

Kindergarten Grade Level Parent Meeting
Friday, December 4, 2009
Dr. Allan Gold, District Psychologist
Marcia Gillespie, Kindergarten Grade Level Coordinator Teacher

Purposes of Grade Level Parent Meetings:

- Understanding your child's emotional, social and academic development
- Addressing issues and concerns to parents of children at each grade level, such as determining what is "normal" at this age
- Encouraging "networking" and communication among parents at each grade level to set a basis for conversations about behaviors and what's appropriate as children get older
- Promoting the school and home partnership to jointly develop academically and socially successful students in their journey towards becoming responsible, competent, and good adults

Psychology Website -> Reed School -> Parents Link -> Psychological Services:

- Parent Meetings
- Parent Resources
- What's New
- Useful Links

Especially good reading for parents (handouts):

- Can These Parents Be Saved? Recent Time magazine article
- The Price of Privilege, Dr. Madeleine Levine
- Advice from parents of eight grade classes to Reed School Parents

Other reading suggestions are on the Psychological Services website

I: Changes we've seen in our children since last year (observations offered by parents):

- More independent – food, clothes
- Better at controlling emotions
- More opinionated
- More aware of surroundings
- More compassionate
- Better able to express/articulate emotions
- Better able to solve social problems
- More sensitive feelings; more easily hurt
- Better memory
- Understand consequences better

- More social
- Want to help more
- Get embarrassed more easily
- More empathic
- More negotiation
- Higher drive to do the right thing - more easily disappointed when they don't
- More aware of who's good at ...
- More "testing of waters"
- More aware of technology
- Greater curiosity about the world
- Better listener

In understanding children's development, there are four areas to consider:

- **Physical:** gradual at this time; children are better able to manage fine and gross motor tasks. This is a good time to take advantage of their desire to help, as they are more physically capable of doing so

- **Cognitive:** this is a time of significant change in cognitive development – between the ages of 5 and 7. Children move from egocentricity to a much better understanding of the concrete world, including rules, being able to group and order objects, take another point of view. These changes have major impact on children's academic and social lives.

- **Social:** developments in this area include:
 - o moving from parallel to interactive play
 - o learning how to interact with each other
 - o learning how to handle frustration
 - o learning how to share
 - o learning how to resolve conflicts

Most children learn social skills by osmosis, but some may have to be taught

Children learn social skills in the classroom and playground as well; they learn:

- how to read non verbal body language
- how to be proactive
- how to give compliments
- how to use politeness
- how to initiate play and to be included in groups
- how to get attention appropriately
- how to resolve conflicts

Note: social development is ongoing and continues into adulthood. For example, older children need to learn how to handle feelings of rejection, rumors and conflicts, determine what and who makes a good friend, how to negotiate group membership, etc.

In the social area parents need to get used to listening to their children's "stories." You won't be able to solve all of their social problems, but you can guide them to developing their options and choices of solutions and possible actions or responses to difficult situations.

- **Emotional:** developments at this age include:
 - o Managing frustration
 - o Handling disappointment
 - o Handling anger

From the parent observations above, it seems that this kindergarten class appears to be somewhat more "advanced" in some of these developmental areas; there seems to be an acceleration in their cognitive and social skills, at least among some of the children. In some ways they sound more like six year olds than five year olds.

Children's task is to achieve mastery in each of these four areas – of their physical skills, academics, their social worlds, and their emotions. This all takes time!

Some general comments about parenting these days:

School is a highly competitive and comparative environment. Children are vulnerable to developing negative views of themselves, if they feel that they are not as capable as others. It is up to parents to not feed into this comparative, competitive mind-set. Home must be a "safe" place for our children; we can help them to value their efforts, enjoy learning, that they **can** learn – even the tough things. Learn to respect their individualities.

Parents these days are often ruled by fear – fear that their children will not be as good as others, get into good schools, not be as successful as they are. Life is very unpredictable – we cannot script our children's lives; we need to give them tools and guide them, but we cannot control all of what they are or what they will do or be.

Be aware:

- Children have very keen radar
- A parents' fear filters down to how children see themselves
- They absorb all of our fears and anxieties

Some "good rules of thumb":

All children can become good people (even if they don't go to Harvard, Stanford, or Yale)

- Refer to the six character pillars of the RUSD

- Protect them from over-competition
- Encourage them
- Recall their historical achievements - how their efforts became successes
- Build self-esteem through teaching them the value of effort and practice, setting achievable goals and meeting them

Questions, Issues and Concerns in Parenting our Kindergartners:

What is appropriate independence for children this age?

Who's "The Boss"??? The Parent! All agreed that age 5 or 6 is too young to be going anywhere alone. Ask yourself: "how trustworthy is my child?" in order to determine at what age certain independence may be gained

Note: brain development continues till 25 years of age –the judgment part of the brain is not complete until then, which is why teenagers and young adults often do stupid, reckless things. Young people may seem capable, but they don't have the judgment always to make good decisions.

Consider safety of situation –the bottom line is that if you're worried about your child's safety, don't grant the privilege. Grant privileges when responsibility is demonstrated

It is always "okay" to buy time; a parent does not have to give immediate answers/replies to questions or requests. Spouses/partners must have discussions and agreement on issues. Children always bring up our own unresolved issues about what's right and wrong in raising children. We may want replicate exactly how we were raised, or do the opposite. Two parents may have two very different experiences of growing up, which may have worked for them (or not), but each child is different and may need different rules, restrictions, privileges. It is important to be both open minded and respectful to who your child is and what they're able to handle at any given time.

A corollary: How much do we protect our children? This is tough, because children are exposed to so much from the media, older siblings or friends, the Digital Age and all of the technology.

Try to protect them from the nightly news, at least. If they see or hear something, and ask, try to put the information into perspective – that we live in a very safe place. Answer questions with a little bit of information; if they want to know more, they'll ask.

How to deal with bossiness?

Kindergarten aged children are not too young to be told about bossiness, i.e., behavior may be labeled as impolite, rude, and disrespectful. Don't hesitate to call them on bossiness and warn

them that other kids will not want to be their friend if they are too bossy. Help them role play other ways to phrase their demands that don't sound so bossy.

We can help our children by sharing our own "true" childhood experiences – tell them stories of similar situations and you dealt with them. It's even ok to invent stories that get the point across.

How do we find out if something negative is going on?

Don't always believe everything your child says about friends or school. They often operate on the "recency effect" – they'll focus on the last thing that happened that day. They could have a perfectly good day and then someone isn't nice and you hear "nobody likes me."

Parents should check out their perceptions with the child's teacher.

Common button pushers:

- Boring
- Nobody likes me

Boring may mean: I know how to do this, or this is too hard. Check it out before reacting.

Try to find times when your child will be open to talking. It may not be when you ask. Listen when you're driving. Set up a sharing time (e.g. "ups" and "downs" [good and not so good things that happen during the day] at the dinner table). Talk after reading a story at bedtime. Get to know your children's friends parents they may find out more about your child, learn to share what you find out with other parents, too.

What can we do to help kids manage the larger social groups?

Not all kids are comfortable in big groups. Some kids are perfectly happy with just a few friends. This extends to more individual vs. team sports. Check out with your child's teacher to see if he/she is isolated at recess and lunch, or just not in a big group. Check to see if they want to join a big group but haven't learned how to do that yet. Role play what to say to see if they can join a game and point out the non-verbal cues to watch for to indicate that it's ok to join.

Children need self confidence and to develop the "know how" of self advocacy

How to handle when praise for effort doesn't work?

Some children are uncomfortable with praise because it may lead to what is called "fear of success." That is the feeling that if I did well this time, I have to do well all the time. It is perfectly ok to express your excitement when your child does something you know took effort

and you are proud of – for example, reading a new or big word. You can begin to get children to evaluate their own accomplishments, so the praise doesn't always have to come from you.

When should kids' opinions be contained?

It's generally quite normal that kids will develop opinions about their preferences – food, clothes, activities, etc. Allow them their opinions. However, when they start to make judgments about people based on superficial or first impressions, you can begin to help them understand that people can often be different than they first appear and we may want to give them another chance. On the other hand, if they can articulate what they don't like about someone, then you have to respect that observation. You can tell or make up a story about how you might not have liked someone at first and then later on found out that there were reasons they were like that or they changed and you became good friends. Certainly, the more superficial the judgments (clothes, toys, physical features, money) are based on, the more you'll want to encourage open-mindedness. But this takes a long time to develop in many children.

How much technology (screen) time is ok at this age?

Kindergarten aged children must be limited in how much time they spend on the computer at home, maybe 15 minutes per day. This is the time to start managing and monitoring their use of the computer. It only gets more challenging. Make sure that the computer they are playing on is in a public place.

Some general parenting tips:

- If it doesn't work -> try something else
- Parents should experiment with different approaches
- It does not help to repeat anything "louder"
- Use "I" statements

See website for additional reading suggestions, e.g.:

- [Raising Cain](#), and [Real Boys](#) if you have a son
- [Queen Bees and Wannabes](#) for daughters
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Email address for Dr. Gold: agold@reedschools.org

Telephone number: 388-7100 ext. 3105