



PARENTING POSTS

A newsletter for parents of sixth grade students

Choices and Activities

We all get 168 hours each week. Your sixth grader will need to use approximately 77 hours for sleeping, about 14 hours for eating and hygiene routines, 35 hours a week for school, and 10 hours for travel, homework and chores. This leaves only about 30 hours a week to connect with family and friends, develop interests and hobbies, participate in outside activities or just daydream. Don't overschedule your student. A child's mind needs relaxed time to explore and absorb information.

Listen to your child's interests. Also, watch your child participate in activities to determine which ones to emphasize and which should be discontinued. Sometimes parents push achievement in scholarship, athletics or music too much. The activity then becomes so serious it's no longer fun. Enjoyment, growth and positive participation should be key goals of a child's involvement in activities.

When deciding which activities to become involved in, discuss these questions with your child:

- What do you like to do? Are other people you know participating, too?
- Will this activity develop one of your interests?
- Will this activity foster healthy self-esteem? Discuss what you would do if the leaders, coaches or other participants change the experience into a negative one.
- What is a realistic goal for you if you participate in the activity? How can you achieve this goal?

Family resources need to be considered:

- **What equipment is required, and what are the financial costs?** If your child wants piano lessons but you don't own a piano, can you rent or borrow one? Think through all of the possibilities before making a major commitment because interests wane at this age.
- **What will the real time commitment be to your family?** Does this activity have early morning/late night/weekend practices or performances? Does it involve expectations about travel? Do adults need to put in volunteer hours to support this effort?

Show interest in your child's activities. This helps maintain the child's participation. However, parents never should get more emotionally involved in the activity than do the kids. Emphasize the value of participation, friendships and learning with all activities.



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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.

Find a clean "joke of the day" and share it with your sixth grader. You may get groans, but they will probably share it with their friends anyway.

Sometimes your child may not be selected to be on the team, in the play or take part in some activity. If this happens, acknowledge the child's feelings and express your feelings. For instance, tell your child that trying out took courage and you feel proud of them for having done so. Help your child set realistic goals. A positive attitude about your child's abilities will help quell disappointment and prepare them to try again.

Children and Stress

As your child works to build skills and friendships, they will experience stress in many situations. Stress is very real to children this age, and yet many are ill-equipped to understand the signs and symptoms. They need help managing the overload, but in their own ways. Avoid comparing how children respond to stress. Help your child understand what is happening and how to manage their feelings and concerns. Symptoms of stress often are noticed in extreme behavior changes.

Symptoms might include:

- Excessive sleeping or trouble sleeping
- Increase or decrease in appetite
- Sudden weight gain or loss
- Hyperactivity or apathy and withdrawal
- Self-destructive behavior, defiance, destruction of property
- Nervous behavior such as nail biting, teeth grinding
- Escape behavior such as running away or immersion in TV, studies or harmful chemicals
- Physical symptoms such as headaches or stomachaches
- Prolonged and persistent temper tantrums
- Explosive crying
- Loss of a sense of joy
- Frequent nightmares

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Helping Your Child

Assist your child in minimizing stress and maximizing personal well-being. Find strategies that best suit you, your child and your family. Begin working on your own methods of coping with stress, too.

Listen. Children need to unload their feelings. They do not always want advice. They want an empathetic ear! Simply reflecting what you hear is a good first step. Often they will come up with their own solution, which may be better than any advice you could give.

Observe. Watch closely for hidden signs of stress and talk to your child immediately if you see new behaviors that concern you. Take note of how your child is spending his or her time.

Accept negative feelings. Accept the fact that your child will have negative experiences and feelings and that you may not be able to "fix it."

Re-evaluate your expectations for your child. Are they realistic? Prioritize activities, and help eliminate unnecessary stress. Is your child overscheduled? Do they need tutoring help? What about their relationship with others?

Check your child's health. Examine food and sleep habits as well as medical needs.

Be a positive force in your child's life. Acknowledgment and encouragement go a long way on a tough day.

Avoid nagging, blaming, criticizing and threatening.

Set a good example yourself. Take care of your own physical and emotional health. Balance work, family and leisure activities.

Help your child see stress as a challenge. Some stress is healthy and motivates us to do our best. Some stressful situations take endurance and teach us how to cope in the short term. Long-term stress needs special help and consideration.

Spend relaxed time with your child. Enjoy time with your growing child. Children need quiet and relaxing times with family.

Find resources and ideas to reduce stress. Engage the help of teachers, counselors, doctors or other trained professionals.



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