**Reed 1st Grade Child Development Parent Talk Notes**

**With Dr. Maya Van Putten, Dr. Mary Niesyn,**

**and first grade teacher, Ms. Wendy Jawor**

**October 22, 2015, 8:30-10am**

**Purpose of the meeting**

1. Partnership with parents
2. For parents to get to know each other
3. Answer any top-of-mind questions parents have. Parents posed questions related to:
   1. Homework
   2. Recess
   3. Chores
   4. What makes for a good friend
   5. How to manage difficult friendships
   6. Competitive sports

**5 Major Areas of Child Development that will be covered in the talk include Physical, Cognitive, Social, Emotional and Moral development.** The talk will try to paint a picture of most first graders (who are 6 and turning 7) in each of these 5 areas.

**Physical Development**

* + A time of gradual physical change developmentally.
  + Children at this age need a lot of time for physical activity, inside and outside.
  + Good time to encourage taking on responsibilities as a member of the family (like feeding the dog, putting dirty clothes away, setting the table, making the bed, empty the dishwasher). The key is that they are trying not to be perfect at it. They do want to help so this is a good time to start this and this will translate to benefits in school.
  + Hand muscles are improving, writing is becoming easier. Still hard to stay on the lines for them and to create spaces; this is developmentally appropriate.
  + Noisy, sloppy age. Often in a hurry. Our job is to slow them down. They take on projects that are too hard and can become overwhelmed and shut down. This is a sensitive age. Hallmark for this stage is speed.
  + They get tired easily and they have more of a tendency to get sick.
  + They commonly chew on things (shirts, hair, watches, etc.). This is normal.
  + Need lots of time for imaginative, free play so be careful overloading them with lots of activities. Your child will let you know if the balance is right. One or two activities per week is probably best but of course see what works for you as a family and for the temperament of your child.
  + Related to this, quiet time can be important so they can recharge their batteries, particularly so for some children. See if your child’s personality suggests that they need more or less structure and quiet time. Are they extraverted and get energy from being around others and like that or are they introverted and need to recharge through quiet time (alone time). Examine how structured your child’s life is over a 2 week period to get a good sense of this. Research is showing that children do best when faced with how to construct their time in a creative way versus over-structuring them.
  + Their bodies and brains are not ready for true, traditional competitive sports. Try to choose a program that emphasizes fun, exercise and teamwork over perfecting skills and winning…until they are around 8. Effort and participation are what you praise at this stage.
* **Cognitive Development** 
  + They are in the middle of an exciting period of rapid cognitive growth that takes place between the ages 5 and 7; they understand the concrete world better now. They are gradually becoming less ego-centric. Some are better at understanding other’s views and most will get this by age 7. As part of this development, they will soon start to understand why we have rules, and to grasp concepts like space, time, past, present, etc.
  + They are very fairness based currently—this matches their concrete thinking.
  + They take on projects that are too difficult and can become overwhelmed.
  + They enjoy the process more than the product. They are interested in producing a lot of work rather than a smaller amount of high quality work. The “how” versus the “what” or outcome. Some children (not most) will start to show signs of being more interested in getting things right. Occasionally, perfectionism can emerge, but that is often seen later. If you do see it, practice how to make mistakes, take a deep breath and keep going.
  + They compare themselves more and more to peers and this gets even stronger in second grade.
  + Replace “I can’t do it” to “I need to practice it more” or “I need to work harder”. Remind them that everyone is gifted with different things. And some have put more time into things and that is why they are ahead; not all things come easy.
  + In response to a parent question regarding age differences within each classroom--Expectations are higher on our children now than they were when we were in school, and age differences within a given classroom can make a difference. As a school, we are trying to get the cohorts in a shorter age range so that they progress more easily together developmentally.
  + They should spend about 20 minutes per night on homework and this is separate from reading. Think of reading as a separate activity. Purpose of homework is to give them a sense of responsibility. Use a timer and see if they are done or not. Set the timer and be there to help them. Turn the timer off at the end of 20 minutes regardless of what happens and let things unfold naturally. If they did not use the time well, they can then go in and explain to the teacher why the work is not done. Your child’s teacher will help them understand this responsibility. We do not want you to have homework battles at home.
  + This is a stage to teach them some increased independence. They need to own certain things like books to put in their bags and homework assignments. Try to ask them an open-ended question (It’s Tuesday, do you have what you need in your backpack now?) to prompt them to remember to put something in their backpack, rather than you simply doing it for them.
* **Social development**
  + 6 year olds are working to develop and master their social worlds. Looking for friends, trying to fit in.
  + The social skills that many 6 year olds are working on include- How do you initiate play? How to join a group? How to solve a problem? How to manage challenging emotions? Wait your turn, lose gracefully, compliment another person…some acquire these skills naturally and others needs some help.
  + 6 year olds are often very competitive and many have a tough time losing. Play games that involve winning and losing with them. When you win, model gracious winning and when you lose model graceful losing. Encourage them to “Keep the party in your head” when they win. Emphasize that kids don’t want to play with others who cannot lose or who are too boastful when they win.
  + Children have different temperament and some don’t care about winning; it may come later or not at all and that’s fine.
  + Friendships: they want friends and some have best friends but many do not. At this age, friendships are often somewhat more mature or selective than they were in kindergarten. Discourage “best friend” language because it is OK if you don’t have one. It is positive for a child to be able to play with lots of kids.
  + Kids are starting to think about what makes for a good friend. They will go back to kids who are unkind to them. You can help them think about how they feel about being with some kids. They will grapple with this for a while.
  + A big social conflict at this age is standing up for yourself versus tattling. They are just becoming more aware at this age. They process everything for themselves. Often, your child wants to know that you know something, so tell him/her that you are well aware of things and are taking care of them. They are starting to understand a grown up problem versus a 6 year old problem. What do you need to tell a grown up versus let it go? They are working through this difference. It is important to let them handle and work through age appropriate problems on their own, so that they can develop coping skills.
  + For girls, this is an intense time socially. How to manage exclusivity in play is a big issue. This dilemma starts now and can continue until about 4th grade. Be a good listener and help them think about this. Try to direct them to try other activities (jump rope, kickball) versus people. Encourage kids to approach a group of three, or a single child to play. Approaching a group of to is often unsuccessful.
  + Boys: they tend to play more in big groups so this is less of an issue for boys.
  + A big challenge at this age for parents: How much do you get involved in solving your kid’s problems? You can be a good listener and ask questions like what did you do/say, What could you have done instead, How did it end? Use reflective listening (sounds like you feel this or that emotion. This will help them to develop a more sophisticated emotional vocabulary). You can role-play with them how to manage a particularly challenging situation (let’s practice it together).
  + We use “I” messages in school to help children identify the appropriate emotions they are feeling. Our Kimochis curriculum will also help them to develop these skills further. We talk about how something made us feel. I felt this way when you did this or that. Often an upset is due to a misunderstanding.
  + When should you contact your child’s teacher about a social concern? If you hear about the same social problem three, times then you should let your teacher know.
  + Your child’s teacher should be your first contact because they know your child best!
  + As a parent, try hard not to “throw a child/parent/teacher under the bus” even when your child comes to you and is upset about something. Using critical language to describe another child or adult can lead your child to have negative feelings about this other child/parent/teacher, and this can be hard for them to shake, even as the situation improves.
  + Let your child know that all emotions are OK. There are no bad emotions or feelings.
  + Bullying is a big topic right now and it is a widely misunderstood term. The definition of bullying is repeated actions of unkindness from one child to another over time and often there is a power imbalance involved (one child is older than the other or more experienced). One or two acts of unkindness does not constitute bullying. So talk to your child about this term, so they understand it. If true bullying does happen then go to the teacher first. We do not tolerate bullying at Reed and take it very seriously.
  + Also, if you do want to approach another set of parents regarding a social difficulty, try to be thoughtful and calm. Know that there are two sides to every story. Ask, what have you heard? Here is what I have heard.
  + Don’t interview for pain! If your child comes to you with a social concern, don’t ask them leading follow up questions about that particular behavior/child the next day. It is hard to avoid this! Ask them neutral, open-ended questions instead. Your children will bring it up again if the situation continues to be problematic.
  + Your child often wants physical release when he/she is angry. A Kimochis saying we like a lot related to this is: You can be mad but you can’t be mean. They need to learn that hitting is not ok but being angry is OK. One strategy to help them is breathing deeply.
  + It is very important to allow them to experience negative things/feelings/experiences so that they can develop confidence, coping skills and so on. It is not good to remove those experiences entirely, as this deprives them of the ability to develop coping skills.
* **Emotional Development**
  + We expect 1st graders to manage their emotions at school, and most can do so. We expect them to verbalize their feelings using somewhat more sophisticated emotional vocabulary
  + Tantrums are on the decline typically at home, but some still do happen.
  + Complaining still happens quite a bit.
  + They need a lot of love and encouragement at this age
  + Many 6 year olds are easily upset when criticized and become discouraged. This is a sensitive age. Severe criticism and yelling is particularly hurtful at this age. Try to model making mistakes and persisting when tasks are hard.
  + Use natural consequences to help your child learn to take responsibility for his/her behavior and to develop resilience and self-awareness. Such as not getting a star or having to tell the teacher that he didn’t do his homework or leaving the house hungry because he didn’t finish eating on time. Let them live with these consequences. Don’t state a consequence you are not willing to follow through on. Make sure the consequence matches the “crime”.
  + Anxiety: we are seeing increasing and higher levels at all three Reed schools and also across the country. The good news is that we think we know how we can reverse this trend as parents. The research suggests that as parents we need to allow our children to regularly grapple with and experience negative emotions, such as failure, boredom, loss, anxiety, sadness and so on in small age-appropriate doses. If you remove all of these from your child’s life then they don’t develop the coping mechanisms they will need to become healthy young adults. They need to strengthen their disappointment muscle! There are lots of great books on this topic: The Blessings of a B Minus and the Blessings of a Skinned Knee. The Gift of Failure. Price of Privilege. Raising Happiness. How to Raise an Adult. Another reason behind the trend towards anxiety has to do with high-octane pressure for achievement. Try to avoid this. More and earlier is not better. Try to praise effort over product, persistence over perfection.
* **Moral Development**
  + Moral reasoning at this age is still mostly black and white, until adolescence. Most children behave to avoid getting into trouble.
  + Related to lying, all children lie. Children at this age lie for two main reasons, to avoid getting into trouble and to make themselves look better. Remind them of the importance of telling the truth and the consequences that occur (people will not trust them) for not telling the truth.
  + Start helping your child to develop empathy skills.

Thank you for joining us!