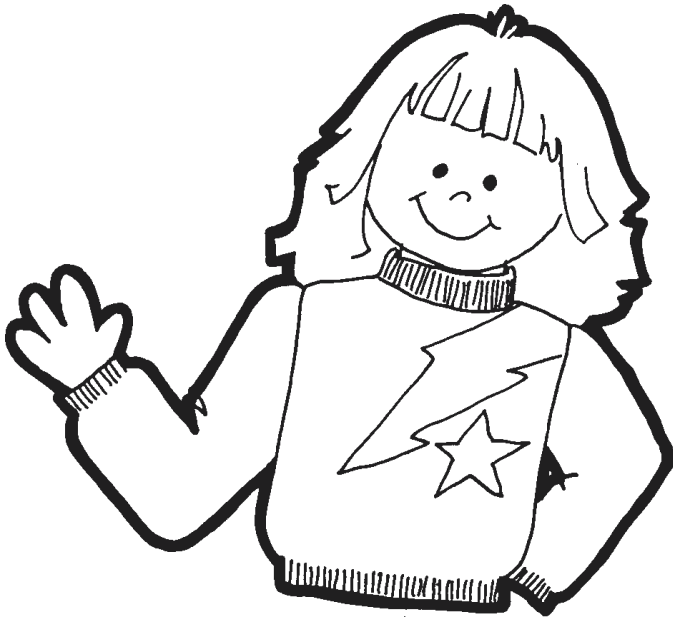
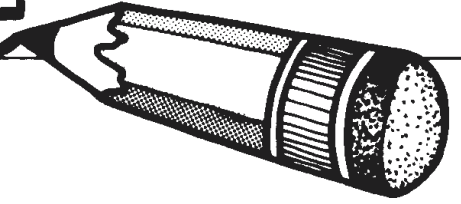


Parenting Pipeline

*A newsletter for parents of sixth-grade children
from Iowa State University Extension*



A Time of Change

Sixth-graders are at a time of life which 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, less emotionally attached to parents. Because of this, they may not want to go to their parents with their concerns.

Sixth-graders often talk about their peers and the changes they are experiencing. They discuss a wide range of topics. They may talk on the phone about their feelings and about the opposite sex. If you look at your child’s notebooks, you may see doodles and

the names of the opposite sex covering the page. This is a way of exploring some of these changes. They also talk about their parents, their attitudes, rules and other important things. 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 asks other adults for information. Sometimes it is easier to talk to someone else.

Parents want their children to be in the “right crowd.” Many of the friends your child associates with at this age will be his friends throughout high school.

If your child is showing undesirable behavior, she needs your guidance and support so she can solve her own problems. She doesn’t need your direct orders.

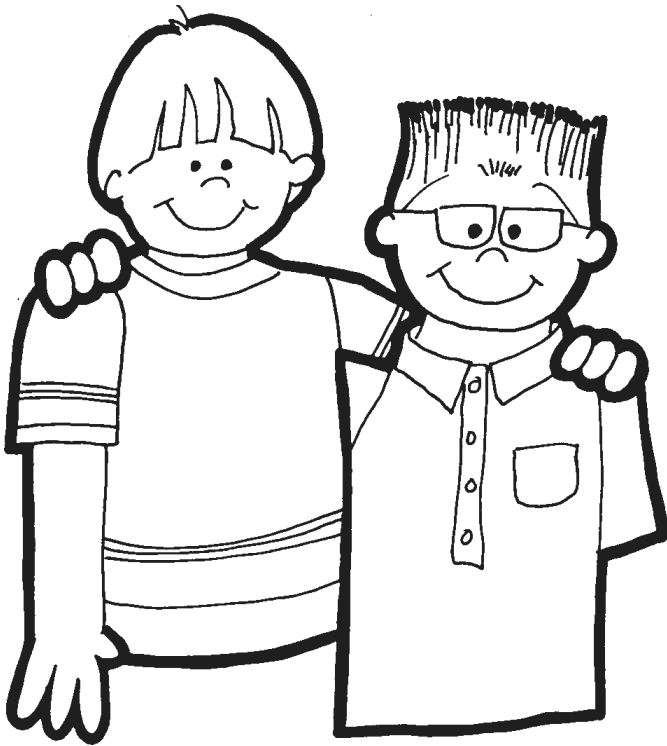
If parents are supportive, children are less likely to get involved with problem peers. Sixth-graders want to be treated with respect and make choices



that satisfy both them and their parents. “Guidance” means allowing them the opportunity to make some of these choices.

Sometimes your child will use your rules to help him say no to his friends. He may argue about these rules, but rules do help a child say no. Rules provide structure. Fair rules are very important at this age.

Consider negotiating and compromising on some rules, like curfew, 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 there are far more important issues to deal with! Save your energy and your child’s attention for the important issues.



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

Parents sometimes think they have lost control of their children when in fact the children are simply learning about people outside of their family, people who are important to them and with whom they can get along. People outside of the family 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. It’s not necessarily a rejection of you as a parent. It’s more of a reflection of their need to expand their experiences.

Remember that children want your approval, support, reasoning and guidance rather than your control. Parents still influence children more than friends. 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. For example, if you do not want your child to smoke, it will be more likely to happen if you do not smoke!

Parents aren’t often 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 that you will be proud of. Encourage and support the positive efforts and successes. Share your feelings and help them understand their mistakes in a respectful manner.

Adapted for use in Iowa from Parenting Pipeline, North Dakota State University Extension Service, by Donna K. Donald, family life field specialist, Iowa State University Extension.

This newsletter is published for families with sixth-grade children by Iowa State University Extension. For more information about parenting education, contact your local county extension office or access the Iowa State University Extension to Families website, www.extension.iastate.edu/families.

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