

Spring 2012 Fifth Grade Parent Meeting
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Questions, Issues, Concerns in Parenting Our 5th to 6th Graders

What can we expect socially?

Social interactions escalate in complexity over the next several years. Kids will care even more what their peers think than they do now. Gossip increases. There can be great differences in sophistication and maturity, both between boys and girls and within each gender. The onset of puberty can significantly affect interests and, therefore, friendships. It is not at all unusual for kids' friends at the end of fifth grade to be very different than their friends in eighth grade. This whole period of time and for years afterward, kids are trying to figure out who are good, loyal, consistent friends. Asking kids what they like about other students, how they feel when they're with them, and getting them to reflect on their choices, is very helpful for them to negotiate the difficulties of middle school.

How do we relate to our children straddling being kids and being teenagers?

Sixth grade is a very transitional time for kids. It is not at all unusual that they will act like little kids one minute, being needy, affectionate, silly, and trying to act like teenagers the next, with attitude, increased interest in clothes, boy friends/girl friends, music, etc. This can be very confusing for parents. It's important to accept them where they are; when they need you, be there. When they are pushing for independence, consider whether you can let out the apron strings a bit. This is a time where they need the opportunities to build trust (and they should know that that's what they're doing). All kids mess up, as the judgment part of their brain isn't fully developed and won't be until their late 20's. But they do need the opportunity to take healthy risks. If they use poor judgment, then rein in the strings; if they show good judgment, then they may be accorded a bit more privileges. A supply of good humor is a real benefit to have when dealing with the fluctuations from child to teenager.

How do we help them understand and respond to their conflicting feelings?

This is another big challenge for parents. Because of hormones, adolescent self-centeredness (I'm the only one this is happening to) and all of the drama of middle school, kids experience a lot of conflicting and intense feelings. This is a time when the parent role shifts from manager to consultant. A good consultant listens, asks a lot of questions, helps brainstorm solutions, and helps the "client" make a plan. Being a good listener to your child and helping them figure out how to handle their social (or academic) problems are especially important at this time.

If you feel that they are being overly teased or even bullied, then encourage them to tell an adult at school. Kids this age begin to adopt the code of silence, but our message at Del Mar is “if you see something (or experience something), say something.” If they won’t seek help if they feel unsafe, then tell the vice-principal, principal, advisor, or psychologists. One nice thing about middle school is that there are no secrets – it doesn’t take long for news to travel, so it is unlikely that only one person ever knows about meanness, teasing, etc., and it is easy to tell a perpetrator that “some teachers saw/heard, a bunch of kids saw/heard,” so that the informer (victim or bystander) isn’t identified.

What about Family Life in 5th grade?

The curriculum at this age is designed to address growth and development. Children are encouraged to ask their parents questions as well as ask questions in class. One session is set aside towards the end of the sessions for boys to meet with a male teacher or male psychologist and the girls to meet with their female teachers to ask questions that they may not want to ask in front of the opposite gender. There is always a wide range of sophistication and even exposure among the students, particularly if students have older siblings. If they are not developmentally or emotionally ready to hear information, then it really just goes over their heads. Family life and sex education is revisited in 8th grade, when much more of the emotional content of relationships is discussed. This is part of the Teens in Transition Program. Also, a new program, called Being Adept, has been introduced at 7th and 8th grades to prevent early (or hopefully, any) drug and alcohol use.

What is appropriate media for them?

The biggest task for parents from now on is monitoring technology at home. School computers have blocks; home computers do not. With wi-fi, kids may have access at home to all kinds of inappropriate websites. It is strongly recommended that kids know that you have access to passwords for email and any other social networking sites and that you will be checking from time to time what they are posting and writing. There is a natural conflict among parents between according them privacy and knowing what they are communicating. There is a delicate balance between trying to know everything they’re saying and giving them complete privacy. Experience has demonstrated that children don’t understand the impact of posting information or negative statements on the internet – that those statements never go away, that they can be extremely hurtful, that they can go very quickly all around to everyone well beyond the intended recipient(s), for example. Even the “nicest” kids have been caught communicating very inappropriate comments with pretty nasty language. If kids do not willing give you their passwords, then take away the device. This is all more complicated by iphones, which are much harder to monitor than laptops. Good luck!

Common Sense Media is an excellent resource for what is appropriate for games, music, etc. Do not get your kids (usually boys) M rated games or even Teen games, unless you've checked them out.

Kids can be very conflicted by what they hear at home and what they see on the media, and don't understand the meaning or impact of what they see, or even read. Be prepared to identify your values, so that you can express them clearly to your kids when you catch them doing something or viewing something you don't approve of. For example, articulate your values about violent games, sexual content, etc. They may not agree with you, but the clearer you can be about why you won't let them play or view games or sites, the better. You need to figure out your standards and determine what is ok for your kids and what is not. It is always ok to say no, if you are firmly committed to values that conflict with what your child is doing.

Have your radar out for what is being texted. Be in good contact with your children's friend's parents. If they are at birthday parties, call parents and ask details of what activities or movies there will be, and especially how well they are chaperoned. This becomes increasingly important, as they get older. Remember, their goal is to push and push and test as they grow up; our job is not to make it easy for them to try everything and get away with it. You can't monitor everything and kids do need freedom, but you can't assume your kid will do no wrong.

What can we expect academically at Del Mar?

Del Mar gives about 1 to 1 ½ hours of homework per night. Time management at Del Mar is about 80% of the battle. By now kids are quite good at managing nightly homework, but may still need guidance and help planning longer term assignments. Teachers do this, but parents may need to make sure kids are on track.

Websites and Power School are available at Del Mar for kids to keep up on both their assignments and their grades. It is tempting for parents to micromanage their kid's work, after three years at Bel Aire of being encouraged to let kids develop their independence. It is recommended that you might check the grades once a week. More frequent monitoring is like watching the stock market; it can drive you crazy.

With the advent of grades kids can become quite stressed out. Monitor your child to make sure that they are not putting too much pressure for As. Some kids feel quite anxious and really get down on themselves for not getting all As. Some feel that they are really letting their parents down, or worse, making them angry if they are not at the top of their classes. This is not healthy. Middle school will present many academic challenges and effort and growth are what are most important.

One wonderful benefit of your children getting older is that they are much more capable of truly intellectual discussions. They will be taught many interesting things at school and conversations can be quite fun and enlightening. You can learn much from your kids.

Some students are recommended for the Strategies elective. This is a support program to help with organizational or academic challenges.

Getting To Calm – is a helpful book recommendation.