

Fall 2011 First Grade Level Parent Meeting

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Philosophy: Parenting is one of the hardest jobs in the world! Partnerships with schools help raise the most well balanced kids.

The objectives of these grade-level parent talks:

- 1) Understand the range of “normal” in this age group
- 2) An opportunity to network so that parents can meet other parents of children and develop relationships and communication with them.
- 3) Explore and share values of raising children

Handouts are available:

- Vision of a Reed Union Graduate- characteristics we would like to see our 8th graders demonstrate when they graduate
- “How to Land Your Kid in Therapy” from the Atlantic Monthly (8/11)
- Profile of a First Grader
- Others are on the website

Portrait of a Child in 1st Grade

Changes in your child since Kindergarten. What have you noticed? (Parent comments)

- Excited about coming to school
- More non-compliance at home
- More grown up in interests
- Taking more initiative with learning
- Great focus on what is fair
- Independence- doesn't want help with anything
- Likes to make decisions
- Comparing self to others
- More afraid of making mistakes and less creative
- More easily hurt and sensitive
- Can feel left out- more socially aware
- Less affectionate in public

What happens to lead to these behaviors? There is a lot of change!

There are five aspects of development to consider (in all children): Physical, Cognitive, Social, Emotional, Moral.

The task of children is to develop mastery in the first four of these areas and to develop a strong sense of what is right and wrong in the fifth.

Physically: There is gradual change in first grade. Children are encouraged to have some sort of home responsibility as a result of their increase in fine motor skills and general physical ability. They are improving in their large-muscle skills, such as learning ball skills and riding a bike. Physically, the focus should be on non-competitive sports, learning skills and having fun.

Cognitively: The cognitive area has the greatest amount of change at this age. Children are changing from being solely egocentric to understanding the rules of the world. They are learning about classification, sorting, and ordering. They are becoming less egocentric and more socially aware. Not only do they order concrete objects, but begin to order and rank each other. They become aware of mistakes, and become more sensitive to errors. They are aware of what other people are thinking. This burst in cognitive development often makes learning and mastery of new skills very exciting to children this age.

Socially: Because of changes in cognition, they are no longer impervious to what other people think of them. Children who are 6 and 7 develop a lot of sensitivity to friendships and how others treat them. This can be especially true of girls. They acquire “best” friends and then can feel very hurt when that friend wants to expand her friendship and play with someone else (all perfectly normal). In about 3-4th grade, the children start realizing that friendship can be flexible and more inclusive. Boys seem to run in a “pack” and have more flexible friendships, though they can also be sensitive about “triangles.”

Children sometimes state that they feel left out. They are just learning how to figure out friendships.

For adults:

Parents can coach children to think of the quality of their friendships “What do you think about this friend?” We need to encourage children to think about what makes a good friend? Parents can coach children to reflect and become aware of how they feel when they are with different children. Gradually children learn that they can have a “talk with” friend, a board game friend, a tetherball friend, etc.

Emotionally: Children are gradually changing and are learning to master emotions. Children have a longer day and have more structure in school compared to kindergarten.

How does your child handle anger?

What is their attention like?

How do they handle disappointment?

Children will get angry or emotional, or even have the occasional tantrum, but we can expect them to recover in a relatively short amount of time.

They are learning how to handle their emotions. Parents should be great listeners and observers.

“It looks like you’re really angry. Tell me about that...” Expand your child’s emotional vocabulary. “I see that you were really frustrated when...”

If we teach children to nuance their emotional vocabulary (e.g. I feel frustrated, hurt, confused) children will learn to communicate more clearly.

Moral: Children don’t make a distinction between rules and moral imperatives. Parents have to communicate that there is a difference between rules and morality. Rules are important for social structure. Morals are more akin to the Character Pillars (Caring, Responsibility, Respect, Fairness, Trustworthiness, Citizenship)

It’s important that children show empathy and remorse. It is important that parents get children to be metacognitive about these feelings. Children need to be coached through these skills if they are not actually displaying remorse and empathy.

Parents can scaffold the conversation if children do not show empathy or remorse. “In our house, when we accidentally ____, we apologize. We think about how the other child would feel. We say we are sorry and show we mean it by our tone of voice, and we don’t do it again.”

Questions, Issues, Concerns in Parenting our 1st Graders

- How do we handle perfectionism?
 - Children want to master their areas of development. Their role models are often adults, especially if they are the eldest child in the family. This can be a life-long struggle to master this, but it’s important how parents model. How do we model how we make mistakes? Think about how to phrase and explain your own mistakes. “We all make mistakes. I love you even if you make mistakes.” Perceptions are very powerful. A lot of children feel that the product is more important than the process or effort. What part of this is hard? Guide children on how to use mistakes for learning.
 - Good voices and Bad voices in our heads.
 - Little Ms./Mr. Perfect vs. Ms./Mr. I-try-hard
Children at this age can begin to personify the internal voices and externalize them. They can begin to see how they can quiet down that voice in their head.
 - If they are over dramatizing - they need to be shown perspective. Sometimes it takes a moment for children to shift their lens on how they view their drama. How bad/important is it really?

- How do we interpret fairness?
 - Children at this age learn about rules and become fixated on the rules. They learn later that rules can be flexible (9-10 years old). Rules and fairness are very important to them at 6 and 7 years old.
 - With siblings- sometimes there is non-fairness. Sometimes, there are privileges associated with age.
 - What is fair, as a parent, is individualized to the child. Children have to learn that fairness is not that everyone gets to do the same thing all the time.
 - Resilience is important. Children should be able to bounce back from disappointment. Can they pick themselves back up? Fairness is tied into resilience. We can improve their resilience through reflection and conversation. Point out their successes... “I was really proud of you when you_____. Even though it was disappointing and upsetting, you _____.”
 - What builds self-esteem is situational- survival and acknowledgement of survival. “This situation was tough, and I got through it.”

- How do we channel competitiveness?
 - Children can get pressured easily.
 - Sometimes they don’t understand differentiation of academic needs. Sometimes they can receive feedback more easily from the teacher than they can from the parent. Emphasize that the important part is that you show effort. This is something that your child’s teacher can support as well.
 - Sometimes children need to give a direct social lesson on bragging. When you brag, this is how children might see you.
 - Children can understand this concept through role-playing. How would you feel in this situation?

- Boys and crying in public
 - Suggestion to read Raising Cain and/or Real Boys
 - Sometimes boys are put into boxes. It is important for boys to show their emotions.
 - We do want to protect our children from social stigma, but sometimes when we stop them from doing what they need to do, we might cause more harm than good.
 - If children are embarrassed of their tears, it’s important to understand why they are embarrassed of the tears. This is part of the emotional process of growing.
 - If the tears are about real and painful (physical or emotional) events, then communicating that crying is “sissy” or like a girl, or that they should be tough, is unfair and damaging. If the tears are excessive reactions to relatively minor events, then boys (and girls) will learn to control that, generally through peer pressure. Discussion of what the tears are saying

might help identify the reasons for the tears and the event can be put in better perspective.

- Homework refusal
 - A lot of times, boys just want to play after school. By around 3rd to 4th grade, they understand the routine and understand the role of homework.
 - Spread out the homework over the week.
 - Where is the resistance coming from?
 - This is in the range of normal
 - Is it too hard?
 - Motor skills?
 - Attention span after a long day at school?
 - For just not wanting to do what they are perfectly capable of doing, there can be consequences at home, or even better, at school. Communicate with your child's teacher that there is a level of struggle and the teacher will work with you to get over the resistance or impose a consequence that is meaningful (such as loss of recess).
 - If the work is too difficult or the writing is too hard, then the teacher needs to know and homework can be modified or adjusted. If the child seems not to understand a skill, then let the teacher know that the child needs reteaching.
 - Try to find the optimal time for homework. Most kids after a long day need some down time and a snack before attempting homework. Starting too late is also not a good idea.