

Fall 2019 Sixth Grade Level Parent Meeting
October 11, 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 6th graders since last year (parent observations):

- A lot more independence (Wanting it too)
 - Morning routine
 - Schoolwork
 - Emailing Administrators
- More stress
- Want to be with friends more
- More defiance
 - Want to know why and have their own opinion
- More concerned about what other peers think
- Changes in friendships
- More emotional

Issues, Questions, Concerns in Parenting our 6th Graders:

- Cell Phone/Technology
- How to handle academic load stress
- Social stress
- How to get them out of their comfort zone
- Confusion regarding hands-off parent or not?

Book Suggestion: I'd Listen to My Parents if They'd Just Shut-Up, by Anthony Wolf, Ph.D.

Five Areas of Development

Physical Development:

Kids are hitting puberty at this age although the girls on the average develop about two years before boys. Kids are sensitive physically about the changing rate they are experiencing, and they are very conscious of differences. Early developing girls may still have some discomfort with their bodies. Later developing boys in

another year or two will also be uncomfortable if they are relatively small and younger looking. The advent of puberty affects their social development, as well, as interests will change.

Now they are quite capable of doing quite a bit by themselves, so they should be helping around the house. It is important for kids to get physical activity as it is good for both their bodies and their brains. The physical activity may be team sports, but that is not necessary. Individual sports or any kind of exercise is positive. They also need downtime, but physical activity can keep them off technology. They may want to do everything, but they are just now learning the executive function of managing their time. With homework, socializing, and extracurricular activities, it is easy for them to get overwhelmed. Parents may need to say “no” to additional activities, just to preserve their child’s time to relax and to reduce their stress level.

Cognitive Development:

This is the start of a wonderful time in your children’s cognitive lives. They are beginning to be able to think abstractly. This can lead to very interesting and deeper conversations at the dinner table and other times. What accompanies this growth is that they now have their own opinions about many things. They now want reasons for your rules and it is very important to be able to explain why you want them to do or not to do something. For example, you may need to discuss your reasons and values why you don’t want them playing violent video games or watching pornography. Kids will be exposed to politics and national and international events. It is fine to express your own opinions and to try to engage in serious conversations about what they are seeing and hearing about.

Social Development:

This is also a time of great change in friendships. Due to puberty and the physical changes that accompany that, kids’ interests change, sometimes quickly, and it is normal to want to choose new friends. However, they are not very comfortable at changing friendships, because they don’t really want to hurt others’ feelings. This is where parents can take on the role of consultant. This is, since the problem is not yours, you can be their consultant: be a good listener, help them identify the problem, ask good questions, help them articulate what makes a good friend, brainstorm solutions to the social problem, and help them evaluate if their solutions/actions are effective.

Socialization and technology are very intertwined now. It is increasingly important that they don’t socialize only on social media, but face-to-face. You will undoubtedly have to help them deal with texts and postings and teach them how to confront upsetting communications. The longer you can keep them off social media, the better. Check the RUSD website under the parent link for suggestions and directions for managing electronic devices. You can always contact Mr. McKay, IT Director for

help. At this point, they want to be like everyone else. By the time they hit 8th grade they are more comfortable with being themselves. Peer pressure is very powerful right now. So you will probably get a lot of push to get electronic devices, and do what “everyone else gets to do,” even though we know that’s not true. That’s why communication with other parents is important now.

Part of their growing up is that they are now more independent and they should be allowed to go places on their own, such as biking to a friend’s house, going shopping, or downtown. They cannot build trust with you if you don’t give them some independence. They will want more and more privileges, so the discussion of earning those by being trustworthy is critical now. You can ask them how to build trust with you, but some examples would be:

- they take responsibility for their homework and chores without your reminding and nagging,
- they keep in touch with you when they’re away from the house
- they return when they say they will or ask for more time
- they go where they say they’re going to
- they are respectful to you, even if they disagree, are angry, or frustrated
- babysit younger siblings
- check in with you if you’re not home when they get home
- taking responsibility for mistakes, accidents, misbehaviors

They may/will make mistakes, so that’s when you can pull in the apron strings (suspend a privilege), and give them another chance in a few weeks.

Emotional Development:

Because of puberty they may show more emotions than a year earlier. They hold their emotions in during the school day as they don’t want to embarrass themselves and may have angry outbursts or tears at home. Still they need to learn to express their feelings in an appropriate way, even though their hormones are surging and thus, they are less able to control themselves.

One major new emotional development in middle school is increased stress and this has increased significantly over the past few decades. We all need to consider what we do as parents and educators to make their lives more stressful. We live in a very stressful society, so we, as adults are subject to similar stressors – making our best efforts and accomplishing, being perfect, too much to do and not enough time to do it, exceptionally high standards for ourselves. How do we help them and ourselves handle these stressors? We can promote a growth mindset with them (and us) – that we all make mistakes and we can learn from them and get better at what we’re trying to accomplish. We can help them put a test or a grade in perspective, that they are much more than one grade or one test. They internalize that they are only as good as what they can produce and that is not true. What is

most important is that they are kind, helpful, compassionate people – something they actually have more control over. They still look to us as role models. How do we respond to our own mistakes? Do we “beat ourselves up” or do we model reasonable frustration accompanied by a plan to fix the mistake. If they continue to be anxious about many things and that is getting in the way of their having an enjoyable middle school experience, then therapy is a good choice for them.

It’s important to recognize that some stress is not bad. There is a relationship between stress and productivity. No stress leads to little production, as does very high stress. Moderate stress or pressure can be a motivator, but it is important to keep it balanced, so kids know they have tasks to accomplish, but that they don’t feel overwhelmed. It’s not unusual for 6th graders making the transition to middle school to feel the stress of assignments, organization, managing seven class. We may need to do more management than we expected to help them learn the skills so they can manage the increased demands.

Communication is the most important aspect of raising children this age. Believe it or not, they still do rely on your opinions. They need to feel safe to tell you information and to ask questions without being judged or getting into trouble. They are more private now, so you may find out about your kids from their friends or their friends’ parents. In addition to promoting open communication with your kids, it’s equally important to be open with other parents. You may find out information about another child that you should share with their parents. This is not always comfortable to do, but to realize that we are a village raising children, we sometimes may need to respectfully and gently share difficult information (e.g. I saw your child vaping the other day, I heard students talking about trying marijuana, etc.)

Some ideas about when to talk to kids about important topics and issues:

- Could plan a weekly family meeting
- Talk at the dinner table, maybe doing “Ups and Downs” (good and not good events of the day), which can start a conversation
- At night time when they go to bed
- Car time can be good because there is no eye contact.

Moral Development:

Kids are just beginning to understand right and wrong and the difference between a rule to keep society organized and a moral right or wrong that is focused on not hurting others. They do have empathy and can understand the impact of their behavior on others, but sometimes after they’ve said or done something mean, they need to be reminded of how their words and actions do impact others. They are able to think before they say or do, but often they still act impulsively. Restorative justice is a method for them to really consider or hear the impact of their words or actions, figure out a way to make amends and restore the relationship. This certainly applies to how they treat you, as parents. Consequences

shouldn't just be punishment, but doing something positive to make things better – writing letters of apology, helping out the “victim,” doing research to understand where their mean words came from and what can result or has resulted historically.

Hopefully, you are seeing remorse some time after their misbehavior. We really worry about the kids who don't show remorse, as they are the future sociopaths, whose behavior may only be modified by punishment or rewards. Fortunately, most of our kids do show remorse when they do or say something hurtful. If you don't see that, try therapy first to see what is underlying your child's difficulty with empathy.