

Fall 2018 Seventh Grade Level Parent Meeting

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Purpose of grade level parent meetings:

- Identify what is normal for children at this age
- Find out what other parents' concerns are and what they are doing in response to issues at this age
- Network with other parents to make communication about your own child and their friends easier and more comfortable
- Recognize that home and school are partners in raising kids during this challenging time of their lives.

There are five developmental areas to consider: physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and moral. This is a time when all of these areas are in a state of flux.

- Physical Development
 - Puberty, hormones kick in, interest in boys/girls
 - Physically they can do more – they are stronger, more adept
 - They may start feeling overwhelmed with activities. May start to say done w/ sports. Physical activity is very good for both their bodies and their minds. As they move toward high school it is good for them to engage in activities to keep them busy and out of trouble – BUT – they can get too pressured and stressed from competitive sports. Sports should be skill building, fun, and their self-esteem should not be jeopardized by overly critical coaches or overly competitive play.
 - They are more conscious of their bodies and begin to take better care of themselves, like showering more.
 - Late developers may have a challenge with feeling different, if they haven't reached puberty yet. Parents need to assure them that they will grow and that they are a lot more as people than just their bodies – but this can be hard on kids.
- Cognitive Development
 - More responsible with schoolwork. More self-starter, less prompting necessary.
 - More driven academically
 - They are more able to think abstractly, which has advantages and disadvantages. They can have very interesting conversations about the world as they are much more aware of world events. However, they may not entirely understand or know what to do about what they hear or see in the news. Parents will have to begin to have adult discussions in response to their questions and be prepared to articulate their own values about issues, whether political, religious,

or scientific. For example, they might ask questions about political parties, abortion, climate change. It is always good practice not to start lecturing them, but to ask what they think about and understand about a subject and then make any factual corrections and express your own values and opinions. They are beginning to recognize different sides of issues and think in shades of gray.

- Social Development
 - They are more self aware and self-conscious. Adolescent narcissism is normal; they feel like everyone is looking at them. They are very socially vulnerable at this time.
 - Social media has a huge impact on kids at this age. They can be deeply affected by texts, postings on Snapchat or Instagram. . For that reason parents need to be an administrator and monitor their accounts. While it is preferable that a parent is transparent about letting their child know that they will be monitoring their electronic communication, Dr. Gold is ok with parents having access to their communication without their child knowing. The old analog is a parent looking at a child's diary. Nowadays the risks are quite high for negative communication and parents need to be aware of what their children are doing. The Del Mar website under Parents/Resources/Technology has a link how to monitor electronics.
 - Kids are more independent and appear more confident in some areas; they want to do things themselves, but the focus is heavily on the peer group and acceptance.
 - There is less girl drama in this class so far this year.
 - They are more private about themselves, which is a reason for parents to be in good communication with each other. They may find out more about their child from other kids or other kids' parents.
 - It is normal for kids to change friends. They are not very adept or graceful at getting out of existing and maybe long-time friendships. This is an area where parents can act as "consultants," as the problems are not directly theirs. A good consultant is a good listener, asks good questions, helps the "client" figure out strategies to solve the problem and then evaluate if the strategy worked. Parents need to learn to be good listeners and not judge their children, so that they can keep communication open for the next six years (before they go off to college). A good book suggestion: I'd Listen to My Parents if They'd Just Shut Up, by Dr. Anthony Wolf.

- Emotional Development:
 - There is far more increase in stress and anxiety from ten or twenty years ago. While some stress is good for productivity, kids this age

start to worry about high school, college, grades, what others think of them and can be very hard on themselves, even if parents are not overemphasizing academic or athletic expectations.

- They can be deeply affected by social media, which leads to more anxiety and depression
 - A recent California law mandates that all schools educate 7th through 12th graders and school staff on the signs of suicide. Dr. Kover and Dr. Gold will be meeting with all 7th grade students in PE class at the end of January to educate students in what to look out for and what to do if they or a friend is feeling like hurting themselves. Last year was the first year we did this and we ended up speaking with about twenty students based on a non-anonymous questionnaire the students filled out at the end of the session. It was very helpful. The TV series: “*13 Reasons Why*” is not for 7th graders.
 - Parents may see less emotional self-control as children enter puberty. They should just be vigilant for extended periods of time of anger or depression and seek help if kids cannot effectively control themselves, particularly if that is true at school as well as at home.
- Moral Development:
 - They do have empathy and compassion and do look out for their friends.
 - They still will lie to get out of responsibility or trouble, but they are much more conscious of doing the right thing now. Kids will more often let parents or a school person know if another student is really doing something hurtful or wrong.
 - Restorative parenting is a useful approach to addressing misbehaviors: kids need to recognize the impact that their behaviors have on others (including parents) and need to do something to make it right. We don’t want them to internalize their mistakes to think they’re bad people, but we want them to learn from their mistakes and find ways to make up for their mistakes – sincere apologies, letters, research about the effects of their actions, like bullying. Watch out for kids who don’t show remorse – they could turn out to be the sociopaths of the future; if that seems to be the case, get help now.

Questions, Issues, concerns in parenting

- Computer, phone, school laptop usage
 - Addiction. Kids are not good at self-regulating, “*let me just finish this game...*” If they can’t get off in a reasonable amount of time (5 minutes) with a previous warning, and the time extends to a half-hour and a fight, then addiction is highly likely. That’s when the clearest solution is no electronics (particularly on school nights).
 - Parents are role models on phone and electronic usage, so watch how you spend time on these devices. Don’t drive and talk on the phone.

Have family time in the evening when everyone is off the phone/computer

- Set limits ahead of time. If your child cannot regulate and get off in 30 minutes, then no computers on school nights. Phones should not be in their room at night. That can really take away from very necessary sleep. You can turn off pop-up notifications to reduce distractions when they have to use their laptop for homework.
- For school research projects requiring Google searches – instead use vetted sources from librarian or teacher website.
- Don't be surprised if your kids start looking at pornography. Be prepared to express your values about why you don't want them watching (misunderstanding relationships, physical expectations, etc.). This is a time to have discussions on consent, both with boys and girls. A very good video is: *"A Cup of Tea."*
- Violent video games present another big issue. Dr. Gold is very much against violent games (and movies), given all of the violence in the world and how playing these games desensitizes kids to violence.
- It is absolutely appropriate to discuss with other parents what movies or games are allowed at your child's friends houses and to in a non-aggressive way seek the cooperation and help from other parents in supporting your family values. If you're not comfortable having your child at their friend's home, then invite them over where they can be supervised. It's important to begin to have these conversations now because the activities will ramp up in high school, e.g. parties with alcohol, drug use.
- Managing time/money
 - It is appropriate that kids this age have allowances and access to money, so they can learn to manage it. Consider how much you're comfortable with they're having each week, triple that – one third for savings, one-third for charity, and one-third to spend or save for their own purchases. They can certainly be paid for extra work around the house, but not for expected home responsibilities to contribute to the family. They need to learn that they can't get everything they want immediately and may need to delay their gratification by saving for a purchase later.
- Developing coping strategies for stress and emotions
 - It is very important that kids learn how to deal with stress in a healthy way: physical activity, being with friends, playing with pets, biking, listening to music, drawing, reading, musical instrument. The alternative can be drugs, alcohol, self-harm.
 - There is a new movie: *"Beautiful Boy"* based on true story of drug addiction in Marin. This is for parents and high school kids, not 7th graders yet, but it is both sad and enlightening about what to watch out for .

- Vaping.
 - We have had instances of vaping at Del Mar (though not this year)
 - Kids need to know that e-cigarettes and juuls contain nicotine, which is addictive and withdrawal can cause an increase in anxiety
 - We have the Being Adept Program at Del Mar to educate students about substance abuse and to help them find other ways to “be cool” and to deal with emotional issues.