

Spring 2011 5th Grade Parent Meeting
May 16, 2011
Dr. Allan Gold, District Psychologist

Questions, Issues, Concerns in Parenting our 5th-6th Graders:

- They are more emotional – what’s going on?
- How do we sort out what is a real “big” issue or just venting?
- More physical interaction among boys – what’s that about?
- What can we expect when dealing with 7th and 8th graders next year?
- How should we encourage out of school socialization?
- How much free rein do they get?
- What about academic expectations?

PHYSICAL/EMOTIONAL ISSUES:

The first three of these questions relate to their changing bodies and entering puberty.

There is a large range right now in development and it will only get larger over the next few years. Boys are much bigger than they were and it is normal for them to express that with more obvious physical interactions. They may not realize their own growing strength, so they should be reminded that if someone complains, they need to stop – even if they’re only being playful.

Both girls and boys will be experiencing hormonal changes. Their emotional ups and downs are related to this growth. They will express their daily experiences with more emotions. Parents will need to figure out if a problem is a significant one by whether venting resolves it or if it is a persistent topic of discussion. Listen carefully without telling your child what to do or overreacting. When they are ready, ask them how they want to handle a situation and then you can brainstorm ideas with them.

SOCIALIZATION AND TEASING:

Your children will spend a lot of time now figuring out who their real friends are. It is normal for friendships to shift, based on when they hit puberty. There is a lot of social shuffling – friends will leave other friends behind. They outgrow each other as interests change, and then they may very well become friendly again later. These shifts can be painful and no one’s fault. Kids are not very good at extricating themselves from friendships, so they need encouragement to be kind when they want to make new friends and leave older friendships behind.

Bullying has been addressed a lot over the last five years at Del Mar. There is a 7th grade “Challenge Day” in the middle of the year which provides an intense experience for kids to be “real,” about who they are and what they’ve

gone through in their lives. These days have had a significant effect on how kids understand and subsequently treat each other. Some of the activities are similar to those in the MOSAIC Program at Bel Aire. In sixth grade Advisory (homeroom) about two months of anti-teasing activities are presented. The Restorative Justice program allows child to meet with 8th grade leaders to agree on some way to make up for their misbehaviors. This process is particularly helpful with addressing and making recompense for teasing. They can both earn back privileges, sometimes avoid suspension, and make up to the student(s) who have been offended.

Sixth graders are assigned an 8th grade buddy. We do not see a lot of cross-grade bullying.

Kids will be pretty exhausted from the intense interactions and social negotiations of middle school. Don't worry too much about your child wanting to hang out at home after school. If they are isolated, no one calls, and they say "I have no friends," then there might be a bigger issue. Kids have better perspective at this age and have a better understanding of friendship, as well as a better sense of when they need a respite.

In general your role switches now from manager to consultant. Get them to reflect, listen to them, make yourself available, but they will want to handle their social life more.

HOW MUCH FREE REIN:

However, they still need your parenting and guidance. They should not have free rein. Specific rules are good – e-mail or not, stay at home alone or not, get ice cream by themselves or not, etc. There is no law in CA regarding the age you can leave them alone. Twelve is a rough guideline, but leaving them alone for short periods of time depends very much on the child and how much you can trust them. Children want more responsibility, want acknowledgement that they are growing up.

Do not advise unsupervised e-mail access. You should have their passwords and be able to screen their communications. In the past there have been some very inappropriate fifth and sixth grade communications among some groups of children (both very mean and some sexually graphic comments).

A good guess is that 50% of kids at Del Mar have cell phones/Facebook access. You should definitely be monitoring usage and accounts if you allow it at all.

PG-13 is very discretionary. Again this depends on your child. Make sure they understand the difference between reality and make believe for both films and video games.

Talk to the other parents. Are their kids really doing something/have something your child says they have? What movies/video games are they

watching? Is it okay with you? Keep communication lines open with both your child and others AND their families.

ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS:

Your children will receive grades for the first time. The teachers try to coordinate tests and big projects so the kids are not overloaded, however, there are periods of time at the end of the trimesters when there MAY be a lot of work. The teachers are very cognizant of the transition to middle school for the students in the beginning of the year and are sensitive to it. There is approximately 1.5 hours of homework per day, though this will vary from day to day.

Organization and time management are the keys to success at Del Mar. Parents are encouraged NOT to micromanage, but to help their children become independent. They will still need help setting priorities, structuring a time and place to do homework, and particularly advocating for themselves with their teachers. This may include clarifying assignments, having confusing concepts reexplained, even questioning grades they don't understand or think are "unfair. Kids need to learn how and when to approach teachers and what language to use. You can be helpful with these skills.

Their assigned lap top computer should still be used in a "public" area (like the dining room table). The computers have wi-fi capabilities. There is software to prevent undesirable usage.

Your child's grades can be checked on-line for each class at any time (both the student and parents get the password). Do not become obsessed; checking every day is probably not healthy.