

**Fall 2019 Fifth Grade Level Parent Meeting**  
**October 10, 2019**  
**Dr. Allan Gold, Psychologist**

**Purpose of the grade level parent meetings**

- Provide an opportunity for parents to meet, create relationships, and work together to support each other as they raise children of similar ages.
- Learn what is developmentally appropriate for different age levels
- Opportunity to discuss specific parenting issues and gain perspective and suggestions for how to handle social, emotional, school, and home issues.

We are all in this together! Parents, schools, community must work together.

**How have our children changed from a year ago? (parent observations):**

- 1) More private
- 2) Quick to anger
- 3) More gratitude and empathy
- 4) Realize their place in the world
- 5) More confident
- 6) Understand sarcasm and humor
- 7) More stress on themselves
- 8) More socially conscious
- 9) Wanting technology to stay in touch with friends

**What are some parents questions and concerns that they would like addressed?**

- 1) Tall tales and embellishing the truth to look cool
  - a. This usually ends in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade (kids will continue to lie to get out of trouble though!)
- 2) Technology battleground (see comments later)
- 3) Less into spending time with friends/more withdrawn
  - a. Social interactions can be so intense during school week that kids just need a break and that's fine
  - b. Interests are changing so friend groups may change as well
  - c. Being selective with friends can be a good thing
- 4) How parents can/should help in times of conflict with friends (see comments later)

## **The Five Developmental Areas: Physical, Cognitive, Social, Emotional, Moral**

If not already, then in the next very few years, all will be in flux.

### **Physical Development**

Puberty is around the corner, especially for girls, though some boys enter puberty in fifth grade. This will change their friendships, emotions, interests. Family Life Education is taught at the end of fifth grade to boys and girls together by their classroom teachers. For one session at the end the girls meet with their female teacher and boys meet with Dr. Gold to ask questions they might be more comfortable asking with their own gender. Girls who may develop early are sensitive about their changing bodies. (Late developing boys are also sensitive.) Early developing boys generally have status because they look older. Parents need to inform them that people may have higher expectations for kids who look older, but they're still just 10 or 11. All students need to be reassured that physical development is individual and really can't be controlled; other kids will catch up to early developers and they'll catch up if they're "late bloomers." Helping them to accept themselves is very important at this time.

Because they are physically more capable, they often engage in team or single sports. Physical activity is very important, but some coaches can be very critical and add stress to children's lives and hurt their self-esteem. Don't overschedule them. Kids may want to do a lot, but parents may say "no." As they get older they have to manage extracurricular activities, homework, social life, and family time. Having too much to do and not enough time to do it is a major cause of stress. Downtime is good, but not just on technology. Unstructured play is still important; we don't see that much anymore. Kids don't know how to deal with boredom and that stifles creativity.

They can be more responsible around the house (home responsibilities) because of their greater physical capability. They should get allowances to learn how to manage money, but not tied to chores; those should be expected as contributing to the family and the running of the household. A good allowance method is to decide on how much you're comfortable with their spending on themselves - multiply that by three and have 1/3 for charity, 1/3 for saving, and 1/3 for spending (or saving up) for their own purchases.

### **Cognitive Development**

This is a time of significant changes in cognitive development and how students think. It is actually a very exciting time. They are more aware of the world around them. For parents a challenge is about how much you tell them. At age ten you can start to talk to them like adults, as they are increasingly sophisticated and exposed to information. On the other hand parents may need to buffer some of the

information, as they don't have a good sense of probability and may not understand fully that events are rare or distant and may still get scared or anxious.

Children this age can begin to understand personal and family values. They deserve to know why certain rules hold, why they may or may not do something. For example, on the more extreme side, kids this age are likely to be exposed to pornography. Think about what troubles you about that, how that goes against your values (gives a very biased view of relationships and physical characteristics, people make money off that, shows nothing about real relationships – caring, communication, may be abusive, especially to women, etc.). The same is true for violent video games – what don't you like about that? (numbs kids to violence, there's enough violence in the world – it's not a game, etc.). Kids may have their own opinions, but you have the right to express yours and why you don't want them to do something. On a more pressing topic – technology and smart phone use or postponement also is dependent on your values: negative effects – depression, stress, even suicidal thoughts, ease of miscommunication and cyberbullying. It's very important that parents identify their values, so that when they do catch their kids in one of these uncomfortable or surprising situations, they'll be prepared to address them.

Children this age understand that parents make mistakes and, while it may seem that they are beginning not to pay attention to you at all, they still really do look at you as role models for how you handle situations. As observed, anxiety and stress increase at this age as they are much more likely to compare themselves to their peers. Even if expectations are not put on them by their parents, they put high expectations on themselves. So let them know that it is ok to make mistakes, that they can learn from mistakes, and role model reasonable reactions to your own mistakes, by not “beating yourself up.” Kids know about the Learning Pit, that one can work one's way out of it.

Part of their cognitive development is that they are much better able to express themselves. They can begin to learn to self-advocate – to stand up for themselves in a respectful way, whether to other kids, teachers, or parents, and to ask for what they need. While it is difficult for many kids this age to make a request of a teacher or express a concern or complaint, parents can help them rehearse what to say by identifying their feelings and express them in a non-angry way (I'm confused, worried, feeling left out...).

Because of their awareness of growing up, they may ask parents questions about what they did, that may involve private matters: did you try drugs; how old were you when you first drank, had sex, etc? You have the right not to tell them your most personal information, though some parents are comfortable with being honest about at least some of their own experiences. One helpful approach is to ask them: “Why are you asking? What would you think if I had? Would you think that would give you permission to do that?” Getting information from them to try to see where they're coming from and what they're thinking is always a good strategy.

## **Social Development**

Again, this is a time of increasing change. From the middle of 5<sup>th</sup> to middle of 7<sup>th</sup> grade, they want to be the same as other kids. They don't want to be seen as different. (By 8<sup>th</sup> grade kids are less focused on being the same and they are much better at accepting each other for who they are and their differences.) Social relationships are more complex. They do have more empathy and the increased capacity to think about what they say or do, before saying or acting, but they are still awkward in confronting other students. This is where parents can act as "consultants." A consultant is a good listener, helps the consultee clarify the problem, brainstorm solutions, help them to activate a solution and evaluate their attempt to solve the problem. For example, if a student has an issue with another student, they can: 1) Ignore, 2) Confront person in respectful way (help them script what to say, try out scenarios); "if you did X less and Y more, things would be better," 3) Get help from others (Dr. Gold, teachers – they will also help to empower them to do on own, but are there for them!). Feedback is really important; no one (including adults) can change unless we know what is bothering another person. Learning to give constructive feedback to friends is a significant skill and may need coaching and a third party to help the process.

Friendships change at this age and kids learn that it's ok to have different kinds of friends. As their interests change, kids may want to spend more or less time with a particular friend and it can be hard to get out of a friendship (just like adults). Parents can help their kids think about what makes a good friend – consistency – nice, trust, stick up for me. Ask "why do you want to be friends with ABC – are they a good friend?" Encourage them to stand up for themselves. Help them script conversations for tough friendship conversations. Have them have boundaries for what they should expect from a friend (values – parents can tell their own stories about friendships changing; good for dads to share with sons; moms with daughters). As consultants at this age, there is a lot that parents can do to help their children weather the storms of social interactions.

## **Emotional Development**

As students enter puberty, their hormones may make emotional regulation more difficult. They are usually good at school, but let their emotions out at home. It is ok if they want alone time, but parents need to be good listeners. They should remain calm as a role model. If parents blow up at kids (and they do), they can apologize later. It is important starting at this age that parents closely monitor their kid's emotions. If sadness/depression, stress, anxiety, low self-esteem comments persist for weeks, then outside therapy would be a good choice, as kids this age are more open to change than they will be in a few years.

Promoting and maintaining open communication is increasingly important at this age. Kids should be reassured that if they need to talk or share, you'll listen without judging. When they make mistakes (not "if") they will be given a chance to

make it right. As kids get older you may find out more about them from their friends or their friends' parents, or you may need to share information with friends' parents. It is important to get comfortable sharing information and listening to information, even though it may be uncomfortable. Sometimes kids will talk in the car when they only see the back of your head, or at bedtime. Another strategy is to have everyone share "ups and downs" (good things and not good things) of the day at the dinner table. That might reveal some issues that can be discussed or expanded upon.

## **Moral Development**

Kids are still at the stage where they don't do something wrong because they don't want to get into trouble. They will lie to get out of trouble or not take responsibility for a mistake or wrong behavior. They don't quite understand the difference between rules that exist to have society run smoothly and moral rights and wrongs which focus on not harming or hurting someone else. They can understand others' feelings, though, so Restorative Parenting is a good practice. This is where, instead of just punishing a child, they have to consider the impact of their behavior on others and figure out how to make it right (written letter of apology, helping the other person, doing research to learn about why particular comments are hurtful, etc.). MOSAIC training in 4<sup>th</sup> grade is really helpful to our Bel Aire students in improving moral development.

Trust is a particularly important concept to discuss and to build. As they get older they will want more privileges and in order to earn them, they must build their parent's trust. Kids this age can earn trust by doing their homework, be home when they say they'll be, do their chores without needing to be reminded or nagged at, take responsibility for their mistakes, follow through, treat their parents with respect. You can actually ask them how they think they can earn your trust. Parents do need to start letting out the apron strings to give them a chance to prove themselves as responsible. If they break your trust, you can pull in the apron strings and give them another chance in a few weeks. You may need to teach them how to address you when they are angry or frustrated in a respectful way. They have the right to feel that way, but not the right to call you the worst parent in the world. They can learn to say "I am really upset right now that I can't do this. It's unfair and I want you think about it again or tell me why I can't do it." When kids do get mad at you, it's so important that later they apologize and express remorse. Kids who don't show remorse are the ones to really worry about and will need very strict limits. Some therapy might help to change this but some children are headed towards being sociopaths and only respond to external punishments and rewards.

## **Technology**

Technology is the most challenge aspect of 21<sup>st</sup> century parenting. This is an area where parents have to be the manager, rather than the consultant. Consider your values about why you want to limit their screen or phone use. In our society

there is just as much parent peer pressure as kid pressure to supply our kids with the latest technology.

We need to know the effects of smart phones – increased depression, stress, anxiety, all caused by being glued to social media. The Wait Until 8<sup>th</sup> national program is committed to supporting parents who want to wait until their kids are at least 13 before giving them smart phones. Parents these days do want to be in communication with their kids and that's understandable, but a flip phone can easily serve that purpose. Our District website has information in the parent link on managing electronic devices. Our head of IT, Mr. McKay, is also available to help parents.

Parents need to be aware of their kids potential or actual addiction to electronics. If they are able to self-regulate (and most kids and adults aren't so good at regulating themselves) and get off within a few minutes of set time limits without arguing and pushing for more, then that is a good sign that they can be trusted and are not addicted. If a few minutes turns into 15, 30 or more with arguing and fighting, then addiction is likely and the best solution is no time at all. That may be very hard to do, but this is where parents have to be strong. Kids are able to function without electronics. They'll find that out at Outdoor Education next spring, when no electronics are allow (and they don't even have cell phone service there!). Not only do they function without the electronics, they actually really enjoy all the activities and real interactions.

Another serious problem with communicating by phone are group chats and texting. Kids don't see visual cues; they can't tell if someone is being truthful, sarcastic, or what they actually mean. Often kids need to sit down face-to-face to resolve disagreements or hurts that take place on devices.

Parents need to be good role models for use of technology. Wait until the kids are in bed to do your email or work. That is difficult, but dinner and evening should be family time.

Cyber safety is discussed in classrooms, but parents would like more to be done to help keep students from becoming too engaged with electronics.