

Spring 2011, Third Grade Parent Meeting  
May 2, 2011

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**Issues, Questions, and Concerns in Parenting Our 3rd to 4th Graders:**

The following topics were raised by parents attending this meeting:

- What is appropriate language, attire, curiosity about the opposite sex for children this age?
- What information about the wider world should kids this age be exposed to?
- How do we help our kids with exclusion and inclusion in friendships?

**Growing up**

The first two topics are related in that parents are observing that their children are growing up quickly - maybe, in some cases, too quickly. It is not at all uncommon to notice that kids at the end of third grade are a lot more aware of bad language, clothes options, music, more teenage types of video games, movies, etc. They are exposed to a lot of information, not just from fourth and fifth graders, but from older siblings of friends.

It is virtually impossible to completely shelter kids from this exposure, so the task becomes that parents need to be clear about their values and help their children process what they see and hear. It is very important to be able to articulate what one doesn't like about bad language, overly sexualized songs, violence in movies, music, or games. Kids will want an need explanations for why they can't listen or look, or say.

**Language:**

With language it is important to be good role models for how to talk. Kids will learn what they can get away with when they are with their peers, largely to seem older or "cool." But if you don't like bad language at home, don't use it. Some families have coin jars to put money in if anyone uses bad language. Kids can learn not to use bad language at home, just as they learn not to use it in the classroom (but sometimes on the playground). They need to be taught what is offensive or disrespectful about particular words.

**Video games:**

With video games, the Common Sense Media website can be helpful. Children this age should not be playing graphically violent games (nor should anyone, really). The dilemma of video games is that they are a common currency among kids, so you don't want to totally disallow games. Some families have a "no video games on school nights" rule, which may be easier to enforce than attempting moderation. Some kids can pull themselves away from games with a few minutes warning. For other kids, true addiction is a very real possibility, and for them, a no games rule probably works better. How easily kids can stop games, without a battle, is a good indicator of whether addiction is a high risk.

### Sex/Opposite Sex

Kids this age are developing an interest in sex and the opposite sex. Just a couple of weeks ago an "epidemic" of crushes was uncovered in one (and probably more) third grade class. The psychologist and teacher had a class discussion about the inappropriateness of crushes and the risks - kids feeling left out, gossip and rumors. They were told that it is perfectly ok to like someone, but they should treat that person as a good friend, get to know them, but keep their "crush" feelings to themselves. That talk seems to have curtailed the crushes - at least for a while.

It is not necessarily too early for educating children about sex. Books about where babies come from are helpful. Even younger children have an interest in their bodies. Fortunately, many parents of our generation are more comfortable talking about sex than our parents were. It is a good idea to ask kids what they know and then to validate correct information and correct misinformation. Most parents would rather their children learn from them than from their children's peers. As a rule of thumb, give kids a little information; if they want more, they'll ask. If that's enough, or the information is over their heads, you'll know it.

### Attire:

Appropriate attire is generally not too big an issue at this age. Parents still have control over what their children wear. However, media, what older children wear, and what is the latest fad can begin to influence children's choices of attire. This is usually much more true for girls than for boys. Parents should carefully watch what is appropriate - even though commercials may advertise clothes that would be for teenagers or twenty year olds, but trying to market them to preteens, you can still say that that's not appropriate and don't buy them. These would include tops that are too revealing, pants with waists that are too low, etc. Use good judgment; 8 and 9 year old girls do not need to look like small versions of big sisters or their mothers.

### Exposure to information about the world:

This is a time of increased interest in and exposure to what is going on in the world. It is hard to shield kids this age from the news. Big events (like Osama bin Laden) get talked about by adults and other kids, so they will be exposed. They need to be educated about probability of space and time - that many events are rare, very unlikely to happen here, and may occur very far away. Natural occurrences, like earthquakes and floods may scare kids, but again, they need reassurance that Tiburon is a safe place.

It is important to protect kids this age from more graphic news, particularly on T.V. This would include murders, war, terrorist attacks, violence in general. On the other hand they should begin to understand their world, geography, where events are taking place, who is involved. Answer their questions with a little information, and if they want to know more, they'll ask. There can be a wide variation in kids this age as to their worldliness and curiosity. Some kids are fascinated by the wider world and begin to try to make sense of it; others are still quite wrapped up in their own social and local worlds.

### **Friendships at this age**

Friendships change at this age (as they do at every age). The good news is that girls, especially, are coming out of the age when they are very sensitive to small changes in friendships. They are learning, as boys generally have already learned, that they don't need to only have one "best" friend and that they can actually enjoy each other in groups. The negative development for both boys and girls is that "popular" becomes a more salient concept for kids. For many different reasons some kids get the "popular" label and kids aspire to be in the popular group.

Parents still need to help their children negotiate the world of friendships. They can get their children to think about who they feel good being with and who not. They can help guide their children not to pick friends based on superficial characteristics, but on what they have in common, what they enjoy doing together, and particularly how they are treated.

Kids this age are not very good at getting out of friendships they don't like. You can be helpful in listening to your child's complaints about someone else and helping them brainstorm non-hurtful ways of getting out of the friendship. If the other child is doing something that is really off-putting, like being overly clingy, in one's space, immature, whiny, or mean, check that out with your child's teacher. You may even want to communicate some of these concerns to the other parent in a very open-ended, non-offensive, or defensive way, so that the other child can be helped. School can often be useful in addressing some real social deficits. Role playing with your child to give him/her some practice in delivering difficult messages is useful. Children this age are conscious of not wanting to hurt someone else and they can be coached to deliver hard

messages in a kind way. For parents the job is increasingly to listen and not to solve the problems for their children.