

Fall 2017 Fourth Grade Level Parent Meeting
October 3, 2017
Dr. Allan Gold, District Psychologist

1. **Background** on the purpose of this discussion:
 - a. We are a partnership between school and home, this is an opportunity to share information and work together
 - b. It's also important and beneficial to know their children's classmates/friends' families, especially as children get older and become more private
 - c. Important to develop communication skills with other parents
 - d. Parenting is the hardest job in the world, even more challenging in the 21st century
 - e. You're not in this alone – "my child's the only one who's doing X"
 - f. As parents, you're all going through it together
 - g. It's also an opportunity to talk about factual information about what are normal developmental changes at this age and talk about various issues that are arising

2. **Reference materials** for talking with your kids about current events: nasponline.org, which has a link to talking with children about violence (site for National Association of School Psychologists)

3. **Handouts** in front of room in categories (Vision of Reed District Graduate – good idea to put on fridge; Positive Life Skills; Profile of a 4th grader: Ways to Handle Common Parenting and Kid issues; Positive Parenting Skills; Cultivating Respect; Restorative Parenting; Things Not to Do [overly enable, let kids experience frustration and disappointment; for example], Atlantic Monthly article "How to Land Your Kid in Therapy", Technology/Cyber citizenship related articles)

4. **Changes observed in our 4th graders since last year (parent observations):**
 - a. More interested in reading
 - b. Less eager for physical affection
 - c. Physical changes (pre-puberty)
 - d. Greater need for independence, and concomitantly providing less information; more private
 - e. Less need to be entertained
 - f. More interested in earning money
 - g. Bigger sense of responsibility
 - h. More self-reflective (e.g., has hesitations about level of independence)

5. **5 Key Areas of Development** for kids this age: overall, they are in a gradual state of change in all of these areas, there are a lot of subtle changes from beginning to end of 4th grade.

a. Physical development

- i. Physical growth, especially in girls who develop ~2 years ahead of boys
- ii. Rarely, signs of puberty show in this grade
- iii. Children at this age participate in organized sports, but...
 1. It will become more important for kids to be able to budget their time, as well as their money (see below) and kids need downtime: homework time, activity time, time with family, how to spend family time
 2. 1 or 2 days per week is a good balance for organized activities
 3. As grades progress, the homework will increase
 4. Also, it is incumbent on the parent to say “no” if the child wants to do too many activities
 5. If they don’t want to do something, listen to that; also, if they want to do too much, then say “no”

Household Responsibilities

Positive aspect: because of their physical development, kids are now more capable of helping with household responsibilities (not using the word “chores” since that term has a negative connotation), doing tasks such as putting dishes in dishwasher, setting table, dinner preparation, etc.

Allowances are important for several reasons: the child learns how to manage money and now is cognitively able to understand it. Household assistance should not be tied to money, their need to contribute is because they are part of the household.

How much should an allowance be?

Formula: think about how much you are comfortable with their spending per week, then multiply it by 3, then allocate the total: 1/3 for giving to charity; 1/3 goes to saving for something big (e.g., a new bike); 1/3 to spend

Children at this age can now learn to budget, which is helpful since in this community there is more of a tendency to have instant gratification (“I want it, I get it”) and in this community, it’s also important for kids to get a sense of their own privilege vis à vis others who are less fortunate.

b. Cognitive development

- i. Kids are in a stage of gradual development now, they are well able to understand concrete thinking: understand rules, they are also building vocabulary.
- ii. The next stage: abstract thinking which starts ~ age 11
- iii. As kids approach age 10, they are increasingly aware of what is going on, and the question is “how do you approach that as parents?”
- iv. Parents need to be buffers for this information about current events (weather, violence, etc.)
- v. They need to develop confidence in their own safety coupled with the concept of probability: e.g., plane crash, mass shooting, natural disasters are rare and distant events.
- vi. Kids need to be reassured that they are safe, and that parents focus on the positive, and that we have a plan
- vii. Kids are more savvy than you think.
- viii. Later this year (April), Dr. Gold does a ‘Touch Program’ for 2 days where he talks about good and bad touch and child abuse, and the kids are very sophisticated (at least some to many students are aware of physical, verbal, sexual abuse; some know about neglect). He focused on verbal abuse as not just adult to child, but peer to peer teasing and bullying as “verbal abuse.”
- ix. 4th grade is the time when we first see kids wanting more independence
- x. If kids need time and space, after dark, then say “no” to their wanting to go outside by themselves.
- xi. They are beginning to be more aware of the world, and themselves.

c . Social development

- i. Again this is an age of gradual development. In particular girls understand that they can play with more than one friend at time, it’s not always easy to transition from playing with one friend to another
- ii. When kids turn ~age 10, the kids who are more impulsive (lack social filter), they begin to reflect and monitor what they say and are able to stop themselves from saying something more hurtful, particularly with boys
- iii. They understand school and homework responsibilities and are able to manage their time
- iv. Parent’s roles as “managers” and “consultants”
 - a. Role of Manager: when younger, parents make rules about what they can/cannot do. You can still be the manager about personal conduct, respect, extracurricular activities, and use of technology and screen time.

- b. Role of Consultant: goes into situation, asks good questions, helps brainstorm solutions to problems, helps “client” evaluate solutions (what’s working, what’s not, how to tweak)
 - c. Best place for parents to learn to pivot their role from Manager to Consultant is in their children’s social interactions and relationships.
 - d. Help children about what attributes make a good friend, for example: think about consistency (X is nice on playdate and ignores you at school)
 - e. Trust is a recurring theme
- 1) Brainstorm ideas with your child to solve issues, also offer “talk to Dr. Gold about X”
 - 2) Encourage communication – important to have contact with teachers, other parents for heavy duty stuff later (drinking, drugs); kids will go to Dr. Gold with their worries as well; and be a good role model for communication
 - 3) Consider how you respond when they tell you something bad (e.g., you will get mad at them, and they will start clamming up)
 - 4) Share “ups and downs” – good and bad things that happen each day - at the dinner table, so they can communicate their feelings and events with you; parents can do the same, so kids can see that parents have their ups and downs, as well.
 - 5) They begin to care more about what their peers think, “popular” comes into their vocabulary, cliques form, which is natural.
 - 6) Be clear about your values

d. Emotional development

- i. Pre-puberty, more able to control their emotions (not bursting out with every thought), can pay attention for longer periods of time, can self-regulate, can begin to deal with disappointment and frustration; easier now than last year
- ii. When do you give kids the privileges they want? The key is to think about trust: can you trust your child with a new privilege? Also, what does trust mean for a 9 year old, and how do they build your trust in them?
 - a. If they report in to you what they’re doing or when they’ve arrived some place.
 - b. Consistency, they follow through on their commitment (do what they say are going to do)
 - c. Honesty: being honest, owning up to things they have done wrong; do they do their homework
 - d. Respectful: are they allowed to be grouchy about feedback? Yes. Are they allowed to say: “I hate you”? No.
 - e. Is it normal to lie about tooth brushing or hand washing? Yes, a lot of parents nodded at this one.
- iii. If “yes” answers to these, then let out the apron strings gradually and give more responsibility.

- iv. The self-reflection of kids to say “I don’t think I am ready for x” is a good sign of trustworthiness.

e. Moral development

- i. Slow, gradual change – ‘do the right thing’ starts to develop later, in adolescence
- ii. They can be empathic and understand other people’s feelings
- iii. Dr. Gold explains concept of ‘white lies’ (e.g., do you like my tie?) to distinguish from lies
- iv. Three areas requiring the most emphasis from parents:
 - a. Trust – see comments above
 - b. Technology
 - c. Respect – they need to learn how to disagree with you as parent, in a way that is respectful – almost in a scripted way. How can they react to it, expressing their feelings without being disrespectful?
 - 1) Teach “I statements” for example: “I am really upset because I really wanted that privilege”
 - 2) As Consultant, explain why you don’t want them to do X
 - 3) Talk about values

Technology

- a. “Who has a smart phone” vs. “cell phone” vs. “phone watch”
- b. 4th graders are too young for an internet-enabled phone at this age
- c. some have a phone-only device, to check in for safety which is OK
 - 1) What gets tricky is monitoring the electronics
- a) Addiction: see the handout article: if kids can’t follow established limits, then that’s a good sign that they are becoming addicted to electronics. Tell them it’s time to get off and they do within reason (e.g., finish X level), and if they do not – this is when they are showing signs of addiction because they can’t get off. Signs of addiction now show up in progressively younger children (previously was 7th grade).
- b) Self-regulation: kids (and adults) are not very good at regulating this very attractive and exciting device. Some kids can, but many others can’t, and it only gets worse as they get older
- c) Moderation: moderation is difficult for many kids. They don’t understand it and are still very “all or nothing,” so it is often better just to say “no.” It’s easier to say “no” at all, if they can’t stop it.
- d) Question about screen time in school on iPads being too much – Dr. Gold to follow up with administration on this
- e) How to differentiate between TV and Tablet/Computer
 - 1. Common to have TV shows on a tablet
 - 2. Screen time = anything with a screen

Consider what your kids are doing with the technology

- a. Make sure you have access to their passwords
- b. No use of technology (including phones) at night time – kids this age need 9-10 hours of sleep
- c. Set limits now
- d. Continue to emphasize in person, social interaction
- e. Discuss what is appropriate to say online (don't say anything online that you wouldn't say to them in person)
- f. Creating and posting your own (appropriate) YouTube may be better than their watching passively.

Values (also goes with Morals section)

- a. Be very clear on your own personal values and why you don't want your kids to do X, in your own house and why it's important
- b. They will say 'very other kid gets to do X:' that doesn't matter – that is not true, anyway. You're still the boss about what your kids can and can't do.
- c. They will push limits as they get more independent
- d. Examples: swear language, pornography, violent video games, rap lyrics that are disrespectful; figure out what you don't like about those or any other activities, or their safety. You can explain your reasons (rather than "because I'm your dad/mom and I said so). They may disagree, but if you're very clear about your reasons they will have to learn to accept the limitations.

Siblings

- a. General discussion of sibling rivalries and dynamics for older/younger, and the level of conflict between them
- b. In these cases, parents can use their intuition and step into Consultant role "what got you so riled up?" or "what was the trigger"
- c. Consider a family meeting to discuss, if it is consistent
- d. If it is not getting resolved or is escalating, then family therapy can help because an unbiased third party can be very helpful
- e. Book: "Siblings Without Rivalry" is a classic
- f. Also, observe their behavior towards each other and compare to how they interact with their friends; if they cannot regulate their anger with friends as well as siblings, then that's more serious and may need outside intervention.
- g. Try "I think you guys can work this out" if it's a 4th grader with an older sibling; siblings often fight in front of their parents to get attention; if you can not get involved, don't – leave it to them to work out the conflict.