

Fall 2010 4th Grade Parent Meeting

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Purposes of Grade Level Parent Meetings:

- “Paint” a picture of what the average student is at each grade level
- Encourage networking and getting to know one’s children’s friends’ parents
- Address value issues
- Address questions and concerns of parents

How have the kids changed since last year? (observations by parents):

- Bigger
- More independent
- Friends have become more important,
- Can be embarrassed by parents
- More distracted
- More private, secretive
- Girl conflicts
- More responsible with homework
- Nervous energy
- Comparing their family with others
- Asking questions about the world
- More social conflict
- Sibling rivalry
- Developing interest in sex

Making sense of these observations: there are four areas of child development to consider: physical, cognitive, social, and emotional. What’s going on in each of these areas can and does affect each other and children’s behavior

1. **Physical:** This is an age of rather gradual change, though some students will begin puberty in fourth grade.

It is a time to capitalize on their increased ability to master physical tasks by making sure that they have some home responsibilities that they do to help the family out. These

responsibilities need not be tied to an allowance, but expected because the children are part of the family

This is the beginning of big variations among children in physical development. It can be a difficult time for early developing girls, who are often very sensitive about their developing bodies. This discomfort will go away as others catch up to them.

This is a time when children like to participate in organized sports, have the physical skills, can understand rules, and sustain their attention well enough to feel success. Watch out, however, for the overly competitive and critical coach, as kids this age are very sensitive to being judged by their peers.

2. **Cognitive:** Again this is an age of relatively gradual growth, where students have a reasonably good understanding of the concrete world of their daily experience. They are just beginning to become aware of the wider world and it's unsettling events.

It is increasingly difficult to shelter kids from information, whether they read it, see it, or hear it from friends or older siblings of friends. Questions may arise about suicides, the Holocaust, 9/11, wars, etc. Parent values span the entire spectrum from wanting to protect their children from the sadder, scarier side of life for as long as possible to wanting to be the ones to inform them and help them process the information.

Keep in mind that kids do not have a good sense of probability or distance, so that when a big event happens, somewhere at a great distance, they may get unnecessarily frightened that it would happen here. They also don't understand that the chances of such events happening is very small.

As children become aware of the wider world and all of its possibilities, teach them that they can have a powerful positive impact on the world. Preserve their youthful idealism and provide experiences that show them that they can make a difference.

Children this age are much better able to communicate their feelings and experiences. Parents should do everything possible to promote good communication with their kids. That means to be available WHEN kids want to talk (take advantage of the opportunity), as they may not be willing to talk on demand. Establish some structured times, like at dinner, when everyone in the family can share "highs" and "lows" of the day. When driving kids around listen to conversations in the back seat. Many kids like to talk at bedtime when their defenses are down. As kids get older you may learn more about your own child from other parents, so try to build relationships with your children's friends and encourage them to talk to their friends' parents. Remember, "it takes a village."

Fourth grade is often the time when kids become aware that their parents are not perfect and do not know everything, so don't be surprised if they jump to the conclusion that if they know more about something than you do, then you must not know anything. This can last for quite a few years, but don't stop expressing your values and imposing your rules. They really are listening.

3. **Social:** This is a time when kids' social world becomes more and more important. On the positive side, kids learn that friendships can be fluid and non-exclusive. On the other hand cliques and popularity become more important. Other characteristics include:

- Kids compare themselves to each other
- Social conflict and cattiness become more prevalent
- Privacy issues become a problem – especially given the public dissemination of information via technology.
 - There may be inappropriate e-mails, texting
 - Make sure kids know you are monitoring everything
 - Put computers in public areas at home
 - Let kids know that inappropriate or mean communications are never hidden, can always become public

4. **Emotional:** This is also an age of increased mastery of emotions.

They are getting much better at recognizing their feelings, managing their feelings, and expressing their feelings. Tantrums should be largely gone by now.

In dealing with kids' feelings and your own – learn to be an active listener; try to identify the underlying feelings which might come out as anger (for example, feeling left out, hurt, scared). Don't just respond to their anger with your own. Learn to identify your own underlying feelings, as well. Your anger may be based in worry, disappointment, fear, confusion, and hurt. Kids may be better able to hear those "softer" emotions than they hear anger, which they expect and tune out.

Some questions raised by parents:

When are cell phones age-appropriate?

Kids want to become more independent, but parents need to know if they can handle it. They don't need cell phones until they begin to go place on their own without your supervision. That often happens this year. At this time a family cell phone for making contact easy and reporting that they've arrived where they're going is sufficient. They don't need phones for texting and unlimited contact.

How can we help kids deal with teasing and meanness?

Kids are trying to figure out where they fit in socially at this age. They are often not very tactful in moving in and out of social relationships. Though we try to foster a culture of kindness and understanding at Bel Aire (through the Character Pillars and MOSAIC Program), kids can still be hurtful to each other. Fourth graders know that it's no "cool" to tattle, but if they are feeling unsafe or uncomfortable, and if they've asked someone to stop being physically or verbally mean, then they should tell an adult. If we don't know about it, we can't stop it. It is also very important to tell kids to stick up for "victims," not just stand by watching, as that gives the mean kid permission to keep on doing or saying mean things.

Kids need to know when they are being hurtful. When they say things such "you're so gay," they are old enough to know that when "gay" is used in that way it is a slur and can hurt people's feelings. You don't have to go into detailed explanations, but most kids this age have some idea what "gay" means, and that it is wrong to make fun of any group of people.

How do we handle kids' interest in sex?

You just have to get through the next year and a half as family life education is taught at the end of fifth grade. Puberty is used as a way to introduce the topic. There are good books that deal with anatomy, development, pregnancy. Some are available in our Bel Aire library or at the public library or book stores. Parents have varying comfort levels in discussing sex, but it is very important to develop good communication early, so that when the more difficult conversations arise when your children are teenagers, then you'll be able to handle them.

What about homework responsibility?

Kids in fourth grade generally understand the homework routine and can do it on their own. Make sure that they have a time, place, and materials; help them when needed, but if they really don't understand something, let the teacher know. Do not micro-manage them; allow them to make mistakes. If your standards for acceptable looking work or the quality of the work are different than the teacher's have a discussion with the teacher to give a consistent message to your child. Work with the teacher regarding consequences if homework completion is a problem. Try to avoid homework being a battleground – use school for support in developing responsibility.