

Spring 2012 Fourth Grade Parent Meeting  
May 14, 2012

Dr. Allan Gold, District Psychologist

**Questions, Issues, and Concerns in Parenting our 4<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Students:**

**Homework: What if you don't think the quality of your child's homework is good enough?**

If you don't think your child's homework is up to snuff (too messy, quality lacking, etc.), ask the teacher what his/her expectation is, and whether what your child is submitting is satisfactory? Teachers' standards may not be the same as yours! Or they may be looking for something other than neatness, or what you may be focusing on. It is very important to communicate with the teacher about these issues, just so parents and teachers can be "on the same page" about what is expected. If the quality of the work turned in is not good enough, then let the teacher work with the student on that. If you notice that your child doesn't understand some of the homework and you can't teach him/her in about five minutes, then let the teacher know that the concept or skill may need to be reviewed or retaught.

**What about multi-day projects or longer term projects?**

While most fourth graders have mastered the understanding of and responsibility for nightly homework, at this age, and even through middle school, kids need help managing larger, longer-term projects. Parents can help by working with their children to break the project up into smaller pieces, and together mark a calendar when chunks of work should be completed, and monitor progress. Longer projects are clearly "scaffolded" (broken down and supported) with benchmarks for completion dates by teachers, but kids do not always follow those dates and will procrastinate. For that reason they still need some monitoring. Parents can also help by modeling effective project management, themselves.

**How Much Independence Should Kids This Age Have?**

Kids this age begin to want more independence and privileges. The appropriate level of independence depends on the child's level of maturity, trustworthiness, and your gut feelings about safety. When kids seek greater independence, it's an opportunity to talk w/kids about trust, dependability, responsibility, honesty.

And it's a time for the child to build your trust. Kids can prove to parents that they can earn your trust by doing their homework and school responsibilities, and home responsibilities (i.e. chores) without a lot of prodding from you or arguments. If they've earned your trust, it's ok to **gradually** release the apron strings! It's also ok to pull back the apron strings, when the "mess up," as they undoubtedly will sometime – that's part of growing up and learning.

Examples of how kids can build trust include: calling you when they get to where they're going, returning on time, being where they say they're going to be and with whom, admitting if they've done something wrong and accepting accountability for it. Trustworthiness is one of the school character pillars, so kids have heard about it in school.

On the other hand, if kids seem anxious about increased independence, then don't force them. Respect their feelings; they're saying they're not ready yet.

This time is also an opportunity to talk to your child about safety and make sure they know what to do if something happens when they're on their own, either outside the home or at home (i.e., how to answer (or not) phone and door when parent(s) not home, etc.).

Once a kid takes steps towards independence, cell phones are ok for use as an emergency contact.

Independence can ramp up quickly. Make sure kids know your values. And make sure you are developing good relationships and contact with other parents, so you can find out what your child is doing, even if they don't tell you themselves!

### **When Should I Talk With My Child About Physical Changes and Sexual Matters?**

Kids this age are curious about physical changes. A good place to start a conversation with your child is to talk about the development of their own bodies, focusing on what is beginning to change or will change in the next few years. If kids aren't comfortable talking to parent, offer them a book on the topic.

Crushes. Girls at this age are more advanced than boys, but both genders can begin to be attracted to other kids. However, discourage early dating and couples-only boy-girl parties (there was one of these a few years ago in fifth grade!).

As far as sexual knowledge is concerned, there is a huge range, already. Some kids with older siblings already have a lot of information. Kids take in what they're ready to take in. Give them a little information and if they're curious and willing to ask, then give them more information. They will all have formal "family life education" at the end of fifth grade.

One of the hardest things at this age is for *parents* to recognize that their child is not a little kid anymore.

### **What is Socialization Like for Kids this Age?**

This is an important time for kids in their social lives; they're learning a lot of social skills. Girls are not over-connected to one best friend anymore. They can be in groups and be somewhat less inclined to have jealousies, though that still can happen. That doesn't mean that meanness goes away, it really begins to escalate from fifth grade on.

The task for all kids this age (and for many years to come) is figuring out who makes a good

friend for them. If some kids aren't nice to them, they should find somebody else. Even though they may want to have a particular person as a friend, they need to begin to evaluate how they feel with that person. Someone who teases or bullies is not a good friend. A more subtle concept for parents to help children grasp is that of consistency. It's not unusual for kids this age to get along fine at a home playdate, but then at school one may reject the other because they're not seen as popular or cool. On other words, it's important to have a friend who will be there for you both outside and at school.

Friendship building is a process, and there's a lot of fluctuation. Kids' friends now won't necessarily be the same friends at end of 8th grade.

Kids still tend to be friends with kids in their classroom, but that will change, too.

Very bright kids may have particular challenges in socializing. They may have more difficulty finding age peers with similar interests or who speak and think as they do. It is helpful for very bright kids to become "bilingual," in a sense, that is, to gauge their audience and not use vocabulary or ideas that others won't understand. Bright kids **can** attract other kids and be accepted for who they are **if** they are helpful, nice, and friendly, and are not arrogant, know-it-all-ish, or brag.

### **What do we do about Picky Eaters and Weight Management?**

This can be a challenging area for parents. Of course, it is important for kids to eat balanced, nutritious meals, but trying new foods can be a slow process. If kids begin to appear are too self-conscious of their weight (particularly girls), and they tend to want control and are perfectionistic, then eating disorders can develop, even in kids as young as ten. On the other hand if a child is tending to get overweight, then guidance and direction from the pediatrician is very helpful. They may be more willing to listen to an outside professional than to parents. Eating should not be a battle ground, but weight and nutrition should be monitored. When given choices for lunches they will often comply (or at least negotiate) for a combination of healthy and less healthy foods. Parents also need to watch what they're eating at home. Remember, you still control the purse strings and the shopping list, and kids will not starve.

### **What About Parent - Child Communication?**

It's so important at this age for parents to maintain good communication with their kids. Kids will start clamming up in a few years, and it helps to set the tone and expectation now that we (parents and kids) can work on things together.

At dinner, everyone (mom and dad, too!) can discuss their "highlights and lowlights" of the day. This will give parents a window into what's going on with their kids, and provides a basis of conversation. It's also good for kids to see that parents have good and bad things going on in their day, and how they deal with the bad things, and enjoy and are thankful for the good things.