

Third Grade Parent Meeting  
October 2, 2012

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**Purposes of these meetings:**

- Create a developmental profile of children this age
- Continue the partnership between with parents to help guide and support our children
- Promote parent networking to increase comfort with communication and to determine what are common practices among parents
- Prepare for dealing with issues before they happen; opportunity to discuss and be clear on personal values that guide our parenting and decision making- without our emotions effecting out decisions

Handouts include the Vision of the Reed District graduate: There are five goal areas of development. Post these on the refrigerator to keep them in mind. They develop slowly, but it is important to monitor your child's progress. Teachers will help evaluate the status of your child. Right now they are guidelines, but it is important to evaluate such character traits as self-confidence, resilience, integrity, for example, and identify ways to address lack of development in these areas.

**Changes in our 3rd graders since last year (observed by parents):**

- Cares more about behavior
- Takes more responsibility
- More mature and more responsibility and more stubborn
- More easy going with the little things
- More aware of others opinions of them
- They care about who likes them; they want more to fit in
- How they identify themselves is changing - friends , interests are changing

**Five areas of development:**

Considering five areas of development can help frame and make sense of these observations. The goal of children is to gain mastery in all of these areas.

Depending on the age of the child some areas are in a phase of gradual or more rapid change. The more of the areas changing rapidly, the harder it is for both kids and their parents. Third grade is a time of gradual change in all of the areas, though social development shows the most change.

**Physical development** – They are more capable physically, though they are growing gradually. They are more able to engage in organized sports and they want to show their increased skills. Even though kids may engage in competitive sports, it is important for parents to insure that they are having fun. Their self-esteem is

still developing and can be damaged by overly competitive sports and overly critical coaches.

Because they are more capable they can assume more responsibility around the house. Take advantage of their desire to contribute and help by making sure that they have some home responsibilities (“chores”). Parents should appreciate their contributions, not tie at least some responsibilities to an allowance, and show that by contributing to the working of the home, there are positive benefits, like extra time to do something fun with a parent. Parents need to confront the conflicting values of perfection vs. developing responsibility. Kids will not do jobs perfectly, but what is more important – learning to take responsibility or doing a job flawlessly?

**Cognitive development** – They have completed the stage of rapid cognitive growth from ages 5 to 7. They can now better understand the concrete world around them. Self-perception is growing. They are beginning to understand their own ability, defining who they are. They understand that rules can be modified; not everything is hard and fast. Some are beginning to be aware of the wider world and may begin to ask questions about current events and information they are exposed to on TV, radio, and even the internet. Give them short direct answers to their questions. If they want to know more, they’ll ask. Their increase in cognitive abilities shows up directly in the increased demands in school, as well, but they mostly are capable of meeting these increased academic demands.

**Social development** - This is an area of increasing complexity. Children’s social relationships at third grade often entail a lot of drama, particularly with girls. They haven’t quite discovered that they can have more than one friend and feelings are often hurt by jealousy, when one really good friend wants to expand her circle and her good/best friend feels rejected. Gradually they will learn that friends don’t have to be glued together, but it takes time. This is the time when parents can begin to make the shift from “administrator” to “consultant.” The consultant is a good listener, will ask probing questions, and help the “client” choose an appropriate action to resolve a problem. It is important for parents to begin to get their kids to reflect on what makes a good friend. If they don’t feel good most of the time when they’re with a particular child, then maybe they need to seek someone else to play with.

Though boys can have similar problems, for the most part they learn early on to hang out in groups and their feelings get hurt less by fluctuating friendships.

In general kids are now trying to fit into a group. They want to be liked by everyone. Parents should encourage more play dates with an assortment of kids. They need to learn to play with a lot of kids. Social interaction promotes both problem solving and resilience. That is why over-structuring children’s “free” time is not good. They need to engage in unstructured social interaction to fully master the social world.

**Emotional development** – Children this age can manage their emotions better. Their attention spans are growing so they can attend to school tasks and homework for a half hour at a time. While they still experience frustration, disappointment, and anger, we do not expect temper tantrums. We see children this age being more reflective and responsible, though not consistently.

**Moral development** – This is an area of development that takes at least to adolescence to move from not doing something simply so as not to get in trouble. That doesn't mean that they don't know right from wrong or that they are incapable of empathy. They certainly can empathize with other people. That is why restorative practices is a good way to approach misbehavior (check out "restorative practices" on google). This is a method of combining support for growth with accountability. Children need to learn to consider the impact of their actions on others, including parents, and to consider how to "fix" their mistakes and misbehaviors.

Lying still exists and will actually increase, as kids want to avoid consequences. Parents will need to introduce the concept of trust. As kids get older they want more privileges, but they have to demonstrate trust, and have the opportunities to do so. That means some increased independence. The question arises as to what children this age are ready for. Parents need to go with their "gut" as to whether their child is ready for more independence. There is no fixed age in California for when you can leave children home alone, though 12 is a good rule of thumb. Some children can be trusted to behave and be responsible at 8 and others not for a long, long time. Their trustworthiness can be measured by how responsible they are about homework, chores, admitting mistakes, and telling the truth.

### **Issues and Questions raised by parents:**

*How do we build their confidence?*

Children and all of us build confidence through effort. If we try and practice, we can get better (though maybe not the best).

Kids are present centered right now, but we can help them reflect on times when they have learned something or gotten better with practice and effort. They can build resilience by recognizing that something was hard, but they did it.

*How can we help children (and ourselves) learn not to "catastrophize" – overreact to events that are annoying, but not catastrophes?*

We can help kids learn perspective. Teach them 1 to 10 scales (first with things like preferences and feelings). Then have them think of the worst things that can happen to them or someone they love (usually they'll say "dying.") Those are "10" events. So then how bad is it that you lost the soccer game, you missed a few spelling words, had your friend play with someone else. Don't deny their feelings of sadness or disappointment, but don't let them turn it into a disaster. We're much

more capable of problem solving when we're not overwhelmed with a situation  
Don't make a 4 into a 10; parents need to be reminded about this as well.

*What do we do to give kids confidence about academic subjects?*

Lots of practice. Tutoring can be helpful for less able kids who need more explanation, but services are available at school, so talk to their teacher first. Point out their progress to them; they may not notice it themselves.

*What are issues around technology and how do we prevent or delay negative consequences of use of technology?*

This is the most difficult challenge for parents of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Now is the time to deal with the prospects of addiction to computers, inappropriate use of computers, lack of desire for social interaction. There should be clear limits to using the computer. At this age an hour a day is probably too much time to spent on the computer (not including homework). The consensus among parents is that 30 minutes is enough. Some parents have a "no computer on a school night" rule. Kids tend to be black and white about many issues, so it may be easier to just say "no." Watch for growing addiction to the computer. If kids can get off with a single request after a five minute warning, then that is a good sign. If a battle starts to ensue and a half hour turns into an hour, then there is the possibility (even likelihood) of present or future addiction. This tends to be more true of boys and gaming. In any case the computer should not be in their room, but in a public place. Games they play now are pretty innocent, but that can change fast. Be clear that you are watching what they do and when they want email accounts, make sure you know their passwords. Learn about Common Sense Media, so you can educate yourselves about appropriate computer use.

*How do we deal with talking back, sassiness?*

This is simply disrespectful. If parents are going to pick battles, and they have to, this is one that they should be consistent about not allowing. Parents should be clear on the consequences for disrespect. Remember that you owe them food, clothing, shelter, and love, but not everything they want. You are not their slaves. If they don't act respectfully, then they should get everything they want. This is not to say that they can't have strong feelings, even anger, but sarcasm, rolling eyes, "I hate you" are not acceptable. Teach them how to reword their emotions. Use restorative practices to get them to think about the impact of their words or actions are on you? How would they feel if someone spoke to them that way? Sometimes you can use humor to defuse situations by suggesting that they retake the "movie" and try again. If there are two parents in the home, then be clear on holding fast to rules of respect and agree on consequences, which would be some loss of privilege. Set out the rules before the incident happens not in the heat of a discussion. Make sure they have a chance to make things right again, too. Let them come up with ways to do this. Just saying "sorry" isn't enough; they have to show they mean it by not repeating the behavior.

*How do we help then deal with inequities in wealth in our community?*

This is a fact of life. We always look up – someone is wealthier, better looking, smarter, more talented. Kids this age are not too young to be dealt a little bit of reality, that we are all different, and, while we may feel underprivileged, there is always someone worse off than we are. Take them to San Francisco, to a homeless shelter, show them pictures of kids in other parts of the world. Teach that happiness comes from within, from the power that comes from making a positive difference in someone else's life. As adults we need to model this as well. While they are young for independent community service, it might be good to check out family volunteer opportunities and do charitable work together as a family. This can even be built into an allowance: "play money, savings, and charity."

Book suggestion: Teach your children Well, by Madeline Levine. This discusses what parenting challenges to expect at different ages, and suggestions for parenting do's and don'ts

Also suggested by a parent: Raising happiness -  
[http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/raising\\_happiness](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/raising_happiness)