is exposed to pornography. Recent research is showing that this is occurring these days for kids 8-10 years old. There is always curiosity and interest, but now kids have access to anything on the internet. If/when you discover they've been exposed or exploring, it's very important that you are prepared. This is a teachable moment and you should be very clear on your values about why you think this is inappropriate for them to be watching. For example, pornography gives a very biased view of relationships – all physical, people have particular physical attributes, noting about communication and relationships, women are often used and mistreated in pornography.

The question was asked about what rules Del Mar has about dating and physical demonstrations. Physical demonstrations of affection such as kissing are not allowed. Dating is not recommended for kids this age. They may say they have a boyfriend or girlfriend, but those relationships are usually short-lived and don't progress far, and are usually labeled for social status or cache. Nevertheless, there are students who will become sexually active outside of school within the next year or two. In 8th grade there is an age-appropriate follow up to the 5th grade family life education.

Most important, not only for physical issues, but all issues is healthy, open communication between kids and parents. They need to be assured that they can talk about anything with you without being judged or punished. A very good book is I'd Listen to My Parents If They'd Just Shut Up, By Anthony Wolf, Ph.D. This helps guide parents on teenage developmental issues and when to listen, when to ask questions, when to be quiet.

Cognitive Development:

Kid's cognitive development at this age presents a very exciting time. You can talk to kids like adults now. They are forming opinions and thinking abstractly; they are aware of a much bigger world now. Your role is to help them think through issues, to think critically, understand that issues are complex – not black and white, and to understand gray areas. We see the insight that kids this age have in their participation in TEA (Teach Equity and Acceptance) Club, where they begin to understand many different points of view and form and articulate their opinions about current social issues.

Kids still can be scared by what they hear on the news – climate change, fires, war, etc. It is not unusual for kids this age to resist rules and be questioning and sometimes defiant. Help them harness this energy to do good for the world, not just to complain about school rules, for example. They can be agents for change, e.g. the 16t year old Swedish girl advocating for countries to seriously address climate change. If they really want to fight something, figure out what is the matter with the world and put their energy into fixing those problems. For example, a 6th grade girl in TEA Club recently informed us that Oreos (which we serve) use palm oil made on plantations that are built by destroying forests and wild life, so we're going to switch to a different snack.

Kids this age can still be very narcissistic and want power. They may have the attitude that adults and parents don't know everything, or maybe anything. Still they need to defend and justify their opinions with facts. Our Del Mar curriculum is very supportive of developing these critical thinking skills in our students.

Parents should enjoy the opportunities that the cognitive development of kids this age provides for deep, fascinating, and very educational discussions.

Social Development:

Shifting of friendships is very normal at this age, and there is often some drama, or at least hurt that accompanies these shifts. However, because kids are more private at this age, how do we find out what is going on with our kids? You can certainly find times, such as bedtime, or driving while they're talking in the back seat of the car. Often parents will find out about their own kids from their kid's friends or the parents of the friends. Kids do talk and are concerned about each other. In January Dr. Gold and Dr. Kover present a lesson Signs of Suicide to all 7th

graders (a state mandate). The message is “Acknowledge, Care, and Tell,” meaning that if they hear a friend sounding depressed or even suicidal, they need to listen, express caring and tell a trusted adult. Drs. Gold and Kover have had much experience with kids coming to them to express concerns about friends, which starts the intervention ball rolling. All parents want to hear if there is an issue of concern with their own child, so it becomes increasingly important that parents feel comfortable, or at least be willing to share uncomfortable or disconcerting information about another student with that student’s parents.

Again, this is all about communication. Parents should be good role models for sharing their own daily experiences or challenges. Parents can talk about small issues that arise and that everyone can work together to solve problems. One strategy is to share “ups and downs” (good and not good things that happen during the day) at the dinner table, just to open up everyone to hearing and sharing. That doesn’t mean that parents have to reveal major family issues that children have no control over and would get very anxious (e.g. money, job uncertainty, marital conflict), particularly when there is a lack of clarity, since that only increases children’s anxiety. But sharing normal daily events, both good and upsetting, can normalize the sharing process and provide a model for how parents deal with different situations.

In social situations it’s excellent to be a consultant to your kids. Consultants are good listeners, try to understand problems, brainstorm solutions or interventions, and help students figure out the best way to proceed, and then evaluate how well the intervention worked.

Emotional Development

Along with puberty comes more emotion, including mood swings. The most serious emotional challenges for kids this age are increasing anxiety and stress. They are still adjusting to the increased workload of 7th grade and future grades. Later in the year they may be thinking about applying to private high school. High school in general can lead to stressful thoughts. 7th graders have more classroom presentations and projects and for many, talking in front of the class can be very anxiety producing. Teachers can accommodate students if they are so nervous, but it is also important for students to learn public speaking skills and to get through their anxiety. With the new grading system it will be interesting to see how the students react. This is a bright class and they put a lot of pressure on themselves, even when parents do not overtly demand high expectations and performance.

Another very important emotionally related skill is self-advocacy. Many students are afraid to stick up for themselves, to ask questions of a teacher. Teachers are here to help students learn. It is the students’ job to ask questions and it is the teachers’ job to find ways to explain content or instructions or standards to students so that they understand. Students have every right to say, “I’m really

trying to understand what you're saying, and I get this and this, but could you explain this part a different way, so I can better understand it?"

Probably one of the most critical forces impacting emotional levels in kids is social media. Consider the Atlantic Monthly article "Are Smart Phones Destroying a Generation?" There is increasing evidence that social media is increasing anxiety, depression, and even suicide in kids. They are concerned about "likes," negative comments and postings, and are easily addicted to electronics. Parents need to monitor their kids' usage of electronics and social media. On the RUSD website, under Parents/Resources, there is a link to technology with a lot of suggestions about setting time limits, blocking, etc. Evan McKay, head of the district technology department can be of great help to parents. Ipad access to dark websites or games is blocked at school, but kids may have access at home through home servers, so parents need to learn how to manage those inappropriate or addicting sites. Kids may be expected to do about 70 minutes of homework at night, much on the iPad (plus 30 minutes of reading), so if students are spending hours on their iPads, it is likely that they're either gaming, or using social media, or both. It is true that girls are more emotionally affected by social media, but boys can be, too. Watch out for technology addiction; if they can't off when asked and argue and get angry, it's better to shut the technology down, at least during the week. Kids (and many adults now) are not good with self-regulation and moderation. Kids are not good with "gray." It is easy to just say "no technology – phone, iPad, laptop – on a school night once your homework is done –and you'll work on your homework where I can monitor you, not in your bedroom." You can also set limits on game time or social media time on the weekends. Remember is a privilege, not a right.

Parents should look out for behavioral changes in their children – increased isolation, more anger, changes in eating and sleeping. If this persists for several weeks or a month, reach out to our Del Mar staff, teachers, administrators, and psychologists for help.

Moral Development:

Kids are just beginning to understand the differences between rules, which exist to make society run smoothly, and moral rights and wrongs, which impact how others feel. Kids this age do understand and experience empathy and understand that others may have different life experiences. Try to expose them to people who have less than they do, even help when possible, such as at a food bank. Help them understand that they can channel their energy into public service and helping others, whether by donating money or used toys or clothes.

Helping kids understand the impact of their behaviors on others is critical. All kids will misbehave or make mistakes, but they need to understand that when they do something wrong they need to own it and try to make it right. The philosophy of Restorative Parenting is very helpful. Kids need to reflect on how their words or actions made another person feel, often directly from that person

(easy to do if it's you, the parent). Ask how they can make the situation better and restore the relationship. Hopefully, they will feel remorse. There are many ways to make a situation right – a written apology acknowledging the behavior, doing something helpful or kind for the person, doing research about the origins and effects of biased, negative talk, for example.

Trust and respect are the most important qualities for kids to develop at this age (and any age). How can kids this age build trust with their parents? You can start out by asking them “How do you think you can build trust with us so you can have more privileges?”

Some parent thoughts:

- Not to have to be reminded to do chores
- Communicate, check-in, be where they say they are
- Proactively sharing issues of failures
- Take responsibility for own mistakes
- Homework effort and starting on own
- Helping with younger siblings

As they want more independence, they should be willing to discuss how they would handle unexpected situations. You can help them with possible scenarios they could encounter without terrifying them (e.g. at a party someone offers you weed or alcohol, you're out shopping and an older boy approaches you and wants you to come with him, a stranger gives you a sad story and asks you for money, etc.) Times are different now than they were 30 or 40 years ago, and while Tiburon is a safe place, things happen. In spite of the urge to be a helicopter parent, kids do need to learn to be on their own gradually and to learn how to handle challenging, unexpected situations.

The question of parties and vaping came up. We're not really seeing vaping in 7th grade, though it has happened in previous grades, and there is always experimentation. Kids will do something stupid and possibly dangerous, which is normal, (as the frontal lobes of the brain, which control judgment aren't fully developed until the late 20s), so we have to help our kids handle temptations to do something unhealthy or risky.

Just remember: Dr. Gold and Dr. Kover are here for us and our students!