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UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD AND SCHOOL

Starting school for the first time, or transferring from one school to another is a major event in the life of a young child (and in the life of a parent as well). While we expect school to be a happy and rewarding experience for both you and your child, we would be unrealistic not to expect occasional “growing pains.” Here are some of the most common concerns that parents express to us:

CRYING

“My child cries all the way to school each morning and clings to me at the door when I say good bye. Maybe he’s not ready for school. Should I wait until next year?”

Each child goes through a period of adjustment when he first comes to a new school. Even the child who is accustomed to being away from you during the day may experience some anxiety when faced with a large group of new children, unfamiliar adults, and a daily routine unlike any he has previously known.

Before the first day your child actually attends school here, talk to him about school. Tell him how he’ll bring his lunch, play with new friends, learn new things, etc. Make sure he knows that school is not a place for parents, that you must be apart from each other, but that you’ll return after school is over to take him home. Some children like to hear the day’s schedule reviewed in advance so they know what to expect, and when.

Nevertheless, he may still get upset. Crying is a normal and expected response to his fears. The best thing to do is try to stay calm and relaxed yourself so that your own anxiety does not increase that of your child. Reassure him that you will come to get him when school is over. You might tell him that it is O.K. for him to be upset, but that his teacher will take good care of him. Reinforce that you love him and will be back later. Then say good-bye, quickly, at the door and leave. Our experience is that if you stay with your crying child in the classroom it only prolongs the problem.

FOOD

“My child isn’t eating his lunch at school, and I am worried that he will (1) get sick, and/or (2) not grow properly.”

It is not unusual for a child’s appetite to change when he first comes to school, or for that matter, even to change at other times during the year. While we do encourage children to eat their lunch, we don’t force them. Following are some points to keep in mind:

- If your child hasn’t been eating his lunch, gently ask him why he doesn’t want his food. There may be something bothering him that even his teacher may not know.
- It often helps to involve your child in the preparation of his lunch. Allow him to make some choices about what goes in his lunch. Discuss what makes up a good lunch and have him help put the food in his lunch box.
- Also, what looks great at 7:30 in the morning when it is being prepared, may not look so good four hours later when it is time to eat.
- Keep in mind that even if your child’s lunch comes home untouched, he has probably eaten a fair amount of fruit and vegetables that the children fix for their snacks.

When all else fails, Just give your child a good breakfast, a good dinner, and be patient . . . sooner or later they all settle into a normal eating routine. Unless the child has a metabolic disorder confirmed by a doctor, when his body needs food, he’ll feel hungry and want to eat!!

SCRATCHES & BUMPS

“My child comes home with scratches and/or bruises on his body. Is he getting beaten up by other kids on the playground - or does he fall down often or what? Don't you watch the kids when they play in the yard? - when he gets hurt why don't you notify me?”

Whenever we are aware of a child being hurt we pay special attention to it. Injuries at School usually fall into the following four categories:

Class 1 - Most of the time when a child gets hurt all he needs is a hug, a pat on the back, and a few kind words.

Class 2 - However, if the child actually has a minor injury we apply first aid and either put a note about it in the sign in book on his page or tell you when you pick him up.

Class 3 - If it is somewhat more serious, we apply first aid and attempt to notify you using the phone numbers on your Identification and Emergency Information Form. In these cases we want you to make a decision whether you want to take your child for medical treatment or leave him in school.

Class 4 - If we feel it is quite serious and necessitates immediate medical attention we call the paramedics while we try to notify you.

There are times, however, when a child is hurt at school and no one knows, even though the children are always supervised. This may happen for a variety of reasons:

- 1) We aren't able to see all things at once and we miss some falls and collisions.
- 2) Some children don't like to say anything when they are hurt and we have no way of knowing unless they tell us; they don't cry or we don't hear them.
- 3) No other child tells us the child got hurt.
- 4) The child himself doesn't really feel hurt until later on at home when the injured area becomes tender and sore.

Some children are much more physical on the playground than others and they just naturally fall more and injure themselves. Also, some children are not as coordinated as their peers and they injure themselves more often.

ABC's

“Since my child started school, he doesn't have an interest in his ABC's. When he was home he liked to do letters and numbers...why not now?”

Each child has a wide variety of interests. In a normal home environment he is usually able to explore only a small number of these interests. Therefore when he comes to school he finds a great deal of very interesting activities available in the classroom that he hasn't been able to do before. He also may be quite tired of letters and numbers from home and find little interest in doing the “same old thing” at school.

When a child becomes completely adjusted to school and has had sufficient time to explore the classroom he will naturally have an interest in those activities which suit his needs. Often if a child has been “pushed” academically at home, he finds the classroom a safe refuge from the pressure of being “pushed” at home by his parents. The child can become fed-up with academics at home and therefore have no interest in them at school. Therefore, parents must make sure that any academic work they have their child do at home is fun, happy, and not “work.” If parents pressure their children, they can end up resenting academics.

Children should be left to learn academics in a natural way at school. If the study of academics has not been given undue importance by his parents, the child is more free to learn in a happy way at school. Also the child then learns much quicker!

“Since my child started school all he wants to do is ABC's. Don't the children ever get to play?”

Of course this question is the opposite of the previous one. Some children have a strong natural drive to learn to read or do other academics. They find that our school is just the place they've been looking for, and they take to the academic materials with enthusiasm and vigor. When a child is interested in academics in that way, we make the most of it because when enthusiasm is coupled with the proper environment, learning can be accomplished much sooner than when that zest is missing. Of course, they still have their usual recesses and other activities.

THE REPORTER

“When my child comes home each day, I ask him what he did in school. He always says, ‘I played.’ Is that all the children do? Play all day?”

Between 8:30 and 2:00pm (2:45pm for elementary) the children have one main recess. The recess is approximately 30 minutes long. So, even if your child reports that all he does is “play” he actually has only about a half hour a day on the playground during regular school hours. However, children may answer that all they did was play for at least three different reasons:

1) Some children don’t like being questioned, even in a friendly manner, about their day. They are more private and reserved than other people . . . often times much more so than their outgoing parent(s).

2) Others are not good reporters and even though they would like to be able to tell you all they did, their vocabulary and/or verbal skills are not so good. For them to say, “Today I worked with the movable alphabet building words with phonetic objects” is just too much. Maybe they haven’t as yet learned the exact name of the exercise. Since the Montessori materials all have specific names - names which their parents don’t know - children can get frustrated as they try to tell their parents about the exercise. They have a hard time explaining and their parent may find it difficult to understand as they attempt to explain different exercises with names their parent has no frame of reference for. That is why it is such a good idea for parents to come to Open Houses, Parent Meetings, etc., so they can learn just what these exercises are, their names, and how they are done. It is much easier for a child to tell his parents that he went on the swings and played with his friend. Parents know what swings and friends are...but that moveable alphabet! who ever heard of that?

3) In addition, some children have such a good time on the playground that recess is what sticks in their mind . . . especially if they are picked up from the playground by their parents, it is the last happy thought in their mind.

We are well aware that you send your children to school to learn and that it is one of the key reasons you have your child with us. We share your desire for your child to learn.

BAD WORDS

“My child has been coming home with some foul language. I know he doesn’t hear it at home, so he must be learning it at school. Can you put a stop to it?”

We also believe that it is inappropriate for a child to say or hear swear words at school. When we hear a child use bad language we talk to him about it. If it continues, we tell his parents, and bring it to the attention of the rest of the staff as well. We tell the children that bad language is absolutely unacceptable and not tolerated in our school.

Nevertheless, children do hear foul language from a variety of sources; usually older brothers and sisters, cousins, or kids on their block. It is unfortunate however, that many children hear foul language from their parents as well - usually when they think that their kids can’t hear them. Children then find it hard to understand why they shouldn’t use these words themselves. Another rich source of swear words is the movies children watch with their parents either at home or the theater.

Children usually know that these are words that adults do not like to hear children use. Sometimes they will use them just to see their parent’s or teacher’s reaction. It is certainly true that most children have little idea what these words mean. Nevertheless, they must learn that saying these words is socially unacceptable for them, whether at school or at home.

I DON'T WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL TODAY (OR) ANYMORE

“My child has been complaining about school lately. Every morning he says he doesn’t want to go. He says he doesn’t like school or his teacher anymore. What should I do?”

There can be a wide variety of reasons why a child doesn’t want to come to school. Sometimes the child is just too young. Most of the time however, the reason is one of the following:

1) Often when a child says “I don’t want to go to school,” he means that he wants to stay home. In other words, although he is saying something about school, he is meaning something about home. Children can miss being with their parents and want to spend a day at home. It can be a drag to go to school every day. After all, staying at home might mean not having to get up so early, watching lots of cartoons, etc. -just like Saturday! A relaxing day off at home can be nice for children as well as adults. However, in the same way that an adult must get in the habit of going to work (whether he likes it or not), a child must get in the habit of going to school, even though it isn’t always the most appealing thing he can think of.

2) Some children seem compelled to try to get a rise out their parents by manipulating them . . . seeing if they can get them to give in and let them stay home. Some kids are adept in the art of inducing guilt. So often, the child who fights all morning with his mom about coming to school, is fine and happy as soon as she has left. Or, if the father brings the child to school there is no fight at all. So, what is really going on is something between the child and mother. If it were really a problem at school, the child would be upset at school also. But if the child is fine at school, then the problem is with the child’s relationship to his parent(s) and that problem comes out in going to school.

It sometimes happens that a parent will tell us that they are having an awful fight getting their child ready in the morning. They then ask us what awful things are happening to the child at school that makes him fuss and fight and complain so much. It can come as a complete surprise to us - because that same child who has such a wonderful time at school gives his mom such a hard time in the morning complaining about how much he hates it!

3) Also, some children know how much it bothers their parents to see them cry and fuss in the morning, and they try to manipulate their parents through their knowledge of how hard it is for their parents to accept their child’s bad feelings. Some parents cannot stand to see their children upset - it just affects them too much - so they will do whatever it takes to make the child stop crying. It breaks some parents’ hearts to see their child cry. And the child knows that and becomes an incredibly good actor! The point is this: allow your child to be upset without it tearing you up emotionally and making you act in a way that is not in your child’s best interest.

4) It can also happen that in his mind a child will cast his teacher in the role of the villain. The teacher can in some children’s eyes represent the cause of why they have to go to school. It is especially easy for this to happen if the teacher is giving the child some much needed discipline, e.g., cleaning up after himself, waiting his turn, respecting the rights of others, apologizing when he’s hurt others, etc. If the child is used to having his or her own way in a more relaxed setting, such as the child’s home or the grandparent’s home, then the teacher can be looked at as being the one who is disrupting the old comfortable way of life. Of course, the teacher and the discipline she gives is usually the best thing that can happen to a child - but many children, just like many adults, resent being told what to do and having to alter their ways. Some kids will “fight tooth and nail” to hold on to their old selfish ways.