

Fall 2019 Fourth Grade Level Parent Meeting
October 3, 2019
Dr. Allan Gold, Psychologist

Purpose of the grade level meetings

- Provide an opportunity for parents to meet, create relationships, and work together to support each other and 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.

Question for parents to answer: How are your kids different now from last year?

- Speak up more
- More competent and want to take on more challenges
- A lot more attitude
- Pushing a lot more away from parents
- Interested in doing new things
- Friendships becoming more important
- Swears for the first time
- More independent / less reminding / becoming self sufficient
- More aware of differences in themselves from peers
- More aware of outside world / current events
- Questions about puberty / body changes
- More emotional

Five areas of development :

1) Physical development

Kids this age are pretty stable physically. Their abilities are more developed and they are capable of physically doing more. Chores are very important for them to do, because they must realize that they can contribute to their family and have home responsibilities to help out.

It is appropriate to give an allowance at this age. They are able to understand money and can learn to budget and to save. An allowance should be divided into 3 (1/3 for charity – 1/3 for saving and final 1/3 for spending). Decide on how much you're comfortable with their having to spend each week and multiply that by three. They can learn that if they want to buy something more expensive, they'll need to learn to save and to delay their gratification – good life skills.

Sports – most kids enjoy and have skills now to participate in organized sports . Physical activity is very important. Team sports are not for all but some sporting activities are important for health and life performance general. There is a positive correlation between physical activity and performance in school. Because we're fighting technology it is even more important that children get out of the house and away from their electronics.

Towards the end of the fourth grade year puberty can begin for some students. There may be girls who get their first period in fourth grade. Girls who develop early can be very sensitive to this. On the other hand boys who develop later tend to be sensitive. Early developing students, boys or girls may be perceived as older than they actually are and this can be quite difficult. There may be unreasonable cognitive or emotional expectations placed on earlier developing kids, so they may try to act older than they are. Parents of earlier developing students need to reassure them that others will catch up and that they should not try to do things that aren't appropriate for their age or not have to be as skilled as older kids.

In the spring of fourth grade Dr. Gold presents the Touch Program. We talk about good and bad touch and child abuse. The knowledge and awareness of fourth graders is surprising, but they can handle these difficult topics, demonstrating their understanding of physical issues.

Be prepared for puberty talk. Let them know that their bodily development is something that we don't have control over. Emphasize that they are much more than just their physical selves and that they will catch up if they're a "late bloomer" and others will catch up if they're early. When talking about these matters, give them a little information, ask what they already know or want to know and if they want to know more, they'll ask. There is Family Life Education at the end of 5th grade, where puberty and development are formally taught. Boys and girls are taught together and then they have an opportunity to ask questions at the end with either their female teachers for girls or with Dr. Gold for the boys.

Communication is of critical importance from now on. Children must feel safe to ask questions or to share information. If kids feel like they are going to get into trouble or negatively judged, that can be a block to communication.

To promote communication on a daily basis parents can set up some form of daily sharing: high and lows / roses and thorns (good or not good things that happened that day) session over dinner. Often what kids and parents share can turn into an interesting discussion and can lead to talking through issues. Encourage them to share without being an inquisitor . Let them know that "you can tell me anything" and we can work it out.

2) Cognitive Development

Kids this age are just beginning to be able to think in an abstract way. They are learning about and understanding the world a little better. You can begin to have more sophisticated conversations with them. The challenge is that exposure to news and other media sources can impact them and they can get worried or scared about what they hear. Parents still need to be the buffer. Kids don't have a sense of probability and that much of what they hear or see on the news are rare occurrences. They need to be reassured that they live in a safe place.

An important basis for discussions of world events is parental values. What are your opinions and values about what is going on in the world or what you see your children exposed to. This can be politics, responses to tragedies, even games. If you don't like or approve of what's going on use that teachable moment to express your opinion. For example, if you don't want them playing violent video games, you can limit their technology use and relate it to the real violence that goes on in the world and you don't want them to think that violence is a game.

3) Social Development

From now on kids' social lives are very complicated. Up until this time you, as parents, have been a manager where you can direct your child's activities and have control over them. Now your role begins to include being a consultant. Consultants listen, help them reflect on situations, brainstorm possible solutions, and help them evaluate their choices. This is particularly useful in the social realm, where problems are theirs, not yours.

This time of their lives (and in the future) is when they need to figure out what makes a good friend. They start to hear the word "popular" now and may want to choose friends for the wrong reasons. Socially they are learning that they can have more than one main friend. As they explore new friendships they can verbalize what they like about one or another friend and what they don't like. Kids this age can articulate what does make a good friend. They need to be introduced to the idea of consistency, that they are treated nicely most of the time in different settings - not the great play date at home and then being ignored or treated meanly at school. They need to decide whether to stick with a relationship and try to repair misunderstandings or annoying behaviors or whether to move on. A major part of this is communication, learning to give constructive feedback to change behavior. Texting and emails can damage communication; face to face discussions are almost always necessary to resolve problems. Dr. Gold also finds that sometime around the age of 9 ½ to 10 kids realize that what they say or do has an impact on others. They can learn to control what they say and do.

Social dynamics get pretty challenging. Kids need to know that no one person is going to fulfill all their social needs. Friendships change and having a few friends is better than just one. Kids aren't very good at getting out of friendships. If they

don't have too much in common they can nicely say "I'm just trying to make new friends."

For parents, as kids get older, it is very important to know your kids' friends. Get to know their friends' families and values. Don't be afraid to ask a parent hosting a party for example what movie they are showing what party games and activities they are going to play. The parent role is to monitor and guide.

4) Emotional Development

Usually kids at this age are better able to control their emotions. At school they do keep things in, because they understand they can be judged by other students. So they might keep some feelings locked in until home time. You can let them be emotionally expressive, but give them the vocabulary to talk through what they are experiencing so they can understand. They need to be paying attention to their body signals to understand how they feel. This is important because if they recognize that they are getting angry or scared they can respond by getting out of the situation or seek help, without losing their control.

This is the age when kids begin to figure out their parents are not perfect. They can be very harsh in their criticism of parents and they can be dismissive when parents make mistakes. Respect is an extremely important value. Kids need to learn that they are not always going to agree with parental decisions or rules, but they need to learn to express their anger or frustration in a respectful way and that there will be consequences if they don't learn how to express themselves respectfully. Parents can model that when they blow up at kids and can apologize and reword what they said.

Children this age can also start to be very hard on themselves. They can be perfectionistic, particularly around school performance. They need to learn that it's ok that they make mistakes and they/we don't have to be perfect. You can again be good role models by admitting your own mistakes and letting know what you learn from those mistakes to not make the same mistake again.

Kids like to feel empowered. To be a child is to not have control over much and parents and teachers manage them. But now they are more capable and want to feel like they have some control. This is the year when kids go someplace without you (store, bike to school etc.), but they need to convey a degree of maturity and emotional self-control so that you'll trust them enough to let them have increased independence and privileges.

5) Moral Development

At this age kids don't have the big picture of moral right and wrong but they do understand rules. They still don't want to do the wrong thing so they don't get in trouble. The moral piece of understanding comes later at puberty. They do,

however, have a sense of empathy and our MOSAIC Program and other programs at school do a lot to develop empathy and understanding.

A huge part of moral development is acting in a trustworthy way. Kids this age are old enough to have the concept of trust introduced. They need to know what they need to do to build trust. That would include doing their homework, or chores, following directions and rules without much arguing, being home when they say they're going to be, following through on what they say they'll do, taking responsibility for their actions, and speaking respectfully to their parents. That doesn't mean that kids this age don't lie; they all do, but they need to know that telling the truth even if they did something wrong is key to building trust. They need to understand the link between trust and independence. Not all kids will want to be independent at the same time, but flip phones can support some of this independence by giving them the tools to communicate while they're not at home.

Restorative parenting is a different way of dealing with misbehaviors. This is a method that helps them understand the impact of their behavior, and helps them fix it and make it better. For example, if your child has been really disrespectful to you how would they resolve that issue? Most kids have remorse - kids should apologize and be sincere, such as writing a letter of apology. Work with them to figure out what can they do to make it better, such as helping you out in an additional way to their regular chores. Try to keep the process positive, though you can always have consequences of taking away privileges, but they should have a way to earn them back. You can rehearse with them more respectful, positive ways of expressing their feelings, so that next time they're upset, they express themselves more respectfully.

Technology :

Technology is the most challenging aspect of parenting in the 21st century. Parents expressed a desire to work with school to understand how to control what kids are exposed to and where. For example, while a number of parents want to wait to get smart phones for their kids (Wait Until 8th [grade]), on the school buses there are peers with smart phones. Kids shouldn't be on social media until about age 13, though some already are or will be before middle school. Parents need to closely monitor or block or limit time on the iPad or phone to make sure that they are not engaging in inappropriate games, youtube videos or even to pornography (which kids are now being exposed to between ages 8 and 10). Parents need to be aware of the possibility of addiction. Some games do not even allow kids to stop in the middle and kids don't want to be started over. Addiction possibility can be noted if kids can't stop, beg for more time, a five minute request turns into 30 minutes and there's arguing and fighting that result. The best solution is to not allow electronics at all in those cases. There was a significant request from parents to have a district wide technology education for parents meeting to discuss these issues. They also were interested in what education kids were getting at school in order to use technology safely and to manage their usage.