**Reed Kindergarten Child Development Parent Talk Notes**

**Thursday October 1, 2015**

**With psychologist Dr. Maya Van Puten, principal Dr. Mary Niesyn, and teacher Mrs. Sarah Vattuone**

Purpose of the talk- to build partnerships with families, to help support our children and to share information about child development.

The talk will cover child development in five areas, Physical, Cognitive, Social, Emotional and Moral. In each of these areas, I will try to paint a developmental picture for you of a typical kindergarten student, who is five and who will turn 6 at some point this year.

1. **Physical Development**
   1. This is a time of gradual physical change – they are much more competent physically now. They have more skills in terms of running and jumping, their large muscles are more effective, monkey bars are more of an obsession than ever, even when blisters are terrible – don’t be alarmed.
   2. It’s a good time to take advantage of this physical capability and start small chores at home – ex. Making bed, empty your tote, feeding a pet, etc. Suggest pairing chores with the understanding that helping and doing chores is being part of being in a family. By helping mommy, she will have more time to play and to do things with you.
   3. At this age, they need lots of time for unstructured play. Err on the side of fewer after school activities rather than more. Perhaps one or two, or even none, particularly in the beginning of the year. They are often quite tired after school and need time to be quiet and to just play. Meltdowns and tantrums are very common at this age after school. School days are long for their little bodies.
   4. Fine muscles – still developing. Writing skills are still tricky and developing. Certain activities can help them to develop fine motor strength if you are concerned, such as play dough, leggos, lacing, beading, etc.
   5. Sports – when should they start? Kids don’t have the physical ability to truly play formalized, organized sports until about age 8. If you do choose to have your child play, try to find a program that emphasizes fun, exercise and teamwork and and focuses less on winning and perfection.
2. **Cognitive Development**
   1. In kindergarten, they are right in the middle of this rapid, exciting period of cognitive growth that takes place between the ages of 5 and 7. Most of them are currently concrete and ego-centric right now but that will begin to evolve. They’ll begin to understand logic and rules more.
   2. They’re learning to sort, order and classify currently. This will help them with reading and science later on. Their vocabulary is growing rapidly.
   3. 5 year olds generally only see one way of doing something. This is NOT selfishness, it’s just where they are developmentally. They will gradually learn to understand another person’s viewpoint as they develop cognitively. Around 6-8 they’ll understand another person’s perspective as well as more abstract concepts such as time (past, present and future).
   4. The Reversal of letters and numbers is common at this age – most children gradually improve in this area, through practice and modeling. Don’t worry about it!
   5. How long should they be able to sit? Approximately for between 5-10 minutes in the beginning of the year and that grows to about 15 -20 minutes or more by the end of the year. Same as following directions – most students can follow 1 step directions early in the year, and then can move on to follow more complex directions as the year progresses. You can help them develop this ability at home. For example: Give them 2-3 steps directions that are very clear. Have them repeat them back to you. Be patient and wait while they are doing the steps. Then praise them for following directions. In the classroom – they come in, hang up their jacket and tote and sit down. Teachers then praise them for listening and following directions.

1. **Social Development**
   1. Friendships are generally not very deep or profound at this age – most children play indiscriminately with peers. They’re less selective than they will become later on. Encourage them to explore lots of friendships.
   2. Kindergarten students are learning social skills currently, such as sharing, playing cooperatively, entering a group, learning to resolve a conflict, managing frustration, and etc. Feelings DO get hurt at times in kindergarten and it’s important for you to know that kids are generally okay within a few minutes after they appear unhappy.
   3. We use the Kimochi’s (Japanese word for feeling) program in Kindergarten and at Reed to help children understand their feelings and to develop an emotional vocabulary. Feelings pillows are a safe way to help teach and learn about feelings.
   4. In terms of talking about what happens during the day at school – many children generally don’t share much and that’s okay. Questions to consider asking – what was your high and low for the day, what was something kind someone did for your and something kind you did for someone else, what are you grateful for today? Ask specific and concrete questions. What game did you play in PE, what book did your teacher read today, what song did you sing in music today, etc. Think about looking at the daily schedule and ask about something very concrete and they will generally talk about it.
   5. When is it a good idea to contact your child’s teacher regarding a social concern? If you hear about the same social difficulty 3 separate times, it’s a good idea to let your teacher know. In general, if you have concerns about your child, their teacher should be your first contact.
   6. Don’t interview for pain! For example, after a reported incident, don’t ask was so and so mean or did he/she say/do something mean to you today? This creates a dynamic of your child thinking and believing that you want to talk mostly about pain and this is what gets your attention. Ask open-ended questions instead. If you show interest and your child is upset, it will come out. Also, be mindful about how you talk about other children and adults to your child. Don’t “throw other children, teachers, parents, etc. under the bus”. Don’t let your child know you don’t like someone. It can alter your child’s perception about that person or situation and how to manage it, and this perspective can be hard to shake.
   7. Try to encourage your child to work out their small social difficulties on their own. If you become too involved in helping them to navigate every social bump in the road, you are depriving them of the opportunity to develop coping skills.
   8. Bullying is a common term these days and is often misunderstood. Let’s define it to create clarity. Bullying is defined as intentional (to cause harm), repeated meanness from one child to another. Often with an imbalance of power. Being mean one or two times is not bullying.
2. **Emotional Development**
   1. Most 5 year olds are happy little people. They are eager to please and find joy in many things.
   2. We expect that most kindergarteners are working on their ability to manage their emotions. We use the Kimochi’s program here at Reed to help them develop their social and emotional skills.
   3. Temper tantrums are waning for most children at home now, although they certainly do still happen at home for some. School behavior is commonly better than home behavior.
   4. A parent asked about how best to de-escalate tantrums, etc. In general, they may have more of them at the end of the day due to their long day at school. We often try to apply reason but that ‘s not what they want to hear. They are actually not capable of hearing, reasoning or solving the problem when they are in the midst of a tantrum. Give them space, be calm, express love and care, or hold them. Maybe they need a stuffy or special toy to help them to calm down. It can also help to teach and give them tools or a strategy in advance of how they can behave when they’re feeling that way. Then, when they are in the moment you can remind them to use their strategy/tool – you can model for them and do it with them. After they’ve calmed down completely, then you can let them know that it’s not okay to have that kind of behavior. They need to be in charge of their voices or body during this time, even when they are upset.
   5. It’s okay to be mad but it’s not okay to be mean is a Kimochis tenet that relates to this. You can say, “Can you try that again in a talking voice instead of a shouting or angry voice?” And then practice that with them. Keep in mind that in order to change a child’s habit, it can take 6-8 weeks.
   6. Anxiety is emerging as an important issue in this district – we’re seeing high levels of anxiety in our district and in wealthier communities across the country. Things we can do to help as parents – ensure our children have opportunities to experience difficult emotions, such as frustration, boredom, challenge, failure and anxiety. Children need to experience the bumps in the road. Doing so will help them to develop coping skills! Don’t be a snowplow and move the obstacles out of their way. If you do that, you are depriving them of the opportunity to develop the coping skills they will need to become healthy young adults. You can also praise effort and persistence over the end result or product. There are a lot of great books that discuss this topic, including, The Blessings of a Skinned Knee, the Blessings of a B-, Raising Happiness, The Gift of Failure, How to Raise and Adult, and others. Researchers: in this field include Christine Carter at UC Berkeley and Carol Dweck, from Stanford University.
3. **Moral Development**
   1. True moral development doesn’t develop into a more nuanced form until adolescence. They’re morally still very young and are concrete and black and white in how they think and reason. All children lie, mostly to avoid trouble or to make themselves look better. You can and should talk to them about how it makes you feel and how it is important that you be able to trust them.
   2. You can also help your child to develop empathy at this age, by talking about emotions and helping them to develop an emotional vocabulary.

Thank you for joining us!