

Fall 2015 Third Grade Level Parent Meeting
September 17, 2015
Dr. Allan Gold, Psychologist

PURPOSE OF GRADE LEVEL PARENT MEETINGS

- Learn what's developmentally appropriate for kids this age
- Parents get to know each other – communication among parents is more critical as students get older
 - this is an opportunity to share ideas/experiences
 - parenting can be lonely; we're all in the parenting job together

CHANGES IN OUR THIRD GRADERS SINCE A YEAR AGO (parent observations)

- More Independence
 - Logical reasoning
 - More stubborn, wanting to impose opinions
 - More pull toward friends than parents
 - More push-back – not as agreeable
 - Worry about report card/anxiety
 - Curiosity toward the world
 - More concerned about how they're perceived
 - Rollercoaster of emotions
- Kids these days act older than their age, compared to kids 20 years ago - "acting more like teenagers"

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

Physical – this is a time of relative quiet – growth is fairly steady, but developing more physical capabilities. Children can now participate in organized sports. They are more capable of doing tasks around the house. They're actually capable of doing things: Making bed, clearing the table/setting the table, cooking (supervised), helping with pets. It is VERY important for kids to have some responsibilities – they need to understand they're part of a home and need to contribute and parents need to be appreciative of their children's contributions.

Sports – competitive sports can be too intense for children this age. Participation needs to be more fun/recreational, developing team work, good sportspersonship, and skills, rather than winning.

Cognitive – it's a time of relative stability after what's occurred from ages 5-7. During that time the brain has made a huge leap – from not understanding the concrete world to be able to understand the logic of rules, order, classifying, all of the underpinnings of the academics they are learning in school. Younger kids tend to be egocentric, but kids this age understand and are aware of other people's feelings. They get good at "rating" themselves so what's at risk is self-esteem. It is important

to help them develop a differentiated sense of themselves, which they are beginning to be capable of doing. They don't have to see themselves as all good or all bad, but better at some skills than others. It is critical to emphasize effort, so that they understand that with practice they can get better at everything they want to.

Part of their cognitive development is that they are much better at understanding rules. However, they then tend to fixate on fairness. They are just learning about cause and effect, which included understanding the consequences of their behavior. Parents will need to help them make those connections, both the effects of their behavior on others and specific consequences.

They are beginning to have more curiosity about the world, but the hardest thing about that is how to manage their access to information. It won't take long for kids to be exposed to "scary" information in the world. Parents have to be very careful about what kids get exposed to because there is lots of anxiety in kids – they are relatively easily made afraid by what they hear because they're not good at processing information. Gradual exposure to news is wise. **"They don't have a sense of probability,"** that is, they might see or hear about a very scary event, but not understand that it's very far away or very unlikely to happen.

Social – This is a time for lots of change, particularly with girls and dramas of social life! The pull to friends is important – it's not that they're ignoring parents, parents still a very important element – but friends are becoming more important. Girls have more trouble with social relationships from mid 2nd through 3rd grades.

Starting now the role of parents as **administrator** (telling kids what to do) very gradually moves towards that of **consultant** (good listener, asks good questions, helps figure out solutions to problems, and kids will more and more resist being told what to do). From here on out people are trying to figure out who is a good friend/what makes a good friend. Girls love to process experiences. Boys tend to be more matter of fact – they yell it out and it's over, whereas with girls it lingers. Social relationships and problems are very good situations for parents to be consultants, as the situation doesn't directly involve or impact them (the parents). Parents can help their children sort out their feelings about other kids, get them to reflect on what makes a good friend, and come up with actions or responses to uncomfortable situations.

It is important to establish early on, that parents want to know their friends. Friends can come over, but not send kids to other people's homes where parents' values are not aligned with yours, or where you're uncomfortable about adequate supervision or safety. You can't legislate whom your kids want to associate with, but you can supervise and be knowledgeable.

Children this age increasingly want to be like everyone else – articles of clothing, electronic gadgets. Parents have to decide what's okay in terms of privilege, dependence and responsibility.

Cell phones are useful once kids are more independent.

Building trust is a big consideration – parents want to be assured that they can handle that responsibility. How to kids build trust? They need to show respect, take increasing responsibility for their school work, home task, contacting parents when they go out to a friend's house, being home on time. All of these are indicators of trustworthiness.

Emotional – Children this age should have more control over their emotions. We expect kids to manage anger reasonably well (doesn't mean they won't cry or get upset); they usually don't have temper tantrums. They can hold their attention for 20 minutes to do work. When playing a game and they lose – they can be frustrated and disappointed, but they shouldn't be super angry. They are developing ability to express their emotions verbally with increasingly accurate vocabulary. Parents can help with this by reflecting what emotions they are observing: "Jimmy you seem very upset/frustrated" ... build their vocabulary and help them understand their feelings.

If the anger is directed at parents: back-out and say we need to take a break. I'm feeling really disrespected now and I'm not going to talk to you. (link to previous talks/articles on website). Use "I" statements. I'm feeling really upset. I'm feeling really disrespected. Anger is a hard emotion, but there are softer emotions – we should identify and express our softer emotions (worry, confusion, disappointment, hurt) which usually underlie anger. Kids and parents are more likely to listen to softer emotions. These days many **parents are trying to be their kids' friends and they let their kids treat them poorly. Respect is one value that should not be compromised.**

Anxiety/stress are much more rampant these days. We live in a very competitive community. Be very thoughtful of message you're sending kids – that problems are solvable. Talk to kids about "**internal voices**" good and bad. A good voice is one that keeps you safe and out of trouble. A bad voice will either get you in trouble or make us feel bad: Mr/Miss. Perfect and Mr./Miss Worry Wart make us feel either that we can't do anything right and we're no good or scare us and have us so worried that we can't function well and take healthy risks. Those voices need to be toned down and challenged by Mr./Miss Good Enough/ Encouraging or Mr./Miss I Can Handle This (or any other names the kids want to give to the more helpful voices).

Another technique is to teach kids perspective! Have them use a 1-10 scale for specific foods or activities (how much they like or dislike) e.g. broccoli, reading, baseball, getting nervous speaking in front of the class. Then ask "what's the worst thing you think can happen to you or someone you love?" Most will say "die." That's a 1 on the scale of events (1 is awful, 10 is wonderful.) Then ask them to rate an event that their very upset about – losing a game, making a mistake on math homework, having a friend call them something mean. Those are annoying, frustrating, disappointing, maybe 4s or 5s, but not 1s. Hopefully they can use this

technique to help them gain perspective. Parents can use this, too, as parents often catastrophize about events (their own and their children's).

Enabling our children –Kids need to learn consequences. Or they need to feel shame for things they've done to help them understand the consequences of their actions. Parents need to let their kids fail, feel shame, or disappointment in order to learn from their mistakes. This is how they become resilient. It is not the job of parents to rescue their children from every mistake, failure or disappointment. It is often hard to step back, but increasingly children interact with other systems than the home, particularly school and extracurricular activities, where parents can't control everything that happens. Blaming other systems, particularly if you know they have your child's best interest at heart doesn't help.

Moral – Moral understanding takes a long time to develop. Kids act "morally" usually because they just don't want to get in trouble at this age. However, they need to learn empathy and consequences and are capable of doing so. There is a distinction between rules and moral imperatives: Rules keep life organized; moral imperatives related to how others are treated and if someone is being hurt physically or emotionally. Restorative Parenting is a technique where children are not simply punished for misbehavior, but are asked to reflect on the effects of their behavior, how the other person felt, promoting the ability to empathize with other people. The crucial part is how do you make this right? Having them say they're sorry, losing privileges are part of the process, but how do you make it right because you don't want them to think they're bad people – that they can never do anything right. Undoing negative self-esteem is very hard. Kids are pretty creative – they can write a letter of apology. Reflect on their behavior. How are you going to sincerely make-up to the other person. When discussing misbehavior with kids, **focus on the specific behavior** and how they can communicate their issues without hurting other people's feelings. By helping them fix it, they understand that they're not "bad" people. Kids learn poor behavior from the media. Kids don't understand what's insulting!

Lying on the moral scale! All kids lie. Why do kids lie? Fear of being judged!

3 types of lying

1. **White lie:** because they don't want to hurt someone's feelings. Kids this age may just be beginning to be able to understand the purpose of a white lie and the nuances of truth vs. tact.
2. **Wild Stories:** generally tends to fade out at this age – less about impressing others.
3. **Getting out of Trouble:** This is the most frequent and pervasive form of lying from now on, through adulthood. Kids will lie about doing homework, brushing their teeth, taking responsibility for accidents, misbehavior, getting out of doing chores, etc. If you've observed an action that they're lying about, don't try to set them up. Just state

what you've seen and then talk about it. Kids need to know that adults are very smart and will find out the truth.

You can begin to address the issue of lying by starting to engage in conversations about trust. Lying = Being untrustworthy. If you tell the truth, consequences will be much less. As kids get older and become more sneaky there needs to be another trusted adult that they can talk to about things, if they don't want to talk to parents. Communication within the community is very important. Make the distinction between tattling and talking about things that might be hurtful to others.

QUESTIONS FROM PARENTS:

- **What if my child observes a parent being angry and disrespectful to a coach?**
- Help kids understand that parents , when they're upset, can sometimes be disrespectful too. That doesn't make speaking disrespectfully to anyone right. Explain that there are always a number of sides to an issue and jumping to conclusions without understanding everything can make people act in inappropriate and disrespectful ways. This can be a good learning experience for kids.
- **How do we handle it when kids feel and express that their accomplishments are really much better than they are?**
- For example , "Look at this flower I drew, isn't it the best!" Good self-esteem is important, but as children get older they will figure out that there's always someone better at something than they are. You might ask what part of their drawing they like best. What part they'd like to make better. The message to convey is to work hard and continue to try. Help them be grounded in some kind of reality. Gradually chip away at it with less important things.
- .
- **What is important at this age to talk about regarding safety.**
- Talking to them about strangers is appropriate. If they see someone at school being hurt or teased, then help them understand to not just be bystanders – either stick up for them yourself or with a couple of friends or ask an adult for help (not tattling).

- **What about sibling rivalry?**
- This is an age old problem. Siblings will naturally fight and argue, but restorative parenting can be helpful here. Discussions of the effects of rivalry on each other and the family are important. Limits can be set along with consequences. Don't assume that it's always the older sibling that is causing the problems; younger siblings are very good at pushing buttons (just the way all kids know how to push your buttons). Both or all children can be either rewarded or have consequences for trying hard to get along, or not. If the home environment seems very toxic and rivalry seems more like hate, then outside family therapy is probably necessary. Parents may learn how to parent in a different way.

- **How do I (Dr. Gold) engage with 3rd graders?**
- In a number of ways – I meet with individuals for counseling on emotional and behavioral issues. I work with small groups to help discuss and solve friendship problems. I have formal friendship groups for boys and girls. I include 3rd graders in my groups for children of divorce. At teachers' request I will lead and facilitate class discussions about current issues, respecting differences among students, managing classroom behavior, general problems in social dynamics.