

SPRING 2009 FIRST GRADE PARENT MEETING

April 24, 2009

Dr. Allan Gold, Psychologist; Lexie Sifford, Principal;

Questions, Issues, and Concerns in Parenting Our 1st Graders as They Approach 2nd Grade

Dr. Gold opened the meeting by talking of how there is tremendous growth seen with children over the 1st grade school year. Lots of development takes place in the 6-7 year range in cognitive and social development. Children are much more socially aware of things like what other kids are wearing, and who's better at what.

Questions were then taken from parents:

1. When kids start acting like "the boss" of the house, what is normal, and what to do? How do you deal with strong-willed kids? What about setting limits?
 - Dr. Gold talked of being able to step in and say "no" when needed, especially in a community where so much is often available and given. If a parent isn't comfortable with a child having or doing something, even if others have it, then they need to stick with their values and discuss them with their child. It is always ok to set reasonable limits.
 - Dr. Gold said that 1st graders are "Mastering their physical world" - they need to figure out who they are separately from their parents. They're forging independence; figuring out social problems, learning to read & write. The message is drummed in to the 1st grader to "work it out themselves." They carry this sense of independence from school to home, wanting to do things on their own, so they might get bossy at home.
 - Ms. Sifford added that "In life, kids always want to know where the edge is, and they'll bump up to the edge. Somewhere in-between is normal."
 - As a parent, it is very important to keep the communication channels open with your child. You don't have to act on everything you hear, but don't write it off, either.
 - Listen to your child and learn to see when they're frustrated. Listen before jumping in with an answer. And if they've done something wrong to someone, ask them, how can they make it right?

2. When my child talks back, is it putting too much on my child to ask them to be a role model for their younger sibling?

- Dr. Gold feels it is okay to have older children help influence younger ones in modeling good behavior.
- Encourage their maturity by letting them know that they can be teachers to their younger siblings and that you need their help in teaching the younger ones how to behave.
- A little guilt never hurts when they are treating younger siblings badly by letting them know that you're disappointed in them.

3. What does social interaction look like coming into the 2nd grade?

- Dr. Gold talked about how 1st graders are developing socially, and by 2nd grade social interactions get much more complex. Having "best friends" and "triangles" get complicated, especially for girls.
- Friendship bonding starts when kids are little. Deep relationships start with girls at 6-7 years of age, and they can get hurt when a friend goes to play with someone else, even if they come back to play with them later. They don't yet have the perspective that comes with experience. All of this is normal. Boys tend more often to play in packs/groups.
- Some parents wonder, "Is it bad to not have a best friend?" Dr. Gold says "no;" it can be an advantage to have groups of friends. Most kids by the end of 3rd grade learn that to be fluid in relationships is okay, but it is harder for 2nd graders to understand.
- Dr. Gold pointed out there's a tremendous amount of peer pressure with adults, and that it's easy for them to identify with their child's social situations. Perhaps they worry, "if my child does XYZ or isn't in soccer, will they be unpopular?" Parents should think of what's really important, for the child and their family.
- Ms. Sifford added, "Parenting is not a competitive sport."

4. What can a parent do help children "work it out" for themselves when they have a problem? How much should parents intervene in social problems with their children and their peers?

- Dr. Gold said that in 1st grade parents often call each other to talk about a problem. He said not to always assume that the other kid is the "guilty one", and be aware of tactfully calling the other parent so they are not on the defensive.
- When you're with your child you can help them brainstorm and ask them, what did they do to try to solve the problem? Classrooms are great places to discuss and solve issues.

- Try and let the child work it out if acceptable.
- Dr. Gold and Ms Sifford pointed out that the playground is one of the last places where kids have the freedom to work out problems themselves, and there they can learn a lot about behavior and consequences.
- Dr. Gold: “We’ve raised a generation of fearful parents who don’t want their kids to suffer pain. But we can’t rescue them all the time, they need to learn on their own, too.”

5. When does something cross the lines to be considered bullying?

- There are different types of bullying:
- Physical bullying: punching, hurting, repeatedly and directly.
- Psychological threats/relational bullying: “I’m not going to be your friend” – verbal, threatening exclusion.
- Cyber bullying: on the computer

6. Emotions-what is appropriate at this age?

*Dr. Gold said it’s absolutely normal that kids cry and have meltdowns at this age. Some children have more sensitive personalities- and while it’s a wonderful trait to have, being able to show remorse and sensitivity to others, they also should be able eventually to build a “shell” to protect their feelings when needed. This may take some years to develop and every child is different in their sensitivity. Make sure that sensitive boys are not put down by parents, especially dads, for being sensitive. They’ll learn how to control themselves at school by third or fourth grade.

- Ms. Sifford pointed out that it’s “Nice if kids can cry at home, to have a sense of release.” Children are more often to have these strong feelings at home with their parents than at school.
- Dr. Gold said that if, however, you get a sense of manipulation, you begin not to trust it. But if the emotion is truly legitimate, then it’s fine for them to show emotion and to talk things over with them.

7. Should we be reviewing cursive writing with our child now in the 1st grade?

*Dr. Gold addressed the question about cursive writing, saying that teaching cursive in this country starts in the 3rd grade. He and Ms. Sifford talked of

how at 1st and 2nd grade level it is fine to practice legible handwriting, used for homework, thank you notes, etc.

Question from a parent: how could get their child to stop using words they find objectionable?

- Dr. Gold said that kids hear things at school and the playground - but at home you should make a big deal about your child saying words you find unacceptable.
- You can talk about your family's values, making language an important issue. Kids can pick up a lot of social clues from the media and say things that they may not even know the meaning of.
- When they say certain words you can point out that you don't treat each other like that in your family, then give acceptable words to use in their place.
- Teach ways to express anger that's acceptable.

Question from a parent: what to do when their child deliberately misbehaves in a public situation?

- Dr. Gold said in the future to discuss with the child appropriate consequences for misbehavior before leaving the house.
- Children need to know their limits; when they act appropriately they get a privilege, otherwise there will be a consequence. Rewards are okay; heap on praise or give special time when it's earned.
- Remember that kids need warnings and transitions, respect that when expecting a change.

Tips on Communication with kids:

- Dr. Gold said it's good for parents to use "I" statements when expressing feelings to their kids. Children are more likely to respond to the softer feelings that *underlie* a parent's anger, such as concern, worry, disappointment, etc. They'll understand more from hearing a statement such as, "I'm feeling hurt by what you did" rather than by just seeing a parent being angry.
- Anger is a secondary emotion, and a child needs to learn the impact on a parent when a child misbehaves. Parents need to mimic a child's feelings too, so the child knows the parent "gets" them.

Question from a parent: what should they do when their child wants to be friends with someone but the kids often "clash" – then the parent feels they have to step in?

- Dr. Gold said that 1st graders are learning to master their social world. They're trying to figure out, "Who is a good friend for me?"

- At this age children have real ideas as to what makes a good friend. They're nice to you, you like to play with them, they're funny. A good thing to ask your child about a friend is, "When playing with them, how do you feel? What do you like about them?" If they don't feel good about the friendship, then perhaps they should try looking for a new one.
- Dr. Gold talked of the "bossy child", who always wants to do things their way. Some kids will follow along just to keep the friendship, but emphasize that they have a right to have their wishes followed some of the time, too. You can talk with your child and ask if they never get their own say with certain friends. Bring it to the child's attention so they can reflect on their experience and if it seems fair to them; you can make your own observations.
- Parents can also ask the children when they disagree, "How are you doing to figure this out?" "What's your plan?" If the children can't figure things out on their own then playdates may have to stop.

Question from a parent: is it appropriate to tell your child when something is morally not right, such as when a certain child is excluded from playing in a game?

- Dr. Gold said it's fine to point this out to a child; encourage them to speak up when things aren't fair. Tell the child how important it is to stick up for other kids, and to stick up for themselves. A parent's job is to teach kids when to be good and make good choices.
- Children don't want their parents to be disappointed in them. You can verbalize that towards your child when needed and it can have an impact.

Dr. Gold concluded the meeting by saying, "Don't abdicate your power now, because it will be a disaster later!"