

**FIRST GRADE PARENT MEETING
APRIL 2, 2010**

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Beth Jacobs, First Grade Level Coordinator**

Changes in our 1st Graders Since the Fall (as observed by parents):

- They read!
- Friendships are more important now
- Friendship groups are forming
- Social separation of boys and girls
- Increase in sense of responsibility
- More deceit/lying
- Forming a sense of humor
- Mean girl talk starting
- Clothing as status
- Self-confidence development
- More independent
- More assertive
- More interest in teams/sports
- Picking up slang
- More aware of others

A lot of these characteristics have held true over time with respect to development of 1st graders, but we are seeing new characteristics that show how kids are getting “older” faster. Things we didn’t used to see at this age level were things like mean girl talk and clothing as status.

There are four areas to look at in terms of development at any age: Physical, Cognitive, Social and Emotional. Understanding what is “normal” in these areas can help make sense of your observations.

Physical

- This is generally a period of time of gradual, rather than dramatic or rapid physical growth.
- The impact of the physical changes happening at this age is the development of self-confidence.
- Kids at this age are able to, and should, take on home responsibilities such as setting the table, clearing dishes and feeding a pet. They are more physically capable of performing home responsibilities, and still want to help out.
- Kids should get exercise at this age, but the focus should be on skill building and finding physical activities they enjoy versus team sports and competition. Age 8 is better for an introduction to team sports.

Cognitive

- Kids make a huge cognitive leap between the ages of 5 and 7. They are starting to understand the concrete world around them. In the academic realm they are beginning to understand the rules in a more mature way. Kids also pick up a much broader set of language skills at this age. In the social realm the development translates to greater awareness of others as they become less self-absorbed. That said, kids at this age still view things in a very “black and white” way. For example, they might think that if they are not good at something they must be stupid.

Social

- Boys and girls begin to separate and have friendship clusters. Rejection doesn't happen as much. While it used to almost exclusively happen with older children, we are starting to see some of it.
- When talking to other parents about any social conflict between kids it is recommended you approach them with “Our kids are having a difficult time” vs. “Suzy hit Sally”.
- The school strongly encourages kids to make a first effort to resolve conflict directly, using “I” messages.
- Kids are starting to learn what they need to do to fit in.
- It's important to talk to your kids and reinforce what makes a good friend, asking your child how they feel when they are with a certain child. Ask if they are comfortable and feel liked or does that child make them feel bad.
- Increased social interaction means increased exposure to the internet and computer games. It's important at this age to monitor and restrict how much time kids spend on the computer and TV. Make sure you know what you kids are watching, what they are doing and limit their “media” time to 30 minutes or less a day.
- If a child is having trouble detaching from e-media when asked, then they are not old enough for that responsibility. A suggested rule might be no computer/TV during the week.
- Social currency is important for kids whether it's movies, music or books so some e-media can be good.
- A question was asked about the age-appropriateness of shows like Extreme Home Makeover, that can address serious, mature issues like illness and poverty, but also communicate positive messages about people giving back and making a difference. The answer is that, in general, these can be good, but you need to use your judgment based on the sensitivity level of your child and the issues being addressed.
- It is not recommended that children at this age should watch the news or read the newspaper- the reason being that they don't understand probability – if they read about a plane crash, they can't put that into the proper context of real risk.

- Kids at this age should have a variety of activities and leisure time, including down time to engage in fantasy and cooperative play, rather than structures classes and extracurricular activities.
- Sleepovers can be okay at this age. Trust your gut.

Emotional

- Kids at this age are developing their skills in managing their emotions. Temper tantrums should be decreasing significantly; weeks should go by with none.
- They have adjusted to the longer school day, so should be somewhat less exhausted and vulnerable when they get home from school.
- Children are better at handling frustration; meltdowns will still occur, but recovery time should be less than 15 minutes.
- Children's ability to sustain attention to a task should be increasing to 10 to 15 minutes for an academic task and even longer for a preferred activity.
- Children should be developing a vocabulary of emotions; parents can be very helpful in reflecting both verbal and nonverbal expressions of emotions, and giving their child a more precise label for what they're feeling (than sad or mad).

Some other issues that were raised:

Impact of Loss/Death at this Age

- Funerals can be okay if you prepare the child on what to expect.
- It's important to talk with your child about it and that grieving is normal.
- If a pet dies it is important to speak about death as a natural part of life.
- If your child is not experiencing the "recovery" side of the up and down cycle that takes place around a sad event then you should consider seeking additional help.

Partnering with Teachers

- If your child is fighting against your requests for them to do their homework, it is important to not set homework up as a negative battleground. You can try a few things:
 - Communicate that it is the teacher asking and expecting this
 - A reward-based system or star chart
 - Speak with your child's teacher and develop a plan together of how to best address the issue given your child

If you are raising a boy, two good books to read are Real Boys and Raising Cain.