

Fall 2011 Third Grade Parent Meeting
Dr. Allan Gold, District Psychologist
October 3, 2011

Introductions:

Purpose of Meeting: To discuss what is developmentally appropriate for each age and to paint a portrait of the average third grader. Also, it is beneficial to meet other parents in the grade level.

Various handouts and articles were explained and reviewed.

Parent Observations of How Children Have Changed Since 2nd Grade:

- More independent
- Wants to solve own social problems in school
- Wants to set own agenda
- More of a “know-it-all” attitude
- Wanting to be cool and look cool
- More oppositional
- Greater sense of responsibility and maturity
- More confident
- Feels more pressure
- Wants to be perfect
- Competitive
- More tired—parent thinking of reducing activities
- More focused on positive accomplishments
- More empathetic
- Greater sense of what it means to be part of a team or community
- More aware of where s/he is in comparison to peers

Dr Gold: many of these described characteristics are typical of this age, while some indicate how, developmentally, children are accelerating in terms of their developmental trajectory.

There are five areas of development to consider when trying to make sense of these changes:

Physical Development: This is still a period of gradual and progressive change, rather than dramatic change. Children are more capable now, which feeds their independence. They are much more capable of doing things around the house, of engaging in organized sports, etc. Their increased capability should be taken advantage of by making sure that they have some home responsibilities and the opportunity to contribute to the smooth running of the household. Dr. Gold asked how many children had home responsibilities; most parents raised hands. This is beneficial right now, to begin to help them take responsibility within the family, contribute, etc. Kids this age are still pretty compliant and want to please teachers and parents.

Cognitive Development: Children are now emerging from a very rapid period of cognitive development. They are moving away from a wholly egocentric perspective. They can now understand their concrete world well, and have a growing interest in the world around them. Awareness of how they compare to peers increases during this time. You can begin to be able to talk to them in a more adult way. For example, you can engage them in a dinner table conversation about world happenings, in a gentle way.

Social Development: Social changes are big at this age. Popularity is not a term yet, but groups are forming typically. Girls can have intense relationships and hurt feelings over the “stealing” of friends. Encourage children to know that friends cannot be stolen, and that it is healthy to have a number of different friends. Boys play in packs more often. There are a lot of rather complex social dynamics at this age. Parents have to be good listeners to determine whether their children have the ideas about how to handle difficult situations and to help them brainstorm ideas. At this age it is less appropriate to get on the phone to talk to other parents to resolve conflicts, though if the situation is serious enough (continuing harassment), then that may be necessary.

Emotional Development: We expect them here at school to manage their emotions and frustration pretty well. The need to be perfect is a big challenge in this district. The message that we as parents communicate in terms of product versus effort is key here. It's better to allow children to fail and struggle so they are able to develop resilience that will benefit them later. Parents need to set limits and to know that

our kids can't do everything. Parents were asked how many after school activities their children engage in. Most parents indicated their children were in 3-5 activities each week. Dr. Gold discussed how some kids can manage this, but others may grow tired these days. Pay attention to your child and your own family's needs. Efforts should be made to help children develop empathy, so they can begin to understand their effect on other people. If parents don't see remorse at this age, it is worrisome.

Parent Questions and Answers:

- **Q:** Should we show our child his/her report cards? **A:** Dr Gold: this is a good question, and the answer depends on the child; it's an individual choice at this point. Children should begin to see report cards in the next few years, certainly. If children are interested, be there with them to discuss it. If they don't ask, there is no need to review it now.

- **Q:** What is the best way to resolve/manage friend triangle/social issues now? **A:** Be a good listener, but also be a consultant. Ask them questions to encourage them to think about this. For example, what have you tried? Did that work? Do you have an idea for how you might change this? Encourage them to understand that part of growing up is learning how to manage hurt feelings. It is OK for more than 2 people to play together. Normalize this. If meanness is involved, it is important for children to learn who/what makes a good friend. Again, encourage reflection and ask questions. For example, How does this person make you feel when you are around him? Is he/she a good friend?

- **Q:** How to manage the return of night terrors? Is this individual to him or typical of pressures now? **A:** Can be typical of this age, as anxiety increases and cognitive awareness increases. Pay attention to the books and TV the child watches.

- **Q:** How involved should we be with homework? How much reminding is too much reminding? **A:** At this age, third graders should be adjusting to having homework, and expecting it.

Homework is a partnership with the teacher. It's important for a parent to help the child set a schedule, locate a quiet place, and be present/available while child completes it. Try to answer/teach for 5 minutes, if a child has a question. If more is required, then write a note to the teacher explaining your efforts and the child's confusion. Do not check and correct every item of a child's homework. Be more concerned that the child is following the directions of the homework and understanding the general gist of the assignment. Some children can accept this level of editing. Others will find it distressing; if they do, back off, and let the errors remain. Homework is practice, and need not be perfect.

Children need to learn now that homework ought to come first. It is recommended that all children have some brief period of down time after school to snack, relax, etc. A discussion of bed time followed, with most parents indicating 7:30-8:30 as the typical bed times. So, do not begin homework at 7:30. If the child is refusing to do their homework, it is important to ask why? Trying to counteract perfectionism can be a life-long challenge. Model making mistakes and resolving them. Rewards for homework are not recommended for typical children, but are appropriate/necessary for children with true attention difficulties. In terms of how much reminding is too much, this is an individual choice. Sometimes, after reminding twice, allowing a natural consequence to take place can be powerful (child does not do homework, s/he may be embarrassed at school, and suffer an unpleasant consequence there, such as losing recess). Let the teacher know that you're working on independence and responsibility and form a partnership, rather than get into blaming each other for incomplete or undone homework.

- **Q:** How involved should we be in helping them to manage self-care, getting dressed, etc? **A:** Parent- suggested a simple checklist has been helpful for her. Dr Gold - check lists are great, and can reduce battles.
- **Q:** What are good screen time limits? **A:** Some parents have kids who can detach easily from screens; others find it a struggle. Some parents choose to have no screen time during the week, while

others can allow it, if no battle is involved. Get used to monitoring their screen time and do use blockers. Keep the door open if they are in another room. Club Penguin and Angry Birds are popular now, but this will change. For television during the week, ½ hour each night. On weekends, an hour, maybe.

- **Q:** What is appropriate in discussing money and how much things and houses are worth? How to manage interest in/curiosity about wealth? **A:** Model how you value relationships over things. Reflect on and articulate your own values about money and possessions. Kids at this age are becoming aware of the disparities in wealth right here in our district. Kids, whatever their family situation, need to learn that they can't have everything they want when they want it. Given our current economy, this is a realistic approach to preparation for the future.
- **Q:** How to talk about your parental feelings that someone is not appropriate for your child to play with without being exclusionary? **A:** You can't decide whom they play with at school. You can choose to have the child come to your house. You get to set the rules and values in your house. If you observe that a child returns from a play date and reports negative things, or is acting out, discuss this with your child, and explain your concerns.
- **Q:** Should I expose my child to the news? **A:** You can begin to do this, to introduce topics from the wider world in a sheltered/filtered way. Encourage them to feel safe, but it is also appropriate for them to begin to ponder the world around them. Nightly news viewing is not recommended. There is too much that is scary and out of their (and our) control. If you can identify positive news items, discuss those. Sports is usually a pretty safe topic to use to introduce them to the newspaper.