

Spring 2014 Fourth Grade Level Parent Meeting  
Dr. Allan Gold, Reed District Psychologist  
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### **Questions, Issues, and Concerns in Parenting Our 4<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> Graders**

Parents raised a number of questions and issues.

A general statement from Dr. Gold about this class: This is a competitive group of students. The level of sophistication with these kids is pretty high. The advantage of this is that you can have advanced conversations with them.

#### **What are appropriate guidelines for use of cell phones and technology?**

You can set appropriate limits on kids. Five years ago this was an 8<sup>th</sup> grade issue. There's an acceleration of growing up. Students' emotional life and independence is all connected with technology these days. Dr. Gold's opinion is that kids don't need SMARTPHONES. Parents like the security of knowing that they can contact their children once they begin to be out and about, which starts to happen right around this age. A compromise is that kids have cell phones but not Smartphones. This also gives parents an avenue to test for responsibility. They think that having a phone (and many other electronic devices) is a right, but it should be a privilege. They should demonstrate responsibility before they get a Smartphone, even though some kids have them already. For example, if your child is going to a friend's house, you want them to demonstrate that they call you when they get there and that they come home at the right time.

The longer you can stave off that kind of independence through technology, the better. If you are going to give your child that kind of technology, you have to monitor it, even though it may be a lot of extra work for the parents. Parents should refer to Common Sense Media for social media websites to stay away from. Dr. Gold will distribute a list of these in the fall when students start fifth grade.

- Parent got a "free smart phone" that he gave to his child, and he was wondering if he should take it back. Should he? Dr. Gold recommends that the phone not be taken back, but that there are rules: The phone doesn't go in her room. The parental controls/safeguards are there, etc. The student continues to demonstrate responsible use of the phone (including not being on it all the time).
- Another parent says she gave her son a phone and he didn't really use it. It was more for social cachet.

Dr. Gold emphasized that the thing to watch for is video games on these devices. Kids can get addicted to these games. What kind of games are they playing? There are some violent games: Grand Theft Auto and Call of Duty are very violent. Three

things to watch for: What is the amount of time they are spending? What is the content of the games? How are they games affecting their social interactions? Think about your values about this? Figure out where you have control and exercise it.

Video games can be very seductive and fun. Quick poll: Parents who do not allow technology during school nights – about 1/3 of the parents present raised their hands. Some kids are better at moderation than others. About a quarter of the parents said that their kids played up to a half hour of games on school nights. Watch for push back. Dr. Gold has received a number of calls from dads of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders with concerns about what looks like addictive behavior. So now is the time to take control so that addiction doesn't happen. If students can't pull themselves away from the games, then it is certainly alright to remove the devices (phones, ipads, laptops) altogether.

- Another parent observation about technology: Concern about desensitizing and a lack of empathy in her kids. She's also noticed a certain passivity, where the kids become more observers than active participants.
- A positive example of kids **not** being passive observers: There was a situation in 4<sup>th</sup> grade where three boys came to Dr. Gold to help another kid that was being teased a bit. He talks to the kids quite a bit about teasing. He sees cases of reporting of incidents like this at Del Mar. He hopes that it continues to happen more and that kids don't fall victim to this "code of silence".

Does e-time include educational activities? No, Kahn Academy and such doesn't count.

- One dad indicated that some parents don't buy memory cards so the kids have to start their games over each time.

Dr. Gold notes that we should watch what we role model. If parents are on cell phones or staring at computer screens all the time, the kids are going to pick up on these behaviors. He recommends some books on parenting values like the new one from Madeline Levine. An article "Raising Moral Children" that talks about research that shows that it is not what we say, but what we do that kids pick up on. If we're totally involved in our electronic world then they will pick up on that.

### **How to help them manage their emotions?**

We want to work on resilience, that is, how to appropriately manage disappointment, frustration, even failure and bounce back. Part of this process is learning how to manage emotions. Dr. Gold talked about some cognitive (self-talk) techniques to help kids put events into perspective using a 1-10 scale. How kids

interpret or talk to themselves about events dictates how they react (which often is overreaction to how “awful” the event is). We respond to events by how bad we think they are. Once students can learn that disappointing and annoying events are not “10s” (e.g. death, disaster, major illness), then they can see that normal disappointments (losing a baseball game, getting a less than perfect grade on a test, being called a mean name) can be responded to in more reasonable ways (than tears, furiousness, depression). If they still rate a small disappointment highly, that indicates an area to work on. Many kids find this rating tool useful. It helps them keep perspective and calm themselves down.

Another tool is talking about internal voices. For kids with perfectionism, it sometimes helps to talk about internal voices that are not helpful.

- A parent brought up managing expectations in a losing baseball season. Dr. Gold suggests that they understand the value of these things is not necessarily winning, its getting physical activity, developing skills and having fun. There are ways to manage these expectations. Sharing your own personal stories is helpful.

### **What involvement should parents have around social interactions as students move to fifth grade?**

Now you are transitioning from parent as manager to parent as consultant. Consultant roles are more advisory. You become a sounding board, listening, asking good questions, brainstorming solutions, and helping them decide how they want to try to solve a problem. Go back to their own historical experiences and have them reflect on how they dealt with them. Kids are old enough to draw on their own experiences, if they are prompted to think about similar situations that they have handled in the past. Ask them what they want help with. Also let them know its natural to have these kinds of feelings: fears and anxieties.

Being the consultant is especially useful for helping them with social interactions, where you’re not directly involved. They’re beyond the age where you call up another parent to try to solve a friendship problem. They are increasing capable (and desirous) of doing this themselves. Try to work it out with the child, which can take some listening and brainstorming time. If there’s some ongoing negative interaction between or among, it’s good to let the teacher and Dr. Gold know so that kids can sit down and talk things out. Communication is the key, miscommunication can happen quite a bit. Once the kids talk it out they find that things are maybe different than they thought. Kids and adults all assume things, often incorrectly.

- A parent suggested a girl’s leadership conference where they did a lot of role-playing and found that to be really helpful.

## **What about puberty? How do we help with this major transition?**

Daughters will be getting periods this year or next year. A challenge is getting your kids to accept who they are? It's hardest on early developing girls and late developing boys. There is a large range in development. Kids normally think that everyone is looking at them. Early developing girls are embarrassed and don't know what to do. For early developing boys it is status. They are taller and look older. Sometimes the world expects more from them (either boys or girls) since they look older. Late developers will look younger. The message parents need to deliver is that everyone is different. You don't have a lot of control over your body. It will all even out. What matters is what is inside, that is what they have control over. Everybody thinks something wrong with them in middle school, not realizing that everyone else feels that way.

5<sup>th</sup> grade classes teach Family Life Education in late spring. It is taught by the classroom teachers, with an emphasis on physiological development. At the end of the instructional session, boys and girls are separated. Dr. Gold and male teachers will answer questions from the boys, and the female teachers talk to the girls. Kids know more than the parents think they do. The teachers try to answer all the questions they can in a factual way. Two thirds of the students say they are comfortable talking to their parents. Communication seems better in this generation. If your kids ask a question, answer that question with a little information. If kids want more information, they'll ask.

Already in this grade there have been rumors going on, e.g. who like whom. Some are not kind. Dr. Gold keeping an eye on this and having discussions with kids. He tells kids all the time: "If there is something you don't want anyone to know, don't tell anyone." Kids like to talk. Also note that with technology, rumors and gossip can become public quickly.

Why is reputation so important now? Reputations start to stick now. We all pigeon hole people. We take one characteristic or one event and decide that's how they are. These things stick. A positive reputation helps when you goof up. 4<sup>th</sup> grade is when reputations start to stick.

## **How to get kids to do what they don't want to do?**

As they get more independent, this will become more of an issue. Parents are still managers in this arena. Bribery is an option if it requires them to put out extra effort for them to overcome some difficulty. A reward at the end of extra math or points for something at the end of the week can help. Kids don't have to be rewarded right away at this age. They can generally earn points for an end of the week reward. Do not reward kids for things they are supposed to do and **can** do like homework, chores and common respect. Again, if a student has real difficulty learning and has to put out a lot of effort to gain mastery of a skill, then a reward is appropriate. Always link achievements and accomplishments to effort.

Dr. Gold recommends thinking about what rewards and/or privileges they earn. When it comes to consequences, try to make the consequence close to what the child is not doing. For instance, if she's not doing chores, that takes time away from you doing things for her. If you can show that what they are not doing has an impact on you, then it tends to work better. Try not to take away play dates if the child needs social interactions.

- A parent suggested that respectful interactions could be something you reward and/or have consequences for. Dr. Gold suggests figuring out the context of the situation and maybe even having a family meeting to get some agreement about what to do to increase respectful behavior. A reward can be used if you are trying to get kids to break bad habits, but should not be continued indefinitely.