

Spring 2009 7th Grade Parent Meeting
Dr. Allan Gold, District Psychologist
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Questions, Issues, Concerns in Parenting our 7th Graders as They Approach 8th Grade

Boys and Girls and how they are relating to each other. What's going on with dating?

- 7th grade has the widest range of development that you're going to find in middle school.
- In 7th grade you will find your children shifting in friendships ...this is a common process and yet a very difficult one too.
- 7th graders are changing and maturing at very different rates, so some may be interested in each other in a romantic way (but any given relationship probably won't last too long).
- "Going out" in 7th grade pretty much means texting and calling each other.

Rec Dances:

- The Rec Dances in Mill Valley were started by two of our former students a couple of years ago. They are not particularly well supervised
- However, kids at this age are going to want freedom. If you decide to let your child attend the rec dances, have conversations about these dances with them before they attend, be sure to have that open communication. This is a great time to talk with them about appropriate behavior and how small the community is and if they do engage in kissing, etc. at these dances other kids, certainly, and then parents will find out.
- Some, but certainly not all of the parents attending were allowing their kids to attend. Some students were unaware or uninterested in going.
- This is also a perfect time to set up a system with them and establish a "code word" (which means "Pick me up. I don't feel comfortable.") with them. If they feel uncomfortable and want to go home they can just give you a call and they can say that "code word" and then you come pick them up, no questions asked. This strategy is good all the way through high school.

Are there any parties or social gatherings parents should know about? What's going on now in this class?

- No one was aware of any parties, supervised or otherwise.
- You really can't supervise your kids 24/7 anymore. At parties the appropriate ratio of adults to kid is 1 parent to about 6. But really supervise; don't have all of the adults at one end of a house while the kids are at the

other end. Cruise around without lurking. Kids at this age still want some structured activities at parties, or they will make their own activity.

- It's perfectly reasonable to call other parents to make sure what is going on, that there is really a party with parents supervising etc.
- The summer between 7th and 8th grade can be a time when experimentation happens (beginning sexual activity, drugs, alcohol), so keep them busy and engaged in healthy activities. Try to know where they are and what they're doing. Use the cell phone for regular contact, if you're at work and they are not in a structured situation.

Helping kids with the ups and downs of their social relationships.

- The parent role now shifts from being the manager to the consultant, particularly with social relationships. You can't intervene all the time, nor do they want you to. You can ask good questions, be good listeners, and help them brainstorm possible courses of action. That might be going to someone, telling another kid to stop bothering them, getting some peer allies, ignoring teasing, changing friends, taking "time-outs" from intense friendships, etc.
- At this age they need to be empowered to be self-advocates. If they're having a problem with another student, they can go to a teacher, administrator, counselor or psychologist for help, with assurances that we'll do our best to keep our source of information confidential.
- It is always ok for you to let us know what is going on. If we don't know, we can't help.
- Remember there are no secrets in middle school. If something's going on, be assured that more than one other kid, (probably many), has observed the behaviors, and we can use that fact to suggest how we heard about it.
- All kids should have at least 3 adults they can confide in. For example, these adults could be uncles, aunts, much older siblings, and often, parents of friends - who are really "cool" to your child, even if you're not. And you may be the "cool" parent to someone else's child.