

Spring 2011 1st Grade Parent Meeting
April 29, 2011

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Introduction and purpose of meeting: meet parents of peers, find out what's normal for children at this age/grade level, and encourage networking amongst parents.

The purpose of the fall grade level parent meetings is to paint a developmental picture of children at each grade level. At the spring meeting we go right to addressing parental issues, questions and concerns.

Brainstorm: Issues, questions, concerns in parenting our 1st to 2nd graders:

How do we deal with fluctuating friendships and exclusion?

What are appropriate limits for electronics?

What are reasonable expectations for asking kids to follow directions at home?

What to do about "I don't want to go to school?"

How do we teach kids appropriate balance between assertiveness and following?

Paying attention at school: what are normal expectations?

Social Issues:

1st graders are waking up to differences among their peers and beginning to really form friendships.

Through middle school and even high school kids are figuring out: What makes a good friend?

At this age children will say that being nice, funny, and having the same interests are most important. Later on they come to value trust, sticking up for each other, being friends in all settings, not just at one's home.

Friendships are going to fluctuate. It is normal. So there are lots of changes in friends at this time. The worst time is from the beginning of 2nd to middle of 3rd grade, especially for girls. Girls tend to want intense relationships/intimacy with close friends, so when their close or "best" friend wants to play with someone else, they can get very hurt. Boys travel more in groups, so are somewhat less vulnerable to feelings of being rejected (though that certainly can happen to boys, too).

Children need to learn how to get along with others and stick up for themselves.

When confronted with their children's upsets about social events, parents can ask them questions to get to what the real issue is.

For example: What don't you like about that person? Get your child to reflect on what makes a good friend. How did you feel when X said/did that? What do you like about that person?

Make up parables about your own experience as a child to teach (for example: I had a friend who ignored me at school and I decided he wasn't a good friend for me. We took a break from each other and a few months later we got friendly again.)

Exclusion Issues:

Sometimes kids will reject each other based on very superficial issues (clothes, etc). Make sure you model/communicate personal and important reasons for why you like or don't like people.

Talk about different kinds of friends: We enjoy different things with different people. Different friends serve different functions: my talking to friend, my video game friend, my sports friend, my fantasy game friend, my Pokemon card friend, etc.

Talk honestly with other parents. It is easier to communicate with other parents now about little things than it is later on. If your child is having difficulty with another child, it is ok (though may take some courage) to speak with the other child's parent, but in a non-offensive and non-defensive way. For example, I understand that your son wants to play with mine, but something doesn't seem quite comfortable for my son. I don't know what is going on exactly, but maybe we can talk and try to figure it out. I like my son to have a wide range of friends, but sometimes he decides not to play with someone. Do you want to talk further or should we just let them handle it? If further, and you have the information – my son says that sometime your son follows him around and he doesn't like that. Maybe that could change, etc.

Kids need to learn tones of voice and ways of clearly communicating (eg. I-messages) what they feel/want. Role play and puppets can be good techniques.

We realize academic skills have to be taught. But there are also a lot of social skills that need to be learned. Examples: reading facial cues, joining in games, respecting personal space, being able to know when to let things go, conflict resolution. Some kids need to be explicitly taught these skills, or at least some of them.

Attention Issues:

We expect kids to attend to an activity/ lesson for 15-20 minutes. A certain amount of losing attention is normal. ADD is seen particularly in lack of productivity. Some difficulty with homework is normal because kids are tired at the end of the day. Check with teacher if you are worried about attention issues with your child.

Expectations for Behavior:

Make sure to have eye contact when you give directions.

Have them repeat what you want them to do. Have consequences when they don't (without nagging). A good book for developing a consequence system is: 1,2,3 Magic.

Respect that they may be in the middle of something (think about yourself) so give warnings that you want them to do something in X minutes.

Give reasonable, logical consequences: For example, if they don't clean-up, toys get locked away.

Responding to kids: Anger gets tuned out. Try to stop and think and clearly communicate. Kids hear softer emotions (disappointment, frustration, worry) and that has more of an effect than anger.

Talking back/disrespectful behavior: try to nip it in the bud now. Model how you want to be spoken to. Point out disrespectful behavior. Think about everything you do for your kids and that you are not willing to be treated disrespectfully. It is ok for them to express anger, disappointment, frustration, but in a respectful way – which you may need to model for them.

Discipline systems need to be worked out at a quiet time, such as a family meeting, not in the middle of an argument or when you're trying to get out of the house. Decide on consequences that you can hold to, not idle threats.

Chores are appropriate at this point. Child should contribute to the household.

Allowance: not tied to chores, but allows child to learn responsibility and begin to manage money. If a child gets an allowance, figure out how much you're willing to all them for spending money a week. Then triple the amount with 1/3 for saving, 1/3 for charity, and 1/3 for spending. If they spend all of their allowance, they will learn to budget and to delay gratification.

Rewards can be appropriate for doing something that is difficult for them.

Rewarding particular behaviors (e.g. controlling emotions) might be appropriate., but not for being respectful, that they should do anyway. Rewards for putting out effort in academics when learning is difficult is very appropriate.

Electronics:

This is the biggest challenge of modern parenting.

Most concerning at this age is addiction to games.

It's not going away and as kids gets older, it is harder to monitor.

Keep the computer in a public place, where you see what they are doing; this needs to be established at this age, since soon they will have laptops.

Set time limits for how long they may play on the computer. If this is a battle, then you have a problem. If their whole life is consumed by these games, then you may be in trouble.

Ideas: no electronics during the week, or limit to ½ hour.

Playdates: talk to other parents about the rules for electronics at their house.

Certain children are prone to becoming addicted to games, etc.

Strive for balance.

Sometimes all or nothing is easier for kids (e.g. no electronics during the week).

Check what you are modeling: is everyone in the family on the computer in the evenings. Kids will watch what you do, not what you say...

Not Wanting to go to School:

This feeling may just be because of something that happened the day before.

Isolated statements are not so much of a concern. If they are saying it repeatedly, then try to find out what the issue is.

Reluctance to go to school is normal after vacations, and at the beginning of the school year (adjustment time).

True school phobia usually has to do with not wanting to separate from mom.

Sometimes reluctance to go to school has to do with something going on at home, and anxiety about leaving home. Other times there may be anxieties related to social issues, performance in academics, something another student or even a teacher said that they took the wrong way.

In general:

Kids tend to globalize or overgeneralize. Try to get to the root of the problem when your child is expressing bad feelings about themselves. Don't try to solve the problem immediately, but get to the root of the issue by listening reflectively (you seem really sad, angry, upset), asking good questions, and conveying your support and willingness to help out. After the feelings have been expressed, the situation clarified, THEN ask how you can help or how they want to handle the situation.