

**Fall 2010 First Grade Parent Meeting
October 1, 2010**

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Purposes of the grade level meeting:

- Paint a picture of the typical first grader to address questions like, “Is my child normal?”
- Meet other parents of first grade students and begin the process of communicating and networking with them
- Continue the partnership with school in raising healthy kids
- Explore parenting values in a safe place
- Address specific issues, questions, and concerns in parenting first graders.

Refer to Dr. Gold’s website linked to the Reed School website (Reed to Parents to Psychological Services). There are helpful articles and links under Parent Resources.

What changes do we see in our 1st graders vs. last year? (observed by parents)

Essentially, kids are aiming for mastery in four developmental areas:

- physical (relatively slow period vs. adolescence)
- cognitive
- social
- emotional

Specific things parents mentioned

- more independent (friends, clothes, food)
- more confident socially
- great academic growth
- more outspoken (little teens)
- more self-control
- more able to express emotions and talk things out
- greater need for unstructured play time
- more requests for playdates/scheduled activities
- more tired (longer school day?)
- more responsibilities (homework)
- better sense of humor - more silly
- less self-control, more emotional (likely due to holding it together all day at school - home is where they can let it go; plus tired and hungry)

Physical Development: This is a period of gradual, rather than dramatic change. Because children more and more want to do things themselves and show control and mastery it is a good time to capitalize on these desires by giving them “home responsibilities” (chores, but the word sometimes has a

negative connotation).

Note: Dr. Gold does not recommend rewarding doing homework or chores with cash. The expectation should be that children do certain things to help the family without expecting a reward. The logical consequences are that if kids help parents get things done, they may have more time to read kids an extra story or play a game. Allowances, which may be instituted when kids are about 7, are an opportunity for them to learn how to manage money (spend, save and charity).

Cognitive Development: This is a time of significant change, where kids learn to understand the concrete world. They become less egocentric, begin to be able to sort, order, understand rules, develop much more nuanced and expressive vocabulary, become more aware of other children, and even the wider world. Their cognitive growth provides the underpinning for all of the academic learning that takes place at this time (reading, writing, math, science).

Questions come up about how much 1st graders should be exposed to and learn about their world (sad stories in paper, etc)? Try to protect them a little longer if you can. Little kids do not have a sense of probability or proximity or the perspective needed to understand these stories. They need reassurance that they live in a safe place. If your child asks questions about a complicated topic, provide a short and simple answer. Even better is to ask them what they think the answer is and make any corrections. If they want more information, they'll ask.

Social Development: Children spend a lot of energy trying to master their social world, which at this age is trying to negotiate the playground, find some friends to play with, and fit in. There are many social skills that kids need to develop, including initiation (asking kids to play or joining groups), sharing, problem solving, controlling emotions, acting one's age, compromising, complimenting, etc. Many kids learn these from observing and interacting. Others need to be more directly taught.

A big issue for parents of children this age is how much to get involved in their children's social issues. If child has a social problem, just be a good listener and try to offer some strategies. At this age, generally getting an adult to help is appropriate, though a lot of time is spent in school helping children develop the skills to work out their own problems. **Resilience** is a very important quality to encourage. Something happened, so then what did you do? What else could you do? Who else could you play with? Could you try again another day? And understanding that sometimes walking away is standing up for yourself - "Do you like how she makes you feel? If not, maybe she isn't the best friend for you." Parents can help children reflect on what makes a good

friend, so that over time, s/he will make better and better choices about who to choose as a friend.

The tendency of modern parents is to be “helicopter parents,” not wanting anything bad to happen to their kids and rushing in to fix things. Obviously, if safety is a clear issue, then parents need to intervene, but in many cases kids need to figure out how to deal with their own problems. We don’t want to communicate to them that we think that they are not capable of learning how to manage their social world.

Emotional Development: We expect kids this age to manage disappointment, anger, frustration better than when they were younger. That doesn’t mean that they can’t get upset, even have a temper tantrum or “meltdown,” but they should be able to regain control within five or ten minutes. Parents can encourage them to verbalize how they are feeling using the techniques of active listening (e.g., it looks like you’re really upset/confused/hurt/frustrated..., want to tell me what happened?)

Kids need to learn that parents have emotions too (and not just anger - if all they feel is anger from you, they will tune it out). Use “I” statements with kids (I felt disappointed, I felt hurt, etc) to express what other emotions (beside anger) that you are feeling.

Note on values: Parenting values are often in conflict. It is very important to figure out what is really most important to you and stick with the consequences of those values. For example, is popularity (because lots of other kids are doing it) more important than not playing violent video games? Is independence (in executing household responsibilities) more important than efficiency or perfection (because you may have to redo or be satisfied with less than perfect)? Spouses should talk over these issues, so they can communicate in a united and consistent way about their values and the behaviors that go along with them.

Some specific questions from parents:

How to help child when someone wants to be his/her friend but doesn’t know how to do it (ends up hurting child)?

Role play how to talk to the boy and suggest a playdate to supervise their interaction more closely.

How do we handle it if we don’t like our child’s friends?

Try to understand why your child likes this kid - ask them why specifically. Try to understand why you don’t like the kid. And be able to express this to your child. “He is not respectful to me.” “I don’t like how he treats you.” “He is unable to follow the rules of our house.”

While the child is at your house, explain that he needs to follow your rules

if he wants to stay. Otherwise, he will have to go.

When talking to other child's parents, use "I" statements to minimize putting them on the defensive - "I see" or "I hear". Take approach of sharing information, as the other parent wasn't there - and if you weren't there you would want to know.

Plant seeds that may help your child see that this isn't the best friendship, "Do you like how she makes you feel?"

How do we help child control impulses?

Awareness is key - can't do much until they are aware of this

Personify their emotions: Create characters to represent their inner voices that can counteract some of the more negative ones. For example, on the negative side, there's Miss/Mr. Perfect, Miss/Mr. Worry Wart, Miss/Mr. Don't Think First. Help them develop Miss/Mr. Try Hard or Good Enough, Miss/Mr. Brave or I Can Do This, Miss/Mr. Calm Down with a voice loud enough to tone the less helpful voices down.

How to REALLY listen to our kids when they talk a lot and we are busy?

Don't let them interrupt you - tell them you want to hear what they are saying but you need 15 minutes to finish your work.

Consider turning off phone and computer for awhile.

Enjoy that they actually do talk – when kids get older they may clam up
If their stories go on and on, try to help them come to a conclusion or ask what they want from you

How to help kids handle stress (social/academic)?

Encourage them to compare themselves to themselves - not anyone else.

Point out what they can do now that they couldn't a few months ago.

Have them set attainable short term goals for themselves and support/teach them what they need to achieve those goals. Focus on effort more than results.

Kids often don't understand that they are supposed to be learning - they are not supposed to already know everything or how to do everything.

Mistakes are a sign that they are learning, trying new things and taking risks. That is a good thing - you cannot learn without some mistakes.