

Fall 2013 First Grade Level Parent Meeting
Dr. Allan Gold, Psychologist, Dr. Maya Van Putten, Psychologist
Elaine Hoover, 1st grade team leader
October 23, 2013

Dr. Gold was introduced – he has been in the district 38 years and works at Bel Aire and Del Mar. Dr. Maya Van Putten was introduced. She works at Reed on Tuesday, Wednesdays and Thursday.

Dr. Gold: Parenting is the hardest job in the world. There is a partnership between school and home. This meeting is important so parents can get to know other 1st grade parents in the community and share information about their children.

There is a big range of normal at this age group. All kids are different and it is important to get a sense of what 1st graders are like.

Dr. Gold has a variety of handouts:

1. Profile of a 1st grader
2. Vision of the Reed District Graduate
3. Advice from parents of 8th graders to Reed School parents
4. Developmental assets of children
5. Restorative parenting
6. Information sheets on cooperation on chores, boosting self-confidence, etc.
7. Articles on parenting

Dr. Gold asked parents to think how our 1st grade children have changed from when they were starting Kindergarten a year ago.

Parent Observations:

Kids are reading now
More independent (parents dropping off instead of walking in)
Gross motor skill development
More confident
Better sense of responsibility
More social and developing more friends
More communicative, reflective

Dr. Gold: How do we make sense of these changes?

5 areas of child development:

1. **Physical:** Kids are changing gradually. Gross motor skills are getting better. They develop more confidence and independence from this. It is important to take advantage of their desire to show mastery by having them contribute

to the household. It is a great time for children to have home responsibilities (chores) because they are more capable of handling them. Parents will need to be both patient and tolerant of imperfection, but it is more important to instill a sense of responsibility in kids, and to appreciate them for their helpful contributions.

2. **Social:** This area is changing relatively rapidly at this time. Kids are branching out and making new friends. It is not necessary to have a best friend, but they need to develop positive social skills. Social relationships are complex and some kids need to be taught these skills like math or reading. We want them to be able to approach someone to play – if you are shy, it may be hard to do this. A group situation may be difficult as well. Other skills to develop: give a compliment, compromise and sharing, resolving conflict and expressing emotion. There are a lot of don'ts they have to learn (don't invade space, don't be too loud, etc.). Kids also need to learn to act their age with peers – not too old or young. Kids need down time and unstructured time to play. Kids need to just have playdates in addition to structured activities. Kids learn social skills from these playdates. Can they resolve fights, agree upon a game to play, etc. ?
3. **Cognitive:** This is a time of rapid change. Between ages 5 and 7 kids change from egocentric to being aware of others and can understand rules, order, categories. This underlies what they are learning academically. Cognitive development affects their ability to communicate – as kids get older, they can reveal more details on their day, etc. Their increased awareness of others can also have a negative effect: they get competitive and are more aware of others people's status. They can see who is good at what and kids may tend to think less of themselves. Dr. Gold said it is important to emphasize that everyone is different – the important thing is practice and children should learn to compare to themselves to themselves, not others. Example: you could not read this two months ago and now you can! You want kids to learn the results of effort. You want to try and quell competition and parents need to do the same thing.

If teachers don't see progress in an area, they will let you know if there is an issue.

4. **Emotional development:** This is an area of gradual change. We want them to be able to control their attention (20-30 minutes of a focused activity in 1st grade in school). We want them to gradually be better at handling disappointment, anger, and frustration. It is more likely that kids can hold it together at school, but will let it out at home. We expect them to work hard, play intensely, and they may have to lose their self-control sometime. You have to know what is going to calm them down during this time. We have a generation of parents who do not want our children to be upset, however we

need kids to be able to show resilience. We need to teach kids how to deal with disappointment.

5. **Moral development:** This is an area of little change. Kids now: “I am not going to do it so I do not get into trouble”. That does not mean that they can’t feel empathy, because they are capable of empathy now. If they do something wrong, they need to understand the effect of their actions on others, including parents. They need to develop a vocabulary of feelings and parents can model that by expressing their own feelings. While all children this age may not be able to take another’s position yet, they should be asked, “how would you feel if someone did that to you?” All kids lie; at this time they may tell stories that are self-aggrandizing or exaggerated. Peers will generally challenge that eventually. More important to address are lies to get out of taking responsibility for actions. Parents need to let kids know that lying prevents trust from building (even though they don’t fully understand that concept yet). Most kids can begin to understand that if caught in a lie, their consequences will be more severe than if they tell the truth about their actions.

In all of these areas it is important to recognize that there is a very wide range of “normal.” Some kids change and develop more rapidly than others during this time period, so don’t worry if some skills are developing more slowly. Always consult your child’s teacher first to see if there are legitimate concerns in any of these areas.

Questions from parents

One parent was concerned about helping children to deal with disappointment. It is important to strengthen the “disappointment muscle” and teach children that disappointment is a part of daily life.

Another question was about children at this age being interested in having a boyfriend/girlfriend. It’s not too early to talk about private parts. Kids are going to be curious. It is important to communicate that they must feel and be safe.

Also talk about what is appropriate at school – and inappropriate.

Another suggestion was replacement therapy – it’s not appropriate to kiss at school –but you could hold hands. You can tell them that kissing is for family members, not other kids at this time. Don’t demonize natural curiosity. Kids need simple explanations at this point; give them just a little information and if they want more, they’ll ask. Follow the lead of the child.

One parent was looking for tools to help children learn how to compromise. You can generate opportunities in your family – and point out to the kids that you are compromising. Going out to dinner would be an easy one to model for your child. “Daddy chose where to go to dinner this week – I’m disappointed because I wanted to go somewhere else, but I am compromising. That’s what you do in families.”

Another parent asked about how to help child strengthen their self esteem.
(There is a handout about this – also on the Psychological Services website for Reed School)

- praise effort --we feel better about ourselves when we face a challenge and get through it
- praise good choices
- praise being a good person
- try not to tie all feelings of self-worth to something child is producing

Dr. Gold asked about how parents are dealing with the electronic world
If this isn't a problem yet , it may very well become one.

At this age it is recommended that parents use a timer, because it can be very difficult to regulate computer time. If getting your child to give up computers is difficult they might be too immature to handle the privilege. It is very easy for kids to become addicted to computers. If trying to get them off results in a battle, then that is a sign that they could be getting addicted and it might be better to have a “no computer play time” rule on school nights and a clear time limit on weekends. There was a recent article in the *Atlantic* that stated negative effects of screen time on children.

Think about setting limits and rules – and stick to those limits and rules.

Children should really be playing at this stage. Boredom is not a bad thing.
You want children to be interactive with their outside world

So much of parenting is or should be based on values and goals. If a difficult situation comes up you will have your value and goals to fall back on, so take some quiet time to figure out what is really important to you and your family in raising your children and if their actions run counter to those values, then you'll know that you'll need to address those actions in a clear, firm way.