

Fourth Grade Parent Meeting
October 9, 2012

Dr. Allan Gold, District Psychologist

I. Introduction:

Purposes of the grade level meeting:

- identify normal developmental characteristics for children this age
 - network with parents of peers
 - discuss issues in parenting and related values
 - handouts (mostly also available on the Psychologists website – linked to Bel Aire website):
1. Vision of Reed District Graduate: 5 areas of children's progress; keep on your refrigerator and evaluate progress periodically
 2. Restorative Practices – an alternative to traditional punishment:
 - a. Started at Del Mar
 - b. Different approach to punishment & consequences
 - c. Suggestions as to how to deal w/ kids behavior: ask questions – what happened? what were you thinking? what was the impact of what you did on _____? what are you going to do to fix this?
 3. Parenting issues: enabling, developmental assets; communications; anger...

Suggestion: read Madeline Levine's new book: Teach your Children Well

II. Changes in our fourth graders since last year (parent observations):

- a. More independent, responsible, mature
- b. Embracing responsibility – They need a chance to try.
- c. Better about homework
- d. More boy-girl awareness
- e. More complex questions
- f. More capable of negotiating technology
- g. Girls are much more socially aware
- h. Word "popular" starts appearing

III. Five Areas of Development – at this time change in all areas is fairly gradual:

- a. Physical development: They are now getting quite physically capable. It is appropriate for them to get involved in organized sports; it is important that they have home responsibilities/chores, and are appreciated for contributing to the functioning of the house. They do not need to be paid allowances for some chores; those should just be expected.
- b. Cognitive development: They have completed the transition to understanding the concrete world, understanding rules, sorting, ordering, etc.. They are beginning to think beyond themselves; thinking more abstractly is just starting. They are able to handle increasing academic demands. An issue is how much of news to filter. They are becoming old

enough to be exposed to the wider world, but news still needs to be filtered by parents, as kids don't yet have a good perspective on how likely or unlikely events are to happen to them. Encourage kids' interest in current events that might involve science, geography, politics, without exposing them to violence.

- c. Social development: Their social realm is becoming more complex; there is more girl drama; cliques develop; "popular" rears its ugly head; hierarchy starts developing (in athletics, social realm); kids are trying to fit in more consciously.
 - a. "Restorative" approach when kids are mean to other kids. Ask such questions as:
 - i. what happened,
 - ii. what were you thinking,
 - iii. what was the impact of what you did on the other kids (doesn't include consequences); it's both control & support (build empathy and make it better);
 - iv. what can you do to fix it?
- d. Emotional development: Most kids can manage their emotions pretty well by this age. That is, they can handle anger, frustration, disappointment reasonably well. Some kids need help in dealing with these strong emotions and not overreacting to annoyances as if they were catastrophes. Some kids with perfectionistic tendencies can be very hard on themselves if they're not first or the best at something (or everything). Parents need to model calm handling of their own mistakes and frustrations.
- e. Moral development:
Kids are still reacting on a "don't do this because I don't want to get in trouble" model, but they are capable of taking others' points of view and expressing empathy. As stated above, they need to be thinking about the impact of their actions on others.

Some important issues and questions:

Technology is presenting the most significant challenge to 21st century parents and raises new moral issues.

MONITOR TECHNOLOGY: Manage smart phones, if they have them (parent consensus was that kids this age do not need smart phones – and may not even through middle school); monitor what they're doing on the computer; monitor images that they see on the media, including how women and men are stereotypically and unrealistically portrayed; the home computer should be in a public place. Plan to have frequent discussions about media safety, cyber ethics, etc. "Common Sense Media" is a good site re. advising kids and parents on media use. Kids don't understand "moderation" – they're very black and white. It's sometimes easier to say: "all or nothing." Don't be afraid to set limits and hold to them.

Curiosity re. Sex/how babies are made:

Ask child first what they know about the subject.

Talk about the physiology of sex & making babies.
Good place to start: how the body starts changing..

Self-Esteem: How to develop or encourage self-esteem:

Self esteem develops not by just being told that children are wonderful and special. Self-esteem develops from seeing the results of effort, sometimes even just from surviving challenges that they (and we) think that we might not make it through.

Recall prior experiences involving effort – “remembering the journey”

Relate to how they felt &/or dealt w/ another experience, when they were challenged.

Tell them not to give their power away, particularly to other children who may put them down; self-esteem comes from self-advocacy – sticking up for yourself.
“If you don’t like it: “tough”

If they feel inadequate or unwilling to try, talk about “what are you afraid of?”
(e.g, skills) Next: How are you going to handle it?

The best way to enhance self-esteem is to do something for someone else. Helping someone else is very empowering, demonstrating that one has the ability to do some good for someone else. It takes the emphasis off one’s own skill weaknesses (we all have them) and on one’s inherent capacity for good.