Spring 2011 4th Grade Parent Meeting

May 9, 2011

Dr. Allan Gold, District Psychologist

Introduction

1. Importance of networking with other parents as kids get older and more challenging
2. Discussion regarding challenging values
3. Topics:
4. What should the parent involvement be with homework?
5. Socially - what’s happening?
6. What to do when kids try on different personalities
7. Handling emotional ups and downs
8. Are fears normal at this age?
9. Touch program
10. Sex education

Homework:

 Kids should be largely independent with homework by the end of fourth grade. Parents should set the general expectations for when and where homework should be completed, but should not micromanage. If homework is still a “battleground,” then communicate with the teacher to impose reasonable consequences at school. If you think that your child should be producing better quality work, then let the teacher know and have the teacher communicate that to the child. It is certainly ok to answer children’s questions and give some help, but if a few minutes of guidance doesn’t set the child on his/her way with the homework, then write a short note to the teacher to try to reteach or determine what the child doesn’t understand. Homework should be completed before extended playtime – not counting an after school snack and break.

Social:

 Socially great changes are taking place at this time. They are learning and using bad language, there is growing interest in and attraction to the opposite sex, they are much more aware of social stratification – the popular group of kids. Kids will begin to try (or want to try) different things to obtain social status: music, clothes, language. They will learn what they can say and do when and where. Children, in a sense, become “bicultural;” they learn that they can’t use bad language at school or at home (hopefully), but will when no one but other kids are listening. Parents can still set the standards for dress, music, and movies, but they will want to know why you might object – so figure out your values about these media influences ahead of time. Remember that their task is to try to figure out who they are, what makes a good friend, and how to leave and enter relationships.

 As children begin to start puberty, their interests and friendships will change. This can be painful as old friends outgrow each other. Girls generally hit puberty two years earlier than boys, so may develop an interest in boys before that interest is reciprocated. Social interaction can be quite awkward for kids this age. Just listen to them.

 It is important to communicate with other parents about what you allow your children to do/see and what your limits are. Get your kids used to your practice of contacting other parents, so when they get older, they will understand that this is what you do. Don’t be afraid to ask how much electronic time, type of music, and movies kids are allowed at another household. You have the right to have your child not go over to a friend’s house where the limits and values are different than yours.

Trying on Different Personalities:

 Part of child development is figuring out who they are. It is normal for kids for the next five or six years, at least, to try on different personalities, partly to see your reaction, partly to try to fit in to groups, partly to connect with a desired new friend. Your job as parent is to give feedback to them, both positive and negative, if some of these personality changes are inappropriate and counter to your values. Before commenting, however, it is better to just observe and maybe ask what they are trying to accomplish with these new behaviors, what they like about the person(s) they seem to be trying to emulate, etc. Then if you see increased cause for concern, you can state your case, citing your personal values. It is ok to tell them not to act a particular way at home or there will be some loss of privileges. But approach this slowly, as kids will seem to change suddenly and then change back again, all within a very short period of time. Don’t panic with the first changes you observe.

Emotional Ups and Downs:

 Along with physical changes come emotional changes. Again, as children, particularly girls move towards puberty, they may become more emotional. Keep that in mind as you try to figure them out. Even though they may seem to have less control over their emotions from time to time, remember that at school we don’t usually see “meltdowns” and disrespect. So, even though home should be a safe place to express their feelings, that doesn’t mean that they can be disrespectful to you. They may need to be taught how to express anger appropriately, stating what is bothering them, but not being sarcastic or even cruel to you.

Fears:

 Children of 9 or 10 are much more aware of the world, both their immediate world and the wider one. It is not unusual for them to begin to be much more interested in current event, what you are reading in the newspaper or seeing on TV. Because children don’t have a good sense of probability, time, and space, they may think that things happening on the other side of the world and rare events are going to happen to them. It is important to reassure them that we live in a pretty safe place and that you (and school) are there to make sure they are ok. You can help them develop empathy for people around the world who suffer natural disasters (earthquakes, tsunamis, flooding, etc.) as well as those who have to live under conditions of war. These are good opportunities to help our children learn to appreciate the good fortune that most have.

Touch Program:

 The Touch Program has two sessions that have just been completed in fourth grade. The first session discusses good, bad, and confusing touch and is meant to empower kids to say whether, how, or in what way they are touched – or not. Some role playing is done to help them identify and use strategies to get out of situations where a stranger might approach them. Emphasis is placed on recognizing their body signals that a worrisome or dangerous situation could happen (butterflies in the stomach, goosebumps, rapid breathing, freezing up, etc.)

 The second session focuses on adult abuse, primarily so that children can recognize what that is and so they can know what to do about it, if they are worried about themselves or friends, now or anytime in the future. They are told that these are adult problems and that they must tell a trusted adult so that the abuse can stop or be stopped. The connection is also made between verbal abuse and child to child teasing and harassment. They are told that they have the power to make each others’ lives better or worse through positive or negative comments and exhorted to choose the positive. They are also told the difference between tattling just to get someone in trouble and telling an adult anytime they feel unsafe or uncomfortable either physically or emotionally.

Sex Education

 Family Life education is presented at the end of fifth grade by the classroom teachers. Parents need to give their consent for their child to participate and there is an evening meeting prior to the start of the program. The focus is on puberty and physical development, though children are given an opportunity throughout to ask questions. There is always a wide range of sophistication among the students, often depending on whether they have older siblings. Some, by the end of fifth grade have been quite exposed to sexual information and others are relatively sheltered. Children are always referred to their parents to answer questions, particularly those where values are concerned.