

Parents often approach us with questions about what is common and developmentally appropriate for their child's age.

We are grateful to school counselors Denise Rousso (St. Anne) and Jennifer Moyer-Taylor (St. Joseph) for allowing us to reproduce this short compilation of their research in order to assist you in navigating these sometimes challenging, yet wonderful times.

Be aware that children move through these stages at different rates, some sooner, some later.

We hope you find their words helpful.

Your Second-Grader

Common Cognitive, Social and Emotional Developmental Behaviors of Second Graders

Classroom:

- Due to the growth and increasing complexity in the frontal (responsible for executive functions) and temporal lobes (speech and long term memory), your 2nd grader's memory is significantly improving. This newly gained coherence allows the brain to integrate the past with the present and drives a deepening awareness of their "inner self." Good age to begin journaling.
- Labeled the "age of reason" because they are more aware of schedules, space, direction, social norms. However, in turn, he/she has a stronger propensity to worry about tests, schoolwork, predictability and even recess.
- Levels of dopamine, a key regulator of focus, are ascending in the brain, and are increased when goals are reached (helping them to set and chart incremental goals will make he/she feel ecstatic!).
- Attention span is 7 – 25 minutes, less for boys. To encourage greater concentration, some researchers suggest limiting TV as it releases and depletes high quantities of dopamine.
- Where 1st graders are fond of the pencil sharpener, 2nd graders adore the eraser. Often perfectionistic, he/she hates making mistakes (lots of erasing) or risking making them, not finishing tasks and *especially* losing.
- Because of their need for closure, they sometimes work to exhaustion and need help knowing when to stop a task.
- Works best alone, or in pairs, although class relationships can be changeable from one day to the next. *May struggle with group work.*
- Enjoys repeating tasks and reviewing learning.

Social / Emotional Behaviors:

- Frequent friendship shifts. Establishing friendships are very important but often lacks the skills to do so; relationships are on and off, from one day to the next.
- Conscientious and serious, has strong likes and dislikes, views things as right or wrong, wonderful or terrible, without much middle ground. May have more complaints, (for example, "My parents are unfair," "Other kids cheat" or "Teacher is unfair").
- Inward looking; sometimes moody, withdrawn and shy – may say or think "Nobody likes me." May quit in games because of feelings of inferiority, not because they didn't get their way.
- Often content to spend long hours in their room, alone by choice, and appreciate a quiet corner for work or reading.
- More sensitive to others' feelings but sometimes tattles.

Communication style

- Vocabulary expands rapidly
- Likes one-on-one conversation
- Precise talker
- Interested in all sorts of codes.
- Likes to write notes.

*You're the best judge of your child's development and what is "normal" for him or her. Just when you think you've figured out your child, something changes. You may find strategies that once worked no longer have any impact on him or her. **Don't worry, this is normal.***

Information compiled by Jennifer Moyer-Taylor, St. Joseph School Counselor and Denise Rousso, St. Anne School Counselor. For permission to customize, copy and circulate, please call Denise Rousso at 206-282-3538 X115 or email at drouso@stannesea.org. Copyright 2012.

Ask the Experts – A snapshot of a common friendship behavior

How Do I Teach My Child It's OK to Lose?

By Debra Collins, Family therapist

QUESTION:

My second-grade daughter is very bright. She reads at almost the fifth-grade level. The problem is that she is so hard on herself! She is often upset if she doesn't win at a math game and it can ruin her whole day. Despite encouragement at home, and constant reassurance that she cannot always be the leader or the winner, she just can't grasp this concept. The only expectations we have for our daughter is to do her best, and enjoy school. I am afraid that this behavior, if not redirected, may be harmful in the long run. I know that I must also ignore some of the drama, but it can be hard. Do you have any suggestions?

ANSWER:

It is wonderful that you are examining her issue from all sides. It can be difficult to teach children how to lose gracefully. I think that in general, children today seem to have a lower tolerance for frustration than in previous generations. There are many things being attributed to this, such as keeping kids overly stimulated and active, not clearly defining expectations or giving mixed messages.

It can also be challenging for academically bright children to cope when things suddenly are difficult for them. There is no shortcut to life experience. Although she is reading at the fifth-grade level, she still is only in second grade. What are her teacher's expectations of her and how are they communicated?

Dealing with disappointment is a learned skill, and we learn first from the adults around us. You may want to explore how people tolerate frustration in your family. Even with the best of intentions we may give mixed messages by saying one thing, but modeling another. Adults come home from work and blame the boss, storm around the house when something didn't work out as planned, or call themselves "stupid." Modeling how to deal with unfulfilled expectations, by talking about what you are feeling, is one way to demonstrate coping skills.

As you mentioned, it is important to not fuel drama, especially if she's using it as a way to connect. Acknowledging her feelings, but minimizing your reaction can help. In a neutral tone you can say something like, "It's disappointing when you don't win at...". Then resist the pull to reassure her or make her stop. When she's calmer, you can ask her if she wants to come up with a solution. "Failure" teaches us problem solving, but sometimes we just need to learn to sit with our disappointment.

Advice from Great Schools' experts is not a substitute for professional diagnosis or treatment from a health-care provider or learning expert familiar with your unique situation. Great Schools recommends consulting a qualified professional if you have concerns about your child's condition. If you have any questions or concerns about your child, consult your pediatrician.

Your 2nd Grader References

Bates Ames, Louise (1990). *Your Seven-Year-Old*. New York: Dell Publishing. *This book gives good information on family dynamics and age-related expectations and milestones.*

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