

First Grade Level Parent Meeting
October 12, 2012

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- Introduction: Reason for these meetings:
 - Parenting is the hardest job in the world.
 - Identify what is normal at this age.
 - Opportunity to establish school-home partnership: we are jointly raising kids
 - Networking with each other: get to know your children's friends' parents
 - Get comfortable communicating with each other and discussing what's appropriate for your children.
 - This is especially important as kids get older.
 - Opportunity to talk about values, at a time when it's not in the heat of the moment. Parenting is full of conflicting values.
- Handouts (most available on psychologists website linked to Reed School website):
 - Vision for a Reed School graduate: it's important to be aware of these and reinforce at home.
 - Advice from 8th grade parents to Reed School parents
 - Various articles on parenting skills and issues
 - If you haven't yet read *Teach Your Children Well* by Madeline Levine, BUY IT! *The Price of Privilege* is also good.
- Where your child is right now in terms of development. How are they different from the beginning of Kindergarten?
 - Ideas shared: Line up by themselves on blacktop; more aware of other kids' behavior; more aware of peer pressure (what other kids are asking them to do); more comfortable in the classroom (more independent); Need less help getting ready in the morning; reading independently; more persistent/more push-back; More interested in being with friends; starting to keep things personal (more private); more lying (or trying to); telling parents what they want to hear.
- Thinking about 5 areas of development helps make observations clearer:
 - Sometimes there are big changes going on, sometimes smaller ones. The more changes, the more difficult parenting is ...
 - The task of childhood is mastery of all of these areas
 - **1. Physical Development:**
 - This is an age of fairly gradual changes. But they are getting more capable and independent. We want to capitalize on this increased capability. Home responsibilities (chores) are very appropriate. These may include setting the table, cleaning up their rooms, putting clothes away, feeding a pet. Parents have to weigh the conflicting values of perfection and responsibility. Is it more important to get the task exactly right or to learn responsibility and contribution to the family?

- Sports: While kids are more capable of learning athletic skills, Dr. Gold feels that organized sports, especially very competitive ones, are not appropriate at this age. Kids are getting burned out by age 12. THEY NEED TO PLAY. They need the social interaction that is less structured, where they build skills and get socialization. Concern is how competitive it gets. At this age kids can shut down easily and refuse to do activities when they don't feel successful. It is important that they learn athletic skills in a fun way and have opportunities for physical activity. They will be much more ready for organized sports in a couple of years.

Question: How much should parents push children, for example, with piano lessons? This can be a conflict of values: commitment versus exposure to new things. Whether to push forward and insist on practice depends on your child. This can be a way to teach perseverance. If the resistance is due to hitting a difficult point, then encouragement and help over the difficult skill can be effective. Incentives for increased effort and persistence can be appropriate (stickers, etc.) if they work. If a child is very vocally adamant ("I hate ...") about stopping an activity (rather than whiny or mildly resistant), then it's probably a good idea to discontinue it. For kids this young, it's wise not to lock them (and you) into months long commitments. It's helpful to be present when kids are doing things that require effort.

- **2. Cognitive Development:**

- Ages 5-7 is period of rapid change.
- They are less egotistical, more aware of things/others outside themselves. Learning to categorize, sort and order. They are learning basics of the concrete world.
- Understanding rules; they are becoming very rule and "fairness" based
- This is a very exciting time as they are expanding their vocabulary and are beginning to be able to talk about their world in a clearer more complex way – but they are still very concrete.

- **3. Social Development:**

- Connected with their cognitive development, they can begin to see another point of view.
 - This can lead to more privacy/lying. Big conflict for kids at this age is standing up for yourself vs. tattling. They need to begin to differentiate that it's not tattling if they are feeling unsafe or uncomfortable, including being excluded.
 - It's important that parents communicate with each other. Also, go through the school when appropriate (especially for issues at school). If parents communicate with each other, they need to do so in a non-defensive, self-effacing way. Don't accuse; form a partnership with the other parent. Don't use the word "bully;" say "tease" instead.
 - They are beginning to figure out what makes a good friend. They are becoming more discriminating.
 - For girls the next few years are intense. Their big issue is figuring out how to be friends with multiple people and dealing with exclusivity. Girls tend to have more intense relationships with each other than boys (who learn to hang out in groups). Girls' feelings get hurt easily when a close or

even best friend wants to play with someone else. Parents become the consultants in this social realm, helping their children navigate issues. Parents can help them figure out how to handle these situations – how to express their feelings, encouraging multiple friendships as alternatives, helping them evaluate how they feel with particular peers and whether it makes sense to continue friendships if they don't feel good with the other person. This applies to boys, as well.

- **4. Emotional Development:**

- This is a period of gradual change.
 - They are getting better at handling frustration and anger. Often what you see at home is exhaustion after having held themselves together all day. They do need consequences for whining, rolling eyes, etc. Modeling and 'rewind' can be good techniques. Expressing themselves emotionally is a challenge. They need the vocabulary and tools.
 - Restorative Discipline: This is an alternative to strict punishment. Ask kids questions to get them to think about their actions and to develop empathy. What happened? What was the impact? How do you think the person (including the parent) feel? How can you fix this or make it better. For example, in dealing with whining, ask "Does whining make me want to give you what you want?"
 - In addressing kids' behavior, use "I-statements," Get below your own anger to the underlying feeling: When I see you do X, I feel worried, concerned, hurt, disrespected, disappointed, etc. (not just angry). Your modeling the expression of the "softer" emotions behind anger can help them learn vocabulary and get in touch with their own feelings, too.
 - Keeping it together at school and with friends, then falling apart at home is very typical. Let them have down time. Also, it's important to make sure after school time is not overly structured. Snacks can be helpful too.

- **5. Moral Development:**

- They are starting to be capable of empathy and understanding how their behavior affects others.
 - They need to understand that their behavior affects you. Anger is much less effective than getting to the root of the real emotion (kids are used to adult anger).
 - Moral reasoning at this age and until adolescence is very black and white. Their behavior is often based on not wanting to get in trouble. But you can begin to make the distinction between rules (to keep systems running smoothly) and moral issues (attending to others' feelings and not hurting people). Teaching empathy is an ongoing process. Even though they primarily want to keep out of trouble, they can still learn empathy.

Other issues:

- Screen time:
 - Most challenging part of parenting in the 21st century is getting control over what they do with media.
 - Video game addiction is a real phenomenon. This gets worse as kids get older.
 - A major sign to watch out for is push back to time limits and refusal to get off the computer or video game
 - It's important to establish limits now, to reduce problems later.
 - Time on screens is time they are not socializing.
 - Kids need to be taught implications of social media when they are young, and are not yet rebelling and pushing back.

- Perfectionism is common at this age. Children need lots of modeling and encouragement that mistakes are okay.

- It's okay for parents to apologize, admit when they made mistakes. Apologies sometimes need to be accompanied with discussion of how behavior is going to change (so that they are not insincere).

- Kids lie for two reasons, one to get out of trouble, two for self-aggrandizement. The telling of stories to impress will stop by about second grade, particularly when peers call them on their unbelievable stories. However, ALL kids will lie to get out of trouble. If you catch them in an action that they deny, don't argue about it. Discuss the importance of telling the truth (you can introduce the concept of "trust"), tell them how their action impacted you, give them a chance to make it right, and impose an appropriate, logical consequence, if you can figure out one that is related to the misbehavior. The more severe the consequence, the more likely the child is to continue lying. This doesn't mean that you make light of misbehavior; you can certainly express your disappointment, concern, etc., but very harsh punishments lead to fear and more self-protection.