

Fall Fourth Grade Parent meeting
October 6, 2008
Dr. Allan Gold, District Psychologist

What our 4th graders are like right now/changes since last year (observations by parents)

- More independent, making own decisions
- Argumentative, sassy
- More self-assured, confident
- More aware of important things
- More self-aware (pecking order)
- Empathetic towards other kids
- Identifying with same-sex parent
- More discerning about friends and activities
- More social
- More interested in parents' stories
- More interested in world around them, national events
- They are more interesting

Thinking about child development, four general categories to frame our thinking: physical, cognitive, social, and emotional.

Physical—They are getting bigger, more confident physically. It is a time of gradual changes. They are now pretty capable of doing a lot. It is appropriate at this age to start to do team sports and to have chores/responsibilities at home. By the end of 4th grade, some kids, probably girls, may start to hit puberty.

Cognitive—They are very well grounded in logic of rules, understanding the basics of how the concrete world works. There is a gradual move toward more abstract thinking around age 11. It makes sense that they are starting to be aware of the outside world. Sometimes that can make them very anxious. How much do we protect them from what's happening out there? Realistically, they are aware of what's going on around them and they get lots of information (from home, friends, general awareness). Parents' job to help them interpret what they see and hear. It is always good to ask them what their understanding is and what they think about an event to help them frame and understand it.

Empathy is extremely important. It is probably innate, but needs to be reinforced by parents from early childhood. Kids become nastier at this time, but it is important for them to develop capacity to understand others and understand how their actions affect others.

Social—The observations from parents above are pretty accurate. This is the beginning of the shift from parent influence to peer influence. They begin to develop the concept of

“popularity”. Difficult to predict what determines where they fit into the pecking order. Take advantage of the fact that they still like being with parents. Parents need to grapple with the impact of family decisions and what that does to popularity, social order. There are good reasons not to give kids everything they want: they need to learn to delay gratification, everyone may not be able to afford every desired item or activity, etc. Kids are capable of finding commonalities with others without necessarily having all of the same things as other kids. They can learn to listen to conversations so they won’t feel “out of it” if they don’t have some game or haven’t seen some movie.

Take a look at www.common sense media.com, which helps give you some more information about what’s acceptable in the media world (tv, video games, movies) and what isn’t.

It is OK for them to negotiate, but important to understand where you are willing to give in and where you aren’t. This goes back to understanding and articulating the values of your own family.

Emotional—at this point kids are pretty well able to control themselves. They are at an age where adults (and kids) expect them to handle frustration better. We do not see temper tantrums. Exuberance and enthusiasm is common. Boy-girl interest begins to arise.

Issues/questions/concerns in parenting our 4th graders

- *Allowance.*

Rule of thumb, depending on what they have to use it for: either related to \$ per age or per grade. Use it as a teaching tool. Three avenues for it: spending money, savings, charity. It is important to learn to delay gratification. They need some guidance, but can learn to save the spending part to get what they want. It is important for kids to have chores, but they should not be related to their allowance. Children have a responsibility to help around the house. You may need family meeting to discuss what everyone’s jobs are, and consequences. Children may earn extra money for special projects beyond their regular chores.

- *Crushes.*

At the beginning of 4th grade, boys are probably not really interested in girls. As the year goes on, interest begins to percolate, usually from girls to boys. They become aware of sexual attraction. Kids with older siblings seem to get there faster because they are exposed to more. Be careful about pushing them/allowing them to get there too early. Some will have no interest well into middle school (which is normal too). Worry at this time about precociousness (but what is cute at 9 or 10 translates into dangerous territory by 12, 13). It’s all in the realm of normal, but we don’t have to encourage it. Be wary of parents who are encouraging things like boy-girl parties, dating, etc. at this age.

- *Computer/screen time and related issues.*

Different families have different rules about screen time. For this age, 1 hour a day is the outer limit. ½ hour is better. Some families do not allow screen time on school nights. A timer is a good idea, and can be built into the computer. It is very important to keep the computer where you can see it. See what they are doing for safety and just general exposure issues. Cyberbullying is a big issue, that will arise as they get involved in IMing and go to social networking sites – maybe not this year, but by fifth grade, these days. They are distant from actual event—kids don't see the impact. Teach them not to say anything online that they would not say in person. E-mail is probably not necessary for kids this age, but that will depend on the child. Parents need to know passwords of everything kids sign up for.

- *Constant negotiation. How to get kids to do things without negotiating everything.*

Kids are good at playing one parent against the other. The rule of thumb is to talk less, act more. If find yourself in a power struggle, something is wrong. Say it one time, but know what the consequences are if they don't do what you are asking. Coordinate with your spouse so you're on the same page. Talk the situation out with each other first so you can be clear with the kids.

- *Appropriate consequences.*

Try to make consequences fit the behavior. If arguing about doing something and wasting time, then be clear about your not being available when they want your time. Another option is to dock allowance. It's OK to say that you need to discuss it with spouse (buy time). Staying calm is key. If possible, work it out ahead of time so everyone understands the consequences. Try to include the kid—they will probably come up with something harsher than we would.

- *Communication with school.*

Be sensitive in communicating with school/teachers. Same concept about how things come across in writing—don't say anything you wouldn't say in person. Try to get to truth of the story. Don't believe everything that your child is saying about a discipline incident that you're called about. We try very hard to be fair and to get to all sides of the story.

There are lots of sources for information about what is going on at school: the Bel Aire and teacher websites, newsletters, special meetings, etc. It is the responsibility of parents to try to keep informed and to communicate with teachers when academic and/or behavioral expectations are unclear or you're

missing information about something. Think of school as allies; we're all in this together.