

Spring Kindergarten Grade Level Parent Meeting
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Questions, Issues, Concerns in Parenting our Kindergarten-going- to-1st graders

What is expected in first grade in terms of the structure of the classroom, behavior, focus, and academics?

In 1st grade the expectations are that children will be able to focus and **stay on task** for 15 to 20 minutes. **Independence** is a big issue! Can students work independently without an adult guiding them all the time?

It is important to remember that children are still 6 years old! There is a great range of developmental readiness and teachers are well aware of the different needs of their students. Your child's current teacher is the best source for information as to the readiness of your child for first grade. How are they doing now? If you haven't heard that there are concerns then they are most likely ready for first grade.

First grade is more structured. Students will sit at desks for a good part of the time, though there is still movement and work in small groups or whole class meetings. Academically, Kindergarten is quite rigorous these days, so there is much less of a jump in expectations between Kindergarten and first grade than there was ten years ago. Kindergarteners are generally well prepared for the academic expectations of first grade.

Should we be doing anything over the summer to better prepare our children for first grade?

Reading is important to do over summer, but make it fun. Go to the library. Be sure to read TO them. Enjoy active learning, the beach, camps, Exploratorium, Discovery Museum, socializing, and solidifying older friendships and making new ones. Check with your child's teacher to see if they would recommend any more focused academic work to build up reading or math skills, if your child is not quite making benchmarks, or just reaching the benchmark (level 4 or D in reading, for example). Most kids are doing just fine and should enjoy the relaxation and fun of summer vacation.

•What should we as parents encourage vis a vis friendships?

It is important for children this age to build friendships and engage with more than just one or two other children. Children build both security and confidence in knowing that they can make friends. The next few years (and for many thereafter) there will be increasing "drama" in girls' friendships. Because of more intensity in relationships than boys have, girls experience more jealousy, hurt, rejection and can get quite mean. They tend to hold onto hurt feelings more than boys. For these

reasons it is important that they have a number of different friend possibilities as resources if their primary friend(s) want to expand. Friendships at this age are naturally fluid, so it is important that kids develop both flexibility and resilience in their social worlds.

There are many social skills that children need to develop. Many do so naturally, but others need to be taught. Some general areas of social skill development are: reading body language and visual clues; initiating - how to enter a group or asking someone to play; proactive skills - giving compliments, sharing, playing fairly, "reading" audience interest, finding commonalities, asking relevant questions; resolving conflicts - compromising, being a good listener, knowing how to apologize sincerely; knowing what not to do: being too bossy, not being assertive enough, not acting one's age (too young or too old), not respecting others' space or property, having to have one's own way all the time, arguing about rules a lot.

This is a good time to initiate talks with your children about what makes a good friend and about how to be a good friend. What do good friends do? How do they treat each other? What do you like/not like about a particular friend? How do you feel when you're playing with them? Children (and even adults) spend a lot of time trying to figure out whom to be friends with and how to fit in. Sometimes their choices are not good, but they need help in evaluating friendships. Consistency is something important to keep in mind: if a "friend" is nice on a home playdate, but not at school, is that a person you want to be friends with?

•What about emotional intelligence? What is developmentally appropriate? What is the role of parents in developing emotional intelligence?

The development of emotional intelligence, the understanding of how oneself and others are feeling and how to respond to others' emotions, and how to act appropriately in response to one's own emotions is perhaps one of the most important life skills that parents can help develop.

Such understanding as empathy and a strong sense of self are two areas that parents can really work on with their children. Students this age are quite capable of empathy, but even at this age they may do things that ignore others' feelings and reactions. If parents really believe that kids need to develop these skills, then they need to devote the time and energy to addressing them. Don't let instances of meanness (including to the parents, themselves), go unprocessed. It is very challenging for parents, these days, to counteract media images of sarcasm, putting down or ridiculing, eye-rolling, etc. Children pick up on all of this without recognizing the disrespect that is portrayed. It is ok for kids to be angry or disappointed or annoyed, but they need to be taught to express their feelings in respectful ways (not - "I hate you. You're the worst mom/dad in the world!"). They need to think about how they would feel if someone said that to them, how they want to be treated, and there should be appropriate consequences (loss of home privileges, playdates, etc.) for disrespectful behavior.

Children also need to be empowered to stick up for themselves. **They** should learn that they don't have to believe and internalize put-downs from other kids. They need to start thinking about what they like about themselves (not just skills that they can do well), so that they can develop an internal voice that will be able to counteract the inevitable teasing or put-downs that will occur.

Related to this is setting limits with **computers** NOW because it quickly gets out of hand both time-wise and content-wise. Social media and cyber bullying is a big issue for older children, but at increasingly younger ages (fourth grade and up). Children are at risk of growing up with a lack of social, face to face skills and lack of empathy.

Teasing is verbal abuse. Be sure to model appropriate ways to communicate, and treat other people. They WILL copy you and mimic your attitude.

Time is NOW for parents to set limits, have consequences for rude, disrespectful behavior towards parents, other adults, siblings, friends, etc. If you don't set limits now, it will get worse later! Possible book: 1 2 3 Magic - how to discipline children to do what they're supposed to and not do what they shouldn't do.

• **How do we explain children's moodiness at home?**

While children should generally be able to control their emotional outbursts and meltdowns, they are still only 6 and spend a lot of energy holding things together at school. They really want to be good boys and girls and please their teachers, so much of the moodiness and grumpiness happens at home. Kids who are tired and/or hungry have less control over their emotions and let their feelings out in the safest place to do so and with the safest people to do so, at home with parents. This doesn't mean that you can't take preventive steps. Don't engage in power struggles, give hugs, provide a snack at home, or run-around time, encourage some quiet time to regain composure.

• **What about competitive sports at this age?**

Dr. Gold does not recommend competitive sports for children this age. This is a time when children should be building skills and learning to value physical activity for the fun it can provide and to establish some patterns of healthy physical activity. Asking kids this age to put all of their energy into following rules, focusing on a competitive game, and have a big portion of their self-esteem determined by their athletic performance is not really appropriate at this age. School, itself, is competitive enough and kids already know who's best at what. If a sport focuses on skill development and learning, and friendships, not competition, then it may be just fine. Some children are not team oriented, so more individual sports like swimming, tennis, gymnastics, or martial arts may be better for them. Recognize the potential value conflict that underlies these choices: popularity or fitting in versus recognizing, accepting, and celebrating each child for who he/she is. There can be

just as much or more parent peer pressure for kids to engage in particular activities than from the kids themselves.

It is also important not to overschedule kids this age. They need unstructured time to learn their social skills and work out the complex dynamics in friendships without the structure of formal activities. As kids get older they want to do more, but there is a great risk of stress in trying to juggle extracurricular activities, family life, social life, and homework. Get in the habit of setting limits and saying “no” to kids’ requests for multiple activities. One or two days of after school activities is generally enough. When thinking about a new activity, don’t make a long term commitment (more than two or three months, if possible), as kids may not like the activity once they get into it, and then the “value” of commitment and responsibility rather than the child’s interest and pleasure takes over.

- **What summer and school year activities are offered in the community?**

The discussion revealed that there is no list of activities that has been compiled by either the local towns or anyone else. Aside from the Park and Recreation Department, there is only word of mouth among parents. It was suggested that the PTA take on as a project to research and compile a list of activities for children both after school and during the summer and provide that information to all Reed District parents.