

PARENTING POSTS

A newsletter for parents of sixth grade students

Exploring Changes and Choices

Sixth graders are at a time of life that can be confusing. Many changes are happening to their bodies and in their social world. Mom, Dad, teachers and others are urging them to “grow up.” And these children are trying to become less dependent and less emotionally attached to parents. Because of this, they may not want to go to their parents with their concerns.

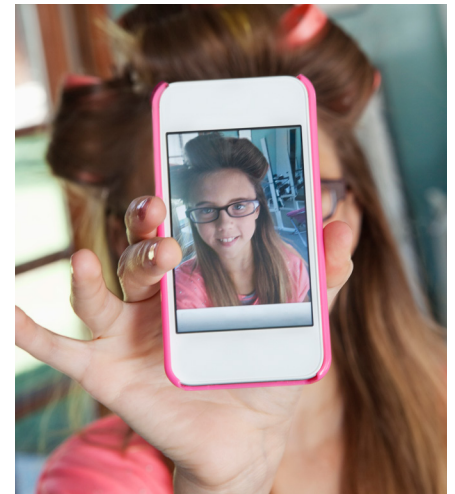
Sixth graders often talk to their peers and parents about the changes they are experiencing. They discuss a wide range of topics. They may talk in person, use social media, or text or talk on the phone about their feelings and their friends. They also talk about their parents and their attitudes, rules and decisions.

Sixth graders realize that their friends do not know all the answers to their questions, so they may ask an adult for information. Don't be upset if your child talks to other safe adults to get information. Sometimes talking to someone else is easier if the child feels they might disappoint you by asking a particular question. You may wish to connect with other adults in your child's life to be sure you share common values.

Parents sometimes think they have lost control of their children when, in fact, the children are simply learning about people outside of their family, such as who is important to them and with whom they can get along. These people can be powerful motivators and influences on your children. A healthy or positive relationship with another peer or adult outside the family can be an important ally. This is not necessarily a rejection of you as a parent. It's more of a reflection of your children's need to expand their experiences.

Guiding Good Choices

Sixth graders want to be treated with respect and make choices that satisfy them and their parents. Parents want their children to be in the “right crowd.” Some of the friends your child associates with at this age may be their friends throughout high school. If parents are supportive, children are less likely to get involved with problem behaviors.



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Stress Less Activity

Stress is part of everyone's life. Even young children! Try this activity with your child to help reduce stress and enjoy time together.

Keep track of your sleep this month. How many hours of quality sleep are you actually getting? How will you get more sleep if you aren't feeling rested and waking up ready to go? Make a sleep plan and find an accountability partner to help you follow it.

If your child is showing undesirable behavior, they need your guidance and support so they can learn to solve their own problems. They also may need monitoring, a listening ear and gentle direction to make different choices.

Guidance means allowing children the opportunity to make some of these choices, but also helping them make healthy choices. Invite your child to use your rules to help them say “no” to friends when it is needed. They may argue about these rules, but rules do help a child say “no” to peers.

Rules provide structure. Fair rules are very important at this age. If you ever have driven 60 mph in a 55 mph zone and grumbled about the slow speed limit, you know how your sixth grader feels. But without a speed limit, you may be tempted to drive much faster than you should. Your sixth grader needs limits for the very same reason. Rules are important for everyone.

Consider negotiating and compromising on some rules such as clothing and hair styles. Don't sweat the small stuff. A major argument over a pair of jeans or style of haircut is pointless when you have far more important issues to face. Save your energy and your child's attention for the important issues.



The Power of Peers

Parents often are so concerned about negative or troublesome peer pressure that they forget friends can be a positive force too. For example, if your child's peers stress achievement and good grades, your child probably will strive to earn good grades. Friends help your child try new behaviors and discover what is appropriate and acceptable. Friends help each other feel like they belong. When your child's friends visit your home, invite them to share in part of your family's activities whenever possible. This is important to your child, but don't monopolize your child's friends.

Remember that children want your approval, support, reasoning and guidance rather than your control. Research indicates that parents are more influential than peers or media. Providing a healthy role model is a major responsibility for parents. Your actions speak louder than words.

Parents often aren't aware of their influence because sixth graders are exploring new behaviors and questioning old behaviors with their peers. Be patient with them. They'll make some decisions that will be mistakes and some decisions of which you will be proud. Encourage and support the positive efforts and successes. Share your feelings and help them understand their mistakes in a respectful manner.

To assist your growing child with changes and choices, explore the following:

- Learn what you can about this incredible state of transition and development.
- Leave helpful reading material around the house and follow up with discussions when your child is ready to talk.
- Let your children know you are open to discussing their questions or finding answers if you don't know the answers.
- Share stories of the “olden days” when you were a sixth grader.
- Social media has changed the way kids this age communicate. Ask your child to teach you more about computers and mobile devices, social media and communicating with others. Put limits on the overuse of digital devices.



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