

Fall 2018 Fourth Grade Level Parent Meeting  
October 2, 2018  
Dr. Allan Gold, District Psychologist

The purpose of grade level meetings:

Raising a child these days is the most challenging job. One purpose today is to understand what is developmentally appropriate for this age.

It is important for parents to connect and network with one another. Kids at this age tend to get more and more private and don't always share their experiences and feelings with their parents. So get comfortable with other parents, so you can all observe and share and everyone is aware of what their and other children are doing. It is increasingly important to have this communication.

Changes in our 4<sup>th</sup> graders since last year that we've observed:

- more reading
- more self consciousness
- more difficulty controlling their energy
- peers more important
- feeling more academic pressure
- more desire for independence
- better self management skills
- more boy-girl separation
- "parents don't understand"
- fear of death
- awareness of social status
- puberty (for some)
- more eye rolling/attitude

4<sup>th</sup> Grade is a year you see tons of change. Many of the above are very characteristic of 4<sup>th</sup> graders and some of the above are more characteristic of older kids but may filter down from older siblings or from the increased exposure to media and the wider world that kids have these days.

In order to make sense of these observations we can consider the five areas of child development and consider issues raised within or because of each developmental level.

- 1) **Physical:** This is still a fairly gradual time for growth. Most children are not at puberty yet. If your child is an early developer, it's especially difficult for girls. For boys, being tall & strong can be an advantage; for girls it can be embarrassing. Some effects of physical development at this time include:
  - a. Able to participate in sports, help with chores/house responsibilities; they are quite physically able to contribute to the house (e.g.

unloading dishwasher, bring in the trash cans, vacuuming, help set the table, clear the table)

- b. Allowances are ok but they should not be linked to chores. It should be expected of kids that they contribute to helping the house but not be paid for it.
- c. Allowances can be taught as 33% save, 33% give to a charity, 33% spend. They are old enough to understand money and this teaches them to budget. Maybe give them a little extra for doing a special job.
- d. Sports should be for fun, not for stress, not be overly competitive. Not all kids are made for organized sports. They are capable of understanding the rules, and many have great skills, but participation shouldn't be a stressful experience for them. All kids should be active in something physical at this age even if it's just riding a bike. Keep it fun!

2) **Cognitive:** This is a time of understanding of the concrete world and the very beginning of more abstract thinking.

- a. They are beginning to be aware of what's out there in the world.
- b. They are developing the ability to have really interesting dinner table conversations.
- c. Because of their increased awareness, parents have to be buffers. Kids are now increasingly interested in looking at the news. Be prepared for some serious conversations.
- d. Kids are aware of awful things that happen in the world. often news is about somebody killing somebody else, so they can get scared or worried. They need to be taught probability and perspective: these events don't happen very often and are often far away. We live in a safe place.
- e. Be prepared to give them a little information when they have questions about information they've seen or heard. Ask what they think, explain a little bit but don't overwhelm them. Explore their questions with them. Use technology to look up answers with them.
- f. Cognitive growth increases their social awareness. They are very aware of what other kids are doing and they begin to develop the attitude of "parents don't understand"
- g. The concept of "my parents just don't get it" really starts in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. This is the start of it but it goes on for awhile. You will see more and more "get out of my life mom/dad" but parents involvement is critical to them. They need you more now than ever before and will continue to need you through middle school and high school.
- h. Social awareness puts a lot of stress on kids.
- i. Dr. Gold sees far more anxiety and stress with kids today than he did 20 years ago. Particularly in this community parents feel a lot of pressure to have kids succeed and it trickles down to our kids.
- j. They are also more self conscious about themselves and how they fit in.

- 3) Social:** Social relationships become more complex now, too.
- a. By 4<sup>th</sup> grade they are getting better at having lots of friends; they are not so exclusive.
  - b. But kids are very sensitive so we have to help them work things out. For example, they get very emotional when teased.
  - c. This is a time to think of the role of parents as Consultant rather than Administrator. An Administrator tells people what to do. Up to now parents do have most of the control over their kids. From now on, there will be “push-back.” Parents still can be the “boss” for some things, but can also take on the role of Consultant, particularly with social situations. A Consultant is a good listener, asks questions, helps their clients brainstorm solutions to problems, and helps them evaluate solutions. Parent can really help them identify issues in social situations and help them figure out how to handle situations and for the big picture –help them figure out who makes a good friend.
  - d. They are better about discussing their feelings
  - e. They have a sense about NOT doing or saying things that hurt other people. But they are still not terribly good at controlling what they do or say, but they are starting to be aware of it. There is a big change in their awareness and self-control around the age of 10.
  - f. Feedback is important – give them constructive feedback. We can’t change unless we get the information (if you just did less of this, I think we could be better friends for example).
  - g. Consistency in friendship is very important and important for kids to understand and consider in their friendships.– a good friend treats you pretty much the same all the time. Some kids are kind at home but mean at school. Is that the kind of friend you want or the kind of friend you want to be? Is it worth trying to talk it out?
  - h. Values! Values are so critical starting at this age. What do I like or not like about the situation? What are your values around the situation?
  - i. Maybe you are getting a lot of attitude at home, you have a right because of your family values to say to your child “I notice this person or this thing brings out this bad attitude in you and this is not part of our family values”
  - j. RESPECT is one of the most important values to teach.
  - k. It is perfectly ok to ask other parents about values & safety in their homes (what are our rules on video games, do you supervise the ipad content, do you have guns in the house and if “yes” are they locked up)
  - l. Teachable moments – what don't I like about pornography, what don't I like about violent games? Think about what you don't like about these things and express your values to your kids. They don't have to agree with you, but they are old enough to hear your values.
  - m. But mom, every other kid gets to do this....Don't believe it, it's not true, every other kid is NOT doing it. Kids are pretty good into conning us into giving them privileges.

#### 4) Moral:

- a. Most kids now know right & wrong, but they don't have abstract thinking yet.
- b. Because they have more self consciousness, it's almost magical....they turn 10 and suddenly it dawns on them, well I better not say that. They begin to get more self-control.
- c. Restorative parenting: This is a method where if kids do something wrong, you don't just punish them. You want them to learn what is the impact of their behavior on other people. You want to help them understand how to make it right. You don't want the child to feel like he/she is a bad person. This leads to self esteem issues. Ex. "When you roll your eyes at me, it really hurts my feelings." Talk to them about how their actions make you feel. Sometimes saying I'm sorry isn't enough because they do the same thing over and over again. Make them understand the impact of their behavior more than just saying they're sorry. They need to learn from their mistakes. Work through it as "Consultant."
- d. Make the distinction between rules and moral imperatives (no gum chewing in class, you can't wear a hat vs. "do unto others as you would do unto you," is an action hurting someone or not?)
- e. Kids do have empathy at this age. They really are able to put themselves in other kids shoes.
- f. Kids begin to self reflect at this age.
- g. It is important to make sure kids are growing in this area at this age (consider the "Balanced Individual/Best self" item in the Vision of the Reed District Graduate).
- h. Not one kid at this age that hasn't told a lie, but at this age they lie to avoid responsibility or to get out of something they don't want to do. That said, they need to realize the impact of not telling the truth and how it damages parents' trust in them. TRUST is key and increasingly important.
- i. Kids at this age need some independent privileges but you want to know they are safe & responsible. It comes down to trust.
- j. If they take responsibility for their chores and their homework, you can start to trust they will take responsibility for other things. It's good for kids to have some independence – can they go to a friends close by on their own, can they go to the nearby store on their own, etc.?
- k. Dr. Gold really endorses the "Wait Until 8<sup>th</sup>" movement – no phone until 8<sup>th</sup> grade. A flip phone could be ok but no smart phones. Your child can call you from the friends house with a parents phone to check in. Tell them they need to be back by a certain time and make them responsible.
- l. They are no longer attached to your hip anymore. Give them chances to show they are trustworthy and responsible.

- m. Electronics are a very significant area for building trust and responsibility. Be careful about addictions – especially with boys and video gaming
- n. If you give your child electronic/gaming time on week nights, you need to have strict limits. When the child keeps asking for more time (oh, just 5 more minutes, ok just wait I am almost clearing this level, etc.) and the time expands to a half hour and there are increasing arguments, then these are clear signs of potential or actual addiction.
- o. Parents set the biggest role model with technology – can you have dinner without your phone (at home & at a restaurant), can you ignore a call, can you put your devices down? Your children are watching your usage very carefully. And what we do teaches them what is acceptable.
- p. Put your foot down on technology use, for yourself and for your children.
- q. If kids say “I’m bored” ....don’t give them electronics to solve the problem. Make them be creative and think of something interesting to do. We don't see the imagination and creativity in kids this age that we used to. Help them be creative.
- r. Social media begins in 5<sup>th</sup> grade....cyber bullying is a big thing at Del Mar.
- s. Later in the year, Dr. Gold will do the Touch Program with the 4<sup>th</sup> graders:
  - i. Good & bad touch
  - ii. Abuse (verbal, physical, sexual abuse)
- t. Parents are a bit more naive than they should be with kids this age. Kids really are very aware of some of the bad things that go on in the world and have to begin to understand and process this information.
- u. Be aware of what kids say to each other.
- v. Get your kids used to the fact that you are going to monitor what they do at this age (on their ipads, laptops, school work, etc)
- w. Kids want some privacy but everything they do should not be private. Kids want to be more and more private as they grow. Begin to get used to the idea that you may need to rely on your child’s friend’s parents to get information about your own child. You may need to communicate to another parent something you heard from your child about their child. While this may be uncomfortable at first, know that we’ll all in the same position and want to know what is going on with our child.
- x. Encourage your children to communicate their feelings with you. How do you keep this communication happening? Don't judge them. Be keenly aware of how you respond to them. Go back to the idea of cognitive parenting. How do you think that made him/her feel. Think about how this makes you feel.
- y. The issue of privacy for yourself is something to think about here as well. How much about your life & experiences do you want to share

with your child? You do have a right to privacy (if you took drugs in high school, when you first engaged in sexual activity, etc.). Some parents are ok sharing their experiences, but it is important to ask why they're asking and be careful that how you respond doesn't give the message – "well if my mom/dad did that, so can I." These all required deeper discussions.

- z. Timing is REALLY important in terms of when you ask about things.
  - i. Wow, it looks like something happened today, are you ok?  
Sometimes they don't want to tell you anything
  - ii. Let them come home from school and relax, don't ask them right away about school today. Dinnertime talk can be a good time to reflect on the day. Ask about "highs" and "lows" of the day, and share your own as well. Kids will often just join in the conversation and drop a hint of what is going on and you can go from there.
  - iii. Message of "when you are ready to talk, I am here to listen"
  - iv. Try to teach your child how to express soft feelings (often underlying feelings, like confusion discomfort, sadness, hurt, worry, feeling excluded) vs hard feelings (anger). Try to identify or help them identify the underlying feelings, including for yourself, so that you don't just respond with anger. "That makes me so angry, stop doing that." OR "Mom/Dad, can you stop doing that it's making me feel so uncomfortable." Both children and adults are more likely to listen to, reflect, and respond to those softer feelings.

## **5) Emotional:**

- a. Kid this age are generally able to control their emotions much better
- b. Maybe there is an occasional temper tantrum, but not usually at school
- c. Kids can often hold it together at school all day and then fall apart at home
- d. They are much better able to pay attention
- e. They are able to deal with anger, frustration, etc., but need a lot of support
- f. There are plenty of kids who can't tolerate making mistakes or not doing as well as they think they can. Where does this pressure come from? Kids will internalize these messages from parents.
- g. If you think there is a self-esteem issue, ask your kids to tell you some things they like about themselves. Usually at this age they can tell you things they are good at (sports, etc) but it is important to start to get them to tell you something about their personality (I'm funny, etc).
- h. Self Esteem is a life characteristic that can make or break all of us as we grow up
- i. It is very important to have a growth mindset – the understanding that with effort we can grow and improve.

- j. We all compare ourselves with other people. There is always someone who is better ....and it's human nature to compare up vs down. It's so important to compare myself with myself. What can I do now that I couldn't do at the start of 4<sup>th</sup> grade.
- k. We want them to be optimistic, to have a sense of power and control over themselves, that they can learn how to do this.
- l. The opposite is depression, anxiety, and stress and these stop everything.
- m. This is where teachers can have such an important impact. If you feel your child is having self esteem issues, talk to your teacher about it. How teachers interact with students and what they say to them can have a powerful positive impact.
- n. Teach kids about putting things in perspective
  - i. Rate things on a scale of 1 to 10
  - ii. Practice with a few items (1 is awful, 10 is wonderful)
  - iii. How much do you like broccoli
  - iv. How much do you like reading
  - v. How much do you like baseball
  - vi. When they say 10 for something, that means you would do it 24 hours/day. Help them put things in perspective
  - vii. So what's the worst thing that could happen to you or anyone you love – death is often what they come up with as a 1
  - viii. So where would you put dropping a football & your friends laugh at you. Hopefully the child can understand this is probably a 5. No one died, it's not a 1. If your child feels like something like this is a 1 or a 2, we need to talk to them further about this and help them move away from this "this is a crisis" thinking.

Some other issues:

4<sup>th</sup> graders will figure out how to make fun of names, make puns, and they find it hysterical. By 5<sup>th</sup> grade they are over it and in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade they don't know how to do it.

Where do kids get the sense they have to be perfect? Sometimes they can benefit from outside counseling if they get too stressed by their mistakes and imperfections.

Sometimes drawing pictures can be helpful. Draw a picture of the face of the voice inside your head, and draw a picture of the positive voices inside your head.

Kids this age can learn these self-help skills if we work with them on them.

Kids easily detect differences between parents and manipulate to get what they want. Kids can arouse unresolved issues in your own childhood. That's

why it's important to understand your values, discuss them with the other parent, so you can make unified rules and decisions about your child's privileges, activities, expectations.