

SPRING 2009 THIRD GRADE MEETING
Dr. Allan Gold, District Psychologist
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QUESTIONS, ISSUES, CONCERNS IN PARENTING OUR 3RD GRADERS AS THEY APPROACH 4TH GRADE:

In dealing with issues, parents need to reflect on what are the important values to them.

ATTITUDE

This is the time to work on attitude. Disrespect towards parents is unacceptable. Generally the child doesn't treat a teacher this way. Children are looking at role models to copy. These are sometimes older children or TV personalities, who, these days, may not be very respectful.

If a child is disrespectful at home, then a parent should call them on it.

- Parents can do this by asking a child to do a "do-over".
- Humor can be used.
- Some children know what the parent wants from them and some children need to be shown. A parent can tell the child how he/she hurt their feelings, "you may not have meant it, but it sounded like...." A parent can tell a child how to rephrase their remark or how to redo their actions

POSTURING

Parents are moving from a micro-manager to an observer and consultant. Some parents have been surprised at the posturing they have overheard or seen between friends. What is the intent when this is happening? Is the child purposely being hurtful or just bragging? Most likely it is just posturing.

What happens if a parent hears too much and feels the need to call another parent? Be self-effacing, not accusatory, in sharing information with other parents: "I'm a little reluctant to tell you, but I think you might want to know...; I know there's always two sides to stories, but I heard that...."

SLOPPY LANGUAGE

It's not a bad thing for parents to require their child to speak correctly. Children live in a world of different languages: language in class, at home and language between kids. They need to determine when to use each language. Correcting their language is fine, but you don't want your child sounding like he's 40 years old in a group of kids. The line should be drawn at swearing. By fourth grade this will be a bigger issue.

COMMUNICATION

How do parents find out what they need to know? What's going on? How do they promote communication?

- Parents should ask specific questions.

- Ask your child what was good/bad (or up/down) in their day. Parents should participate in telling about their day. The goal is to get a conversation going.
- Children tend to talk more freely in the car. If a child is talking to a friend, listen to the conversation. You don't need to intervene in the conversation unless something very inappropriate or hurtful is said; just listen. You can ask questions later – “how did you feel when X said...?”
- Before bed is also a good time to learn about a child's day, when defenses are down somewhat.

Children are being exposed to information from older children, movies, and various media sources. For example, some fifth graders recently told some third graders scary stories. Parents need to comfort and reassure their children. Parents should ask about the movies being played at a sleepover or party. Some parents don't use good judgment, so get comfortable asking other parents what will be going on at their houses. Remember, you're trying to support your child in developing your values and you don't need to have other families working against those values.

Children who have access to a computer can innocently be exposed to many new ideas. Focus on setting the standard now. Put the computer in a public room. Blocking software can be useful for setting time limits, access to specific sites, etc. Lori Mustille and Al Hart can help with computer solutions.

A lot of 3rd graders are asking for cell phones and separate email accounts. Parents shouldn't believe that “every other child” has one. 3rd grade is still too young. By 5th grade, children are doing more on their own and a cell phone maybe a good idea. It takes discipline and responsibility to care for a cell phone. Dr. Gold also believes “safety trumps everything”. If you feel your 3rd grader needs a cell phone for safety reasons, than that's fine.

OVER-CONCERN ABOUT GRADES/STAR TESTING

Before or during 3rd grade, kids start comparing themselves with others and with parent expectations. This can cause anxiety. A little bit of anxiety is okay (in fact, it can even be productive), but too much causes high stress and is counter-productive.

Dr. Gold suggested:

- Explain to kids how the test is used to see how well teachers are teaching and how well the class is learning. (It is like a “report card” for teachers.) Also, the test has no effect on how or if the students will be advancing to 4th grade.
- Ask the student what is concerning him/her, and what he/she thinks the test is about. Clarify misconceptions and fill in the blanks.
- Don't turn the test results into a “grade”. Think of it more as an indication of which skills are still being developed, and which have been mastered.
- Remember to emphasize the student's effort, rather than the final outcome. For instance, say “There will always be someone in the world better than you at this, but you can learn it.” It's about self-confidence. Kids need to learn they can be better at something if they work at it, and everyone learns at a different pace.
- A parent referred to Lexie Sifford's analogy about a train: “Some kids catch the fast train, others the regular, others the slow train, but they all get there eventually”.

PHYSICAL CHANGES AND NEEDS (SLEEP)

Most kids this age are sleeping 9-11 hours per night, with 10 hours the most common. At this age, this is something within the control of the parent.

LACK OF FOCUS

Most kids focus better at this age than they have before. They are much better able to sustain focus in class for assignments and projects. Kids may still get tired after a long day at school and be less focused when doing homework in the afternoon and evening. Most kids need a break when they come home from school. Make sure that they are not so overscheduled with extracurricular activities that they are too tired for homework, and cannot focus very well at all.

FRIENDSHIP DRAMAS

In normal circumstances, friendship dramas increase during the 3rd grade. One thing that has begun happening is boys pestering and criticizing girls.

Dr. Gold suggested:

- Possible motive is that the boy wants to be noticed.
- Girls should stand up for themselves by blowing them off (but don't resort to insulting them back), or simply saying "Stop it. Leave me alone."
- If there has been pushing or hitting, say "Stop it. That hurt!" Chances are the boy does not want to hurt the girl.
- Responses can be practiced at home in advance, using a strong, firm voice.
- Perhaps tell the teacher so that there can be a class discussion about teasing, insulting and criticizing.
- It is not too early for students to learn it's not okay to tease or harass.