

# **SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL GUIDEBOOK FOR PARENTS OF SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS**

**Supporting Our Sixth Graders through  
the Transition to Middle School**

**Developed by Reed Union District Psychologist, Dr. Allan Gold**



## **INTRODUCTION**

Grade-Level Parent Meetings have been offered as part of the parent education program in the Reed District for many years. District Psychologist, Dr. Allan Gold, facilitates these discussions among interested parents, the school Principal, Assistant Principal, and other support staff. During the course of these meetings, parents have expressed surprise and concern about the issues that were being raised by their sons and daughters as they moved into adolescence, as well as the increased challenge to their parenting efforts. This guidebook is meant to speak to some of the issues that have come up repeatedly in those meetings over the years, and tries to deal with them in a way that is as relevant to the 21st century as possible.

The guidelines expressed in this booklet are intended as a framework to help parents talk with their children and make thoughtful decisions that will support their healthy development. We recognize that each family will address issues differently depending upon its own value system. A few years ago the District adopted the "Vision of a Reed Union School District Graduate." We expect students to be motivated learners, creative problem solvers, effective communicators, engaged citizens, and balanced individuals/best selves. All of these, but especially the last three, are critical to positive and healthy social-emotional development. These characteristics and the values they represent serve as a guide as we parent our children through the challenges of adolescence.

We sincerely hope this handbook will encourage parents to:

1. Think carefully and keep pace with the needs of their children.
2. Talk openly with other parents so they are not trapped by "everyone else does it".
3. Have the courage to stand up for what they know is best for their child.

## **WHAT ARE THE DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES THAT EMERGE IN SIXTH GRADE?**

There is a disturbing trend within our culture for children to grow up more quickly than in the past. The "adolescent issues" which might not have come to the fore until late in middle school now often appear in the sixth grade, if not before. The following are some developmental themes of sixth grade students, with the caveat that, of course, every child develops at his or her own pace. Children of this age know that they have good ideas and need to be validated and recognized for their contributions.

Intellectually, middle school children are intensely curious, and are especially willing to learn things they consider to be useful, or to use skills to solve real-life problems. Most sixth graders start middle school highly motivated to do well in school; however, it is around this time that academic goals can begin to lose importance in the face of the personal and social goals that take on primary importance in middle school.

The peer group becomes increasingly important. Popularity becomes a concern and is often defined by the most precocious, as opposed to the nicest students. It is during the middle school years that there is often a shift to peers as the primary model of behavior and great stress placed on fitting in. Despite this, middle school children still need their parents, as role models, sources of emotional support, and to set limits. Sixth graders naturally want more independence, and can be expected to handle the responsibilities of homework and chores and to manage their own time with decreasing guidance from parents. However, the shift to middle school requires new levels of organization, and students will often need parent support to implement an organizational system, especially during the beginning months of the school year.

Emotionally, middle school students often experience swings in mood, and can be particularly sensitive to criticism. You may start seeing more of this in the sixth grade. Interest in romantic relationships often begins in earnest at this age. This happens at varying ages for different children, and can be a source of social stratification between those that pursue these interests and those that do not. Their bodies are going through any number of changes at this point. They need to know how to maintain good health and self-confidence.

## **A MODEL FOR EFFECTIVE PARENTING: RESTORATIVE PARENTING**

Many different situations will arise during the middle school years. It is important for parents not to react in the moment, but to have a consistent model for dealing with challenges. One such model is based on “restorative practices.”

Restorative parenting encourages us, first and foremost, to proactively set clear limits that are chosen with compassion and care. When children do break rules, rather than merely assigning punishment, a restorative approach stresses responding with logical consequences that are related to the behavior and that attempt to repair the harm that was done to the family unit. This is achieved through a series of questions that give children a chance to express their view of events, to take responsibility for their actions, and to recognize the impact of what they have done.

Specifically, in response to misbehavior, children are asked:

- What happened?
- What have you thought about since?
- Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way?• What do you think needs to happen to make things right?

These questions can be supplemented with others to clarify the child’s perspective, though note that it is not recommended to ask the child “why” they have done something, as this often leads to rationalizations, as opposed to productive problem- solving. In certain cases, the person who has been harmed by the child’s actions—or possibly the entire family—might be asked to participate in the discussion by answering the same questions (e.g., How have you been affected by what took place?). This process provides multiple opportunities for the child to achieve some insight into the impact of their actions. In addition, this questioning process often leads the child to suggesting the consequences for his/her own misbehavior, and can increase the likelihood that the child feels they have been fairly treated.

What follows are a number of different social and emotional situations and/or challenges that may arise. For many, if not most of these, restorative parenting practices may be used to address parental concerns. For each of these, some suggestions are provided, and in some, examples of how restorative parenting might be incorporated into parental responses to difficult situations.

## **HOW CAN WE SUPPORT THEIR GROWING DESIRE FOR INDEPENDENCE?**

Since children mature at different rates, some will be ready for more independence before others. Most situations are not “all or nothing” and can be shaped so the child gets some freedom and the parent feels comfortable. It is appropriate to allow sixth grade students to go places with friends. The purpose of a trip or event should be clearly defined, with time limits, transportation and the involvement of other kids specified. Have expectations for communication and a simple plan or schedule for talking by phone or cell phone. Sixth graders should not “hang out” any place except at home or at a friend’s, where there is parental supervision.

## **HOW DO WE HELP THEM DEAL WITH INCREASED ACADEMIC STRESS?**

Middle school is both socially and academically challenging for most students. Sixth graders are making the adjustment to having more teachers than ever before, a locker, managing homework and longer term projects, and will receive letter grades for the first time. It is important to take the long view that they have three years to develop the skills to be ready for high school: responsibility, self-advocacy, independence, and especially, resilience.

Parents can be helpful by helping the child develop the executive functions of organization, setting priorities, and time management. It is not necessary to micromanage all of their homework, but Power School provides an opportunity to follow their performance. Have discussions with them if homework is not turned in, assignments are missing, or test

scores are very low. Contact teachers if a home plan does not seem to be working. On the other hand, it is important to let them fail and to help them figure out how to solve an academic problem. If you rescue them all the time they will never develop the resilience that they will need in life to overcome disappointment and performance that does not meet their or others' standards. They need encouragement to set reasonable goals, develop the strategies to accomplish those goals, and the belief in themselves, that they are capable.

Clearly communicate that you value their effort and not just their grades. Not everyone will get A's. Parents only add to children's stress when approval and even perceived love is dependent on academic performance. It is important to have realistic standards and expectations. Many students impose unrealistically high standards on themselves, and create internal stress. They need to know it's ok not to be perfect.

## **WHAT ARE APPROPRIATE BOY-GIRL ACTIVITIES FOR SIXTH GRADERS?**

Children should be encouraged to wait a bit and gain some maturity before developing romantic relationships with the opposite sex. Hold onto the years when you can keep them busy with sports, music, art and other activities for a little longer! "Couples-only" dance parties are not appropriate for this age group, though by the end of the year some students are ready for supervised co-ed dance parties.

It is not typical for children to begin "dating" in earnest during their sixth grade year, though some sixth grade students do begin to test out the process of getting to know a potential crush, or experiment with the labels of romantic relationships. Relationships usually do not move beyond this point, however. Parents should gently discourage relationships with opposite sex peers from moving past friendship, as at this age, coupling can lead to too-early physical activity, and boy-girl pairings often lead to status and popularity for some children and, sometimes, cruel exclusion of others.

Students can participate in co-ed social interactions, but they should be supervised:

- Such events should have a structured purpose, such as a movie or sports event. -A parent is present at all times – perhaps sitting a few rows back at a movie. -Such events should be time-limited.
- Unstructured time is fine as long as there is parent supervision.
- It is useful to establish rules for appropriate behavior with all of the children and families beforehand (e.g., not running off, manners, etc.)
- Parents who might consider sponsoring co-ed activities should call the parents of the other children to clarify arrangements.

## **WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT CLIQUES?**

Children of this age begin to group themselves into networks of friends who have similar interests. This is perfectly normal. However, when these friendships become "cliques", parents may need to intervene. Cliques are friendship groups that are rigidly defined and exclusionary. They are usually based on perceived popularity, clothes, or perceived attractiveness of the opposite sex. Children within a clique can be unkind to children who do not belong and may even punish clique members for spending time with children outside of the group. Cliques are not in the best interest of any child. They stifle individuality and promote elitism.

Since parents are the role models for their children's behavior, they are encouraged to think about how they discuss and interact with other people. Parents also need to listen carefully to the way their children talk about and treat other children. Children should be encouraged not to judge others on superficial characteristics. Instead, they should be encouraged to find each person's positive attributes.

If a child is having difficulty with friendships, it is suggested that parents:

- Listen with empathy to the child's concerns. Sometimes that's all it takes.

- Help the child not to exaggerate or personalize negative comments or situations.
- Help the child recognize that friendships change frequently and the situation may be temporary.
- Assess whether the child is seeking appropriate friends or should be encouraged to pursue other children who might be more receptive.

If a child is treated unkindly by other children for an extended period of time, parents should inform the classroom teacher, so s/he can carefully monitor the situation. If further intervention is necessary, a teacher, principal, school counselor and/or school psychologist can be helpful. It may also be appropriate to call the other parent to discuss the issue. If the concerned parent is non-accusatory and recognizes that there are two sides to each story, the other parent is more likely to be supportive in solving the dilemma.

Friendships change, especially in the transition to middle school, and it is not uncommon for students to switch friends, but it is important that children understand that friendship with one person does not require an absolute exclusion of another.

### **WHAT LIMITS SHOULD BE SET ON MOVIES?**

Although some children, in their desire to appear grown up, may seem to be unaffected by violent and sexual material, do not be fooled. Research on violence in the media provides overwhelming evidence that children are negatively affected by repeated exposure to the unpunished violence that is prevalent in many television shows and movies. Children who are exposed to a lot of violence tend to be more pessimistic about life, to become numb and unresponsive in situations where another person is being hurt, and too often choose physical aggression as a way to solve problems. Violent acts combined with sexual relationships also send a particularly negative message to young boys and girls who are just beginning to define their potential relationships with each other.

R-Rated movies are not appropriate for sixth graders. Even PG-13 movies may contain material that is inappropriate for a sixth grade student. If possible, films should be pre-screened or carefully reviewed by a parent before sixth graders are allowed to see them. If a parent chooses to let a child see a film with mature content, it is recommended that he/she accompany the child and discuss the movie afterwards to ensure that the child understands the real life implications of movie behaviors.

Parents deciding to take groups of children to movies or selecting videos for parties are encouraged to contact the other parents when a movie is rated above PG, to be sure that others feel comfortable with the selected film. If a child is invited to a movie or party with videos, parents are encouraged to call the hosting parent and ask about the film that has been chosen. That said, these guidelines become significantly harder to enforce in sixth grade than they were during elementary school. Students are now in contact with older students who see some movies that are restricted, and there is more peer pressure to see movies with explicit material. This does not mean, however, that you cannot set limits.

### **WHAT ABOUT TV SHOWS?**

As with violence in the movies, parents are cautioned to protect their children against the pervasive influence of television. The impact of a particular program may seem inconsequential, but the undisputed harmful effects of hours of violence or negative stereotyping are well documented in child development research. At parent meetings over the years, the consensus has been: Parents agreed that television should be limited and children should be encouraged to participate in other family or individual activities with as reading, games, or sports. Many parents do not allow their children to watch television on weeknights. It was suggested that television programs be treated like movies. Shows that contain violence or sexual material are not recommended.

When children watch TV, parents are encouraged to join them and use the opportunity to discuss racial and sexual stereotyping, the effects of "put down" humor, different approaches to problem solving and the consequences of these things in real life. Children should also be educated about the hidden messages in advertisements and the ploys that are used to encourage children to buy.

The content of many programs and channels on television these days is not appropriate for sixth graders. Reality and other programs often contain violent and sexual material. If in doubt, watch programs yourselves first or, at the very least, with your sixth grader.

### **WHAT ABOUT VIDEO GAMES?**

Videogames are very popular, particularly among boys. There is increasing evidence from research that the brain is affected from excessive time spent on the computer, leading to attention problems. There is also evidence that some students are desensitized to the violence portrayed in the games and can act out violent ideas if they are alienated or angry as they get older.

It is not unusual for parents to limit computer game time to the weekends only. Respect the rating system for videogames; if a game is rated T (teen) or M (mature), don't buy it. Action or violent games with cartoon figures are less damaging than those with very realistic characters.

Total "electronic time" (TV, computer, videos, Play Station, Gameboy, Nintendo, Xbox, Wii) should be limited. These are addicting activities. If your child begins to crave more and more computer time and is less able and willing to go outside to play or interact with friends, cut out the computer altogether.

### **WHAT ABOUT MUSIC?**

Although parents may want to close the door or turn it down, they need to get involved with their children's music to better understand their interest and unique subculture. Everyone agreed that parents should screen their children's music to ensure that it does not contain excessive violence, profanity or explicit sexual language. Parents are encouraged to talk with sales people where their children buy music to get feedback on the musical content and to understand the rating systems on CD's

### **WHAT ABOUT THE INTERNET?**

Most parents are aware of the dangers of unsupervised Internet use. Children are often more computer-savvy than their parents, but can still be lured into or link into websites or chat rooms that are either inappropriate or frightening for them. A few precautions can help avoid uncomfortable or dangerous situations:

- Parents should monitor their children's use of the computer, including laptops. Ideally, they will use them in a common living area at home for easy checking.
- Children should be reassured that if anything comes up on the computer that worries them, that it is ok to tell parents and that they won't get in trouble.
- "Chat rooms" for children and adults can be used by strangers who may talk inappropriately with your child. If a child receives a scary or bothersome message on-line, the child should be instructed to notify a parent right away.
- Children should be warned never to give their names, addresses or phone numbers online. They should also be told not to assume that another person online is always telling the truth.
- Children should also be advised not to buy anything online. If they purchase something by mistake, they should be encouraged to tell a parent so the order can be cancelled.
- Parents are encouraged to consider blocking chat lines, instant messages and Internet newsgroups. Instructions are usually included in user's manuals under "parent controls".
- Although computers and online services have exciting educational potential, unfocused use or excessive use of games should be limited just like TV. Parents should learn how to trace Internet websites that children have visited, as a monitoring approach.

## WHAT ABOUT SOCIAL NETWORKING?

As you likely know, in recent years the use of Internet social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace, ask.fm, SnapChat, Chat Roulette, YouTube, Instagram, Tumblr, and Twitter has taken off amongst middle school students. On some of these sites, users build profiles or “pages” to represent themselves and then connect their pages to those of others by becoming “friends” with them, which allows them to monitor one another’s pages, post notes or images on each other’s pages, and often allows them to chat with one another. Many of these sites have minimum ages or require a high school or college affiliation, but students can circumvent these simply by entering false information. These websites are problematic because they represent an over-simplified version of social interactions where popularity and quantity of friends is stressed, where students are willing to say things to one another that they might not otherwise, and which can encourage overly precocious behavior.

On sites like YouTube or Instagram, users post a collection of videos or photos on which other users can comment. These can be a great outlet for creative kids—as long as the material they post is appropriate. These sites also allow one to “follow” other users or simply to search for videos on certain topics. Once again, this can be great, depending on the type of material these other users are producing.

The above recommendations about Internet usage apply here as well, but here are a few that apply specifically to social networking sites:

- It is okay **not** to allow your child to use these sites. The age limits—usually 13 or freshman in high school—are there for a reason.
- If you do let your child use these sites, talk to your child about how they represent themselves online and ask them to apply the tests: Is this something I would tell someone about myself in person? Is this something I would want a stranger to know about me? Is this something I’m willing to risk being preserved electronically for people to find for the rest of my life?
- Many social networking websites and email programs have “chat” functions that allow children to type instant messages back and forth with peers. It’s important to discuss with your child how these types of interactions differ from real-world conversations. Often children will say things in these “conversations” that they would not say in person. This can be mean talk or sexual banter.
- Often, children will meet new people on these sites, as friends introduce friends to each other who may attend another school. Children should be cautioned to make sure that the person claiming to know their friend actually does know that person. As noted above, children should still not give out full names, phone numbers, or addresses in these circumstances.
- No matter what, make sure your child sets his/her profile so that it can only be viewed by a friend, and is not a public page.
- Do not cede these sites to your children. Open an account of your own—making sure that it follows all the rules of decorum that you’d want your child to follow. It is important that they know that adults are active in this world and it is important that you have some familiarity with how these sites work. You may want to require your child to “friend” you on these sites.
- If you do let your child have an account with one of these sites, require that they give you the password to be used in the case of an emergency.

## HOW CAN WE USE RESTORATIVE PARENTING WITH INAPPROPRIATE SOCIAL NETWORKING BEHAVIOR?

As noted above, children can often engage in conversations with one another over social networking sites that they would not in person. Parents may hear about mean gossip, teasing, or use of inappropriate language (e.g., swearing, or sexually explicit exchanges) and it’s important that they address these issues with their children. By using the restorative parenting model described above, parents can help their children see the effects of their actions. For example, if parents learn that their child has engaged in teasing of a peer over a social networking site, the same questions apply:

- What happened?
- What have you thought about since?
- Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way?• What do you think needs to happen to make things right?

Though a restorative model encourages us to ask these questions calmly to ensure that the child feels comfortable processing the events, this does not mean that you cannot express your response to events, either using statements about how you are feeling, or by questioning another member of the family. After all, though your child is likely to think about how events have impacted the individual on the other end of the electronic interaction, it is certainly possible that they have affected family members or themselves as well. For example, as part of the conversation, you might ask your spouse: “What have you thought about since you heard that our son/daughter was repeatedly teasing someone else on Facebook?” This creates an opportunity for a range of responses. A parent can, of course, express empathy for the person their child’s actions have harmed directly, but also concern for their child’s ability to maintain satisfactory relationships with peers, frustration about their ability to trust the child with Internet privileges and other technology, or concern for the digital footprint their child is leaving behind (e.g., “I have felt really worried, because I know that things we do on the Internet can be found even years later, and I don’t want this lapse in judgment to affect how people see you even years from now.”)

As is noted above, in a restorative model, consequences for rule-breaking behavior are meant to repair the specific harm that resulted from a child’s actions, and often ideas for consequences flow directly from the questioning process. In the case of Internet teasing, this will certainly include a sincere apology (face-to-face or in letter form, depending on the comfort level of the victim), and likely loss of full technology privileges until parental trust has been rebuilt. Other possible outcomes could include family reading about cyberbullying tragedies, or researching and discussing digital etiquette. Of course, the specific circumstances of a given incident will inform what consequences are most logical on a case-by-case basis. Trust yourself, and your child, to come up with an appropriate response that is suitably rigorous.

## **HOW SHOULD WE HANDLE USE OF CELL PHONES?**

For parents, the cell phone is a blessing and a curse. Phone time, in general, is a natural outgrowth of the social development of pre-adolescents, and it is a good place for them to practice their social skills as long as phone use is appropriate. Moreover, as your child becomes more independent, the cell phone is eminently useful in helping you stay informed—with a cell phone, there’s never a reason that your child can’t call when he/she gets somewhere, or can’t call to find out if they have permission to do something. Of course, these days, most children don’t make phone calls at all, but instead send text messages or, if they have a smartphone, surf the Internet. At parent meetings, most parents understood their children’s desire to use the phone, they also felt it was important to set limits, and some did not feel it appropriate that their child have a cell phone yet.

Above all, encourage a view of the cell phone as a useful tool. It is too easy for cell phones to become a status symbol to boost popularity, or just a toy. In fact, if there is not really a reason for your child to have a cell phone, maybe they do not need one yet. (You might have an extra family cell phone for rare occasions when they do need one.) Similarly, students do not need the latest smartphone. They are not executives who need to be able to get their email at all times. With both cell phones and home phones, some parents limit the length and number of phone calls each evening.

Other parents establish times when phone calls are not allowed, such as dinner time, homework time or after 8:00 p.m. It is important that children are not allowed to take phones to their bedrooms at night. They often will stay up texting and lose much needed sleep. Some parents set a firm limit on how many text messages their children can send each month, though this can be hard to enforce until you get the bill. Some parents decide that their children shouldn’t have a phone with a text message plan at all. It’s okay to decide that your child does not need a phone with a data plan (that enables them to surf the Internet). If a child receives teasing or harassing phone calls or text messages from another child, parents are encouraged to contact the parents of the offending child immediately. Children should be reminded that this is not an appropriate use of the phone and may result in the loss of privilege.



Please teach your children appropriate phone etiquette. It has become common-place for people to let their cell phones draw them away from every and any task. Teach your children, both directly and by example, how to distinguish between an important call, when the caller can leave a message, and when it is a good time to just shut off the cell phone altogether.

Remember, you can look over your cell phone bill to see things like the amount of time your child spends on the phone, or the number of text messages they've sent. If you want to monitor phone use more closely, there are even programs that can be installed onto a phone, like Phone Sheriff, that can be used to track the specific websites they visit, et cetera. Almost all modern phones come equipped with a camera. Students need to be extremely careful about what they photograph or video, and then what they do with that material. Make sure your child understands that if they choose to put that material in a text message or email, then the images are out of their control. An impulsive decision to broadcast the wrong thing can be extremely embarrassing for them, or possibly hurtful to others.

Need some inspiration? Check out the list of rules this mother wrote for her thirteen- year-old son when she bought him an iPhone: <http://news.yahoo.com/moms-18-point-iphone-rules-son-143831843--abc-news-parenting.html>

### **HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND TO FOUL LANGUAGE?**

If it hasn't already, swearing becomes part of the peer group phenomenon in the sixth grade. Children's choice of language is their primary way of interacting with others, and is a way to project a certain image, a way to fit in, and a way to get others' attention (not always of the positive kind). Through language, they can communicate intelligence and caring . . . or disrespect and disregard for the feelings of others.

Parents need to be cognizant of their own styles of expressing anger or frustration, or just the types of everyday language that they use, and the message that this conveys to their children. Children should be encouraged to find intelligent and thoughtful ways to express their feelings. Swearing is not an acceptable form of self-expression, and it is usually the easy way out of finding an effective way of articulating ideas.

### **HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND TO HOW KIDS DRESS?**

It was suggested that parents become familiar with the school guidelines for appropriate dress. Pants must fit at the waist. Clothing with offensive or suggestive language or graphics is not allowed. Parents are encouraged to talk with their children about the messages they send to peers or others if they choose inappropriate dress (i.e., short crop tops, baggy pants that ride low in the hips, or shorts and t-shirts worn to dress occasions).

### **HOW CAN WE SUPPORT THE CHILD WHO IS A "LATE BLOOMER"?**

Many students, especially boys, are not ready for the independence and intense social interactions that some sixth graders are seeking. This is perfectly normal! Children must be validated for their own timetable and assured that all children are different. When they are read for such interactions and independence, they will know it. As long as your child takes pleasure in his or her activities, has some peers to share these activities with, and seems happy, you should feel comfortable letting the other activities come in time.

Children should be encouraged to recognize their own interests and to seek out friends with similar interests. Parents need to listen to the concerns of their child when he/she feels left out, but students should be encouraged to trust their own feelings of comfort or discomfort in social situations. Parents can point out families who have similar values and students who are at similar maturity levels so that children who are less socially active don't feel so alone. Parents can sponsor activities with other families or groups that would be fun for everyone and developmentally appropriate (i.e., a sports event, skating, picnic, Great America, etc.).

Children who are less socially mature can still be good students, good athletes and have highly developed skills in such things as the arts, music, drama and computers. They can also be considerate and engaging children and thus ensure themselves a place in the social fabric of school. Encouraging any and all of these personal skills and traits can be helpful in boosting the spirits and social status of the late bloomer.

### **HOW DO WE TALK TO SIXTH GRADERS ABOUT SEX?**

Children in the 21st century are often exposed to information about sexual matters far earlier than their parents were. In addition, there is increased pressure from the media and from older “role models” to become sexually active earlier. It is important to be able to talk, if not entirely comfortably, at least openly and honestly about sex.

Students who attended Bel Aire in fifth grade had a series of lessons on the physiology of adolescence and other sexually related topics, so already they have information. However, curiosity about sexual matters increases and there will, undoubtedly be new questions or questions for clarification.

Answer questions with a little bit of information; if your child wants more, they’ll ask. Have books available or be prepared to go on the Internet to find out answers to questions together (except watch out for pornography).

Be prepared to answer the questions “when am I old enough to have sex?,” “why can’t I .....?” Most parents don’t want their children to “grow up too fast,” but have trouble articulating why. Fear of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases are easy responses, but don’t address our deep desire to protect our children from emotional hurt, from desensitization to the joy of sexual activity within a committed and loving relationship, and the simple desire to have them look forward to something as they get older and mature.

### **HOW MUCH ALLOWANCE SHOULD THEY BE GIVEN? WHAT LIMITS SHOULD BE SET ON THEIR SPENDING?**

Sixth graders need to understand the value of money and should have the opportunity to save and spend money so that they will understand the consequence of both. Having some spending money is also an important way to support their growing independence. Allowance is an opportunity to help children learn to manage money. Most children expect to use their allowance to purchase extra items, such as a movie, a CD, magazine, or snack. The types of things that a child is expected to purchase should be reasonable given the amount of allowance. Ideally, the child is not given quite enough for all he/she might want and therefore learns to “budget” spending.

In determining the amount of money they give a child for allowance, parents should think about what they expect a child to pay for out of that money. If a weekend trip to the movies with peers is the child’s responsibility, for instance, \$10 dollars a week might be appropriate. No matter the amount, it is better to give too little than too much. Many parents feel that children should not be paid for doing routine chores around the house. These are seen as part of everyone’s responsibility within the family. However, extra chores such as washing the car may be paid extra. Some children who want to earn additional money may be encouraged to offer small services in the neighborhood.

There are pitfalls from parents’ lending money to their children whenever asked. It is suggested children should be taught to delay gratification and to save for special items. Children should be discouraged from lending money to other children. Children might also be encouraged to save a percentage of their allowance in their own bank account and to donate some to a charity of their choice. For instance, figure out how much money you’re comfortable with your child spending each week, triple it, and have them keep one-third for spending, give one-third for charity, and the remaining one-third for saving.

### **WHAT CAN PARENTS DO TO SUPPORT EACH OTHER DURING THE TRANSITION?**

Parents need to keep an open dialogue with other parents, particularly the parents of children’s friends. Since families have different values, parents cannot always expect to agree with each other, but they can begin to understand and

respect their differences. Children also need to understand that parents do not always think alike and that it is okay to make decisions that are different from a friend's decision. This kind of independence establishes an important foundation for later years when peer pressure increases and the risk of sex, alcohol and drugs becomes more dangerous. Parents can be models for resisting peer pressure, including pressure from their own children.

### **WHERE CAN I GET HELP?**

The best place to start is at school. The teachers, the assistant principal, and principal are available to provide suggestions and support. The district psychologists, Dr. Allan Gold and Dr. David Kover, are also happy to talk with parents about any concerns and can help locate appropriate resources if outside help is needed. The school and town libraries, as well as the Internet also have resource books for parents.

### **CONCLUSION**

There are times when every parent feels alone and uncertain about what is the best decision for his/her child. We hope this handbook has provided a framework to help you address some of the challenges that come up during the sixth grade year and during middle school. Please remember that these are only suggestions; each family must decide on rules, consequences, limits, and privileges that are consistent with their own values and beliefs. We do encourage parents to continue talking with each other, to discuss the difficult issues and to build an involved community that will support all of our children. The task of raising children is far too complex for any of us to do it alone. Furthermore, we hope that you will have the courage to be parents, to say "no", and to set the limits that our children need.

As a seasoned parent once said, "We have a small window between now and age sixteen. We must take full advantage of this opportunity. It will not last." We hope that you will cherish your child during these transitional years. Our sixth graders need parents who will listen to their concerns, respect their ideas and increasing maturity, and, most of all, love and accept them even when their behavior makes it difficult.