

Fall 2010 Third Grade Parent Meeting
October 4, 2010

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I. **Purposes of Grade Level Parent Meetings:**

- A. Paint a picture of a “typical” child at this age.
- B. Build a network among parents and between the school and home.
- C. Encourage parents to reflect on their values in raising their kids, rather than reacting on an ad hoc basis to the challenge of the moment.
- D. Address parent concerns and questions.

II. **What Changes Have We Seen In Our Children Since 2nd Grade?**

- More independent—social responsibility
- Less attached to parents
- More self-conscious, aware of who’s noticing them
- Desire to fit into a group/be accepted
- More defiant
- Less helpful
- More aware of the world
- More talking back
- Less/More emotional control
- Stronger feelings
- More able to take in negative impressions of the world

III. **Four Areas of Child Development To Make Sense of Observations**

A. **Physical Development**

- 1. This age is relatively quiet physically.
- 2. Kids may be interested in sports, which is appropriate at this age since they can understand rules and are better able to control emotions (frustration, disappointment from losing).

3. Children are developing a mastery of physical skills. They should have responsibilities at home that they do not do for compensation, but just because they are a member of the family.
 - a. Children may be less interested in helping than at earlier ages, since they now have more competing interests. Parents can encourage contributions by showing their appreciation, explaining the positive consequences of their contributions, such as allowing more time for family activities. Parents may also want to develop checklists to aid children in remembering what tasks need to be completed.
 - b. Note potential conflict between nurturing responsibility/cooperation and efficiency. Though children are mastering physical skills, they may not be able to perform tasks as efficiently or as well as their parents would like. Parents may sometimes have to make allowances in order to encourage a sense of responsibility in their children. Parents should weigh the need for efficiency and perfection for each task.
 - c. Children do need to begin to learn to manage their time, so it is a good idea to try to let them figure out how to fit their household chores into their day. The message parents should be sending is that they expect the children to complete the tasks.
4. Giving children allowances at this age can promote three uses: (1) give children their own spending money; (2) help children learn to save money; and (3) encourage charitable giving.
 - a. Dr. Gold does not recommend linking allowances to regular household responsibilities, which they do as a member of the family. However, payment for special tasks may be appropriate.
 - b. Allowance can be used as a motivator that can be withheld if children are not performing their household tasks, however.

B. Cognitive Development

1. Children are blossoming academically.
2. Children at this age are becoming less egocentric, more aware of the world around them.
 - a. They are beginning to understand rules and consequences.

- b. They may begin to be quite competitive, especially in our community.
- c. They are beginning to see the negative aspects of the world.
 - i. The issue of how much to expose our children to is a value question, with no right answer.
 - ii. Research does show that violent games do desensitize children to violence. Be aware of what your kids are playing, and talk to other parents about what they might be playing at their houses at play dates.
 - iii. The desire to fit into groups at this age may propel kids into games or activities that do not comport with your value system.
- d. Children at this age do not have a good sense of distance or probability.
 - i. An example was raised of a child becoming fearful of eating food due to frequent news about product recalls, or of a child who was fearful that heavy rains might cause his house to slide down the hill. Children attach their anxiety to these things.
 - ii. Reassure your children; talk to them about how distant geographically an event on the news might have been, or how unlikely it is to happen to them.
 - iii. Model the behavior you would like to see your children engaging in (such as eating food that is not recalled and is safe to eat).
 - iv. Talk to children about the positive and negative “voices in their head.” Explain that the positive voices can help to keep them safe and out of trouble, while the negative voices are simply unhelpful. Characterize the voices and balance “Mr. Perfect” with “Mr. Try-hard,” or Ms. Worrywart” with “Ms. I-can-do-this.”
 - v. Parents are notorious catastrophizers—we must work on keeping our own anxieties about our children in check.
 - vi. Be the explainers/interpreters of the world for your children, based upon your own values. It is often helpful to talk to children about your own experiences.

- e. If your child does not want to engage in activities that their friends are engaging in, encourage them to use you as the “bad guy,” who prohibits them from doing it.

- f.

C. Social Development

1. Children are becoming concerned with being popular.
2. Children are beginning to sort themselves into groups.
 - a. Negotiating the social world is a difficult and complex task that can take years to learn. Skills that must be developed include how to initiate interactions, how to deal with frustration, how to share, how to resolve conflict, etc.
 - b. We often expect children to learn these skills through osmosis, but children may need more explicit instructions.
3. Parents must determine at this age when and how to become involved in the social conflict that their children experience. Dr. Gold’s suggestions in this regard:
 - a. Be a good listener. Often children simply need to vent.
 - b. Ask your child what he or she did in response and brainstorm as to other possible responses or courses of action.
 - c. If you feel your child is being scapegoated or doesn’t have friends, first ask the child’s teacher and other adults who may see your child interacting with others about what they have observed. Determine whether there are social skills that your child may be lacking that may be giving rise to the behavior. Behaviors that will not be well received by peers include:
 - i. Not acting their age/acting like a “baby”
 - ii. Invading personal space, either physically or auditorially (being too loud)
 - iii. Crying “unfair” when something does not go their way
 - iv. Copying (though this may be a sign of flattery)
 - v. Being excessively critical/putting others down
 - d. Do not be too quick to intervene on your child’s behalf—they must develop a sense of resilience.
 - e. Help your child figure out which people are good friends for them. Ask them why they want to be friends with a

particular child and how that child makes them feel when they play together.

- f. Occasionally, a situation may be beyond your child's capabilities, in which case you should contact the school or other adults to help resolve the situation.
- g. You can of course always enforce your own rules in your own house, and may decide that play dates should occur at your house.
- h.

D. Emotional Development

- 1. Children can be expected at this age to have emotional control, to handle anger and frustration and pull themselves together within a few minutes. They should not be having temper tantrums at this age.
- 2. Children should be reasonably good losers by now.
- 3. Children should be able to stay on task at school for 15-20 minutes at a time, unless they have diagnosed ADHD issues.
- 4. Children should be able to use their words, rather than their hands when angry.

IV. Parent Questions

A. What will our kids will be exposed to from the 5th graders?

- 1. Language
- 2. Discussion of sex. Children may be curious—ask them what they know and give them some information.
- 3. Teasing.
 - a. The MOSAIC program helps. Most challenging environment may be on the bus.
 - b. Encourage kids to stick up for others, contact school if it sounds like a situation is out of hand.
 - c. Don't allow yourself to think "not my kid"—all children at this age are capable of lying and being nasty. An issue of ethical development.

B. How much should parents push/facilitate friendships?

- 1. Kids differ in their need for friendship. Some are more self-contained—if they are alone at recess, ask whether they are

content. Try to determine whether the issue is one of personality or skill development.

2. Don't expect your child to be like you. Look at your child's self-concept/self-esteem.
3. If your child is shy, you may want to be more active in helping him or her develop friendships.

C. How do I promote more independence in my child?

1. Birthdays (and half-birthdays) are a good time to change rules about what children are expected to do by themselves.
2. Determine first whether it is an issue of skill deficit.
3. Although Dr. Gold does not endorse rewards for being "good," rewards can be used to encourage behavior that is difficult for a child—for example, skill-based behavior or impulse control, if that is an issue for your child.
4. If the issue is simply "laziness," determine what the consequences will be for not getting something done.

D. How do I handle competitiveness?

1. This is a particularly difficult issue in our community, which is very competitive.
2. Encourage kids to compete with themselves, rather than their peers. There will always be someone who is better than they are at any particular task. Encourage your child to set a goal for him- or herself and to figure out how they will achieve that goal. Roadblocks will teach resilience.
3. Competition is inherent in organized sports. Make sure they are having fun at the sport, and emphasize the fun and the process rather than winning.
4. Examine your own behavior and communication to ensure that your own fears and anxiety are not driving you to push your child into uber-competitive behavior.