

Fall First Grade Parent Meeting
Dr. Allan Gold, District Psychologist, Angela Geiger, First Grade Team Leader
Friday, October 3, 2008

Dr. Gold opened the meeting by mentioning the resources on the RUSD Psychological Services website: http://web.me.com/davidkover/School_Psychology_at_RUSD/Welcome.html, which has descriptions of services at all of the schools and useful links to resources for parents, including these notes.

Ms Geiger, at the request of Principal Lexie Sifford, spoke about expectations for first grade students and their parents in the reading program. This year's big focus for homework is reading and developing fluency. To develop fluency students need to read what is easy for them. They should read the books that are sent home even if they seem too easy. Their reading will improve with these types of books rather than with books above their independent level, where they may be read with word by word choppiness. Encourage reading at their independent level. Go back and ask questions to make sure they understood what they just read. Make sure they are getting the meaning of the text. It is good to read the same book over and over. This helps reinforce words and understanding of content.

The meeting then was turned over to Dr. Gold.

Dr. Gold spoke about the how this is an important opportunity for us as parents to think about the issues of parenting and get comfortable with discussing things with other parents.

He then asked the question: "What are 1st graders like? What is normal? How have our children changed from a year ago?"

Responses from Parents:

- Independence and Confidence
- More Social
- More aware of what friends are doing/playing with
- More aware of what peers are thinking about them
- More fragile/sensitive
- More expressive with opinions
- Better at identifying emotions
- Don't take parents' word so easily. Need reasons.
- More aware of rules and rigid about following them
- Greater ability to understand cause and effect
- More expectations of being challenged in school

In order to make sense of these observations and to better understand child development, think of four categories: Physical, Cognitive, Social and Emotional

Physical: This is a time of gradual growth and development, rather than dramatic changes. They are getting bigger, more confident and competent. Take advantage of this with home responsibilities (chores). **Sports:** this is a time for skill development such as throwing and catching.

Cognitive: They are right in the middle of a period of significant change (generally from age 5 to age 7) from being egocentric and not understanding basic logic to being able to understand logic/concrete world. They are learning the rules in math and reading, sorting, categorizing, ordering. They are

seeing the world in a richer way and understanding cause and effect. But, they are more fragile as a result. As they become more aware of other kids' abilities, etc they can get discouraged.

Socially: They are more confident, familiar with their setting, the rules of the playgroun, learning social skills. They are learning how to enter a game, ask someone to play and be sensitive to other kids' feelings. They can better identify their feelings.

-How much should parents get involved in the ups and downs?

-At this age, be involved. School also has lots of conflict resolution tools that the kids are learning. But, still call the teacher if you can't figure out a situation.

Emotionally: We expect first graders to manage their emotions. At the beginning, though, this can take time. Kids want to hold it together at school, but may not be able to do this at home. The academic learning and output and social interactions demand a lot of energy, so they may be exhausted at home.

However, they should be able to:

-Control emotions

-Handle frustration

-Identify and verbalize their feelings. To help them with this use reflective listening.

Help nuance what they feel

Take a stab at what you think they are feeling from body language, what they say.

Dr. Gold then asked for questions and concerns/issues we have in parenting our first graders:

He stated that the rules we establish now will carry all through their childhood.

Determine what are the most important values you want to teach as you are raising your children. In our society there are often competing values that make it challenging to know what to focus on: kindness, success, popularity, wealth, self-fulfillment, depth and passion, academic competence, generosity, respect, service, etc. These values may conflict with each other, forcing choices sometimes.

Questions and Answers:

Q: Shy Kids-how do we encourage participation. What is the right balance between pushing a child and accepting their personality?

A: Work with the teacher to encourage the child to speak in class. Role play at home to prepare if there is a presentation to make in class. Teachers can prearrange for students to answer a particular question. Push a little on social skills. If they are reluctant to try something, prepare them for what will happen (e.g. a new extracurricular activity or social event). It's ok to encourage, but balance the pushing and corrections with lots of encouragement and praise for effort.

Q: Computer/Screen time-how much?

A: The rules you establish now are really important. Right now, 20 to 30 minutes on the computer or television is the max. You don't want the possibility of their not learning how to interact with others if playtime is all computers. Whatever you do, have a time limit and keep the computer where you can see it. Block inappropriate websites. Children this age need to play with each other, engage in fantasy games, work out compromises and learn to follow rules. They can't do that just on the computer.

Q: What about multitasking?

A: Multitasking is part of our 21st century life, but it is not necessarily a good thing. Research is being done that shows that the quality of thought is more superficial when we try to do too many things at the

same time. Productive thought for children and adults takes time and focus. Trying to do homework while text messaging, listening to an iPod, and watching uTube and IMing doesn't work for anyone. In class kids should not have to multitask – they should be focusing on their work and not have to develop the skill of listening to the conversation at the next table at the same time. Children this age are just learning to focus. If focusing is a problem, don't assume that your child has attention deficit disorder, but do consult the teacher to begin to carefully observe.

Q: Do you see a shift with testing and No Child Left Behind?

A: There is no push to have testing begin at a younger age. NCLB is supposed to have everyone at grade level by 2014, but that isn't going to happen. While we can strive for more students reaching proficiency in their academic learning, the earlier and earlier achievement push has its limits.

Q: What about the balance of time spent in cognitive activities vs creative or physical activities?

A: If a child doesn't want to try something, balance the intensity of their feelings of “no” vs. letting them try it out. Limit the initial commitment, so that they aren't signed up for a months long activity they don't even know that they'll like. Give them a preview and keep the activity time limited at first. Help them build the skills they may need for the activity, so they'll feel that they can fit in.

Balance is good. If they love academics make sure they get outside (and vice versa). Remember their passions might not be your own, but if they do have a passionate interest to the exclusion of other areas, that is not bad. If they don't show any particular attraction to a sport, creative endeavor, or academic area, then keep on exposing them to different activities. And it's ok, too, if they just want to play. More than two days a week of structured classes at this age is probably too much. Kids want to try everything, so if you find yourself stressed out from taking them everywhere, if they can't keep up with a tight schedule and/or they seem cranky and stressed, then they (and you) are probably doing too much. It's ok to say “no.”

Q: How do you encourage enjoyment of learning when there is all this pressure to perform?

A: Kids want to learn. Parents need to expose them to lots of things. Encourage the learning-go on field trips as a family, etc. As they get older ask “What did you learn today?” vs “How did you do on the math test?” Ask questions that keep them engaged and stress that effort is really important. If they are struggling, have them think back two months to give them a sense of how much effort they have put out and what they have accomplished.

Q: How do we guide kids to reflect on their choice of friends?

A: This is part of the process all kids go through to figure out who is the right friend. We want them to know their choices should reflect our family values. It is ok to say “I don't like when Johnny is over and he talks back to me.” When your child goes to a friend's house ask what movies are being shown, etc. Or say to your child, “It is ok to have Johnny here at our house, but I don't want you to go to his house.” Be direct and tell the child why. Talk about your values and why they are important.

Q: Should we protect kids from the news, now that they can read. What should kids be exposed to?

A: This is a complicated question, but one that everyone has to face. Innocence these days stops at about age six, but that doesn't mean that kids should be exposed to what they can't understand. At this age it's ok to filter what they see and read. They will hear things from other kids, maybe older brothers or sisters of playmates and will ask questions. Ask them what they think the answer is and then correct misinformation. Give a little information and if they're curious, they'll ask more. Otherwise, stop. Don't let them see, as much as possible, the often sensational pictures and stories on the news or in the newspaper – that will come later. Be prepared, though, to have many years of reassuring them that

what they see is far away, doesn't happen very often, and that they are safe. It is easy for little kids to assume that sensational events happen all the time and will happen to them or you.

On the other hand it is not necessary to shelter them from normal life events, such as funerals. If there is a death in the family, such as a grandparent, children this age can be included in funerals. It is important to let them know what will take place and give them a choice about attending. They can do everything from saying something about the person, making a drawing, or writing something – or they can not participate at all. Seeing an open coffin is not recommended and maybe seeing a coffin lowered into the ground is too much for a first grader, but can participate in ways that are comfortable and not scary for them.