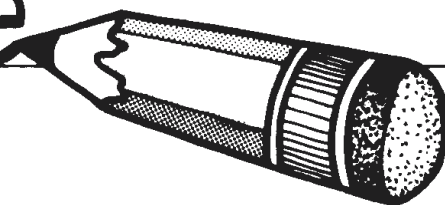


Parenting Pipeline

*A newsletter for parents of fourth-grade children
from Iowa State University Extension*



The World Connection

The fourth-grade student is entering an exciting time of life. Preadolescence is a new scene — a new way of seeing things. Suddenly your child is connecting with many meaningful experiences. School and studies inform her about the real world. Math can be used to solve shopping problems. Science reveals things she sees in the world about her. Reading involves stories with real plots. The skills practiced in the first few grades are finally usable. The student is ready to be an active contributor to her own life. This youth is ready to discover more. The primary grades are where your child has learned to read, fourth grade is where she will read to learn!

Making Choices About Their World

Offering choices will open new opportunities for your child. Parents should be cautioned, however, that children are not an extension of themselves and should not be expected to participate in areas where parents could not. A parent who had wanted to be a national baseball star may well have a child more interested in music than baseball. Children grow and change as

adults do. A youngster who loved ball as a preschooler may get his fill of little league early in his school years and decide to pursue something else.

It is important to guide youth to explore a number of interests during these preadolescent years. This is the time a child can try many things to determine what he enjoys.

Since peer identity is becoming more important, this may be a great time to choose a club or group to join. Children this age have a need to belong to a group. Groups may develop on their own, both positive and negative. Look into the variety of clubs and activities available led by involved adults. This provides you the opportunity to present limits to work within and for your child to make choices. Looking to an adult other than the parent is an exciting experience for the fourth-grade student. These clubs are a positive option, and they channel energies in a positive direction.

Since every child needs to feel accepted and worthwhile, choose a group where even the smallest successes are applauded and failures are minimized. Since comparisons with other youths erode self-confidence, choose activities that help the youth build personal skill and that she can compare to her own past performances but not to others.

Joining groups or taking classes can be overdone. Parents need to help their child adjust to and balance her activities.

In all activities, parents will want to direct attention to the child's efforts and successes rather than failures. Use failures or disappointments only as an opportunity to teach or to change. Plan any activity, especially a new effort, so that chances for success are good. Divide the activity into small pieces with several small goals instead of one large one. If a child experiences failures and says, "I can't," remind him that he hasn't been able to perform that task up to now, but "can't" isn't forever. What he doesn't know now can be learned.

Making Choices About Their Problems or Conflicts

At times, parents need to offer choices for a different reason. Children this age experience conflicts and need to be aware of options available in problem solving. Problem solving involves choices.

When you and your child, or your child and siblings or peers, become involved in conflicts, the following may assist in working through the conflict.

Offering Choices

What — Offering choices presents children with at least two options and lets them decide what they will do.

Why — Decision making is a skill basic to self-esteem, problem solving and responsibility. Children need experience with many kinds of choices. Parents can carefully offer two alternatives that are acceptable to them.

Progression

1. Simple choices. These are either/or choices. “Do you want to wear your blue sweater or your jacket?” “Do you want to turn off the radio, or shall I turn it off?”
2. Multiple choices. “Do you want to wear your zip jeans, your button jeans or your new pants?” (Add more choices as your child is able to handle them.)
3. Ask for possible choices. “What have you considered wearing?”

Finding Choices

You can use either the logical or creative approach to finding alternatives.

Situation: Dawn and William each get one hour of TV time a day. They are quarreling over who gets to sit in the comfortable chair to watch television. Dawn: “You always sit there; it’s my turn.” William: “I was here first. So, it’s my turn.” They want you to decide.

Creative possibilities:

President — Make the rule that Dawn uses it on even days, William on odd days.

Magician — Make another chair.

Aunt Em — Let the “loser” use the special rocking chair.

Neighbor — No TV until they find a solution.

Child guidance expert — Help the children solve the problem themselves.

Logical possibilities:

Both use — They both sit in the chair together or they alternate at commercials.

Find substitute — One child can use a stool.

Bargain — The child who sits in the chair will set the table for the next meal.

Get help — Get a parent to decide whose turn it is.

Make a rule — The person who is using his or her TV time gets the chair.

Distraction — Ask Mom to bake cookies with the other child’s help.

Choose some ideas to try: Select the three or four ideas you think may work and offer them. In this example the children might choose to make a rule — the person who was using his or her TV time got the chair.

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The parents’ challenge with their fourth-grader’s new interests is to set realistic expectations for the child. Such expectations need to be based on the child’s developing interests and abilities. Age guidelines can help. Give the child an opportunity to try a variety of activities. Observe carefully. Can the child succeed? Does the child enjoy the task? Does the child need instruction and assistance? Is the activity frustrating and upsetting to the child? Can the child succeed with encouragement and a little help?

Becoming a keen observer of your child’s ability is a good way to know how realistic your expectations are. Assisting your child in discovering her world connection is a challenge that can provide memorable times together.

Adapted for use in Iowa from Parenting Pipeline, North Dakota State University Extension Service, by Donna K. Donald, family life field specialist, Iowa State University Extension.

This newsletter is published for families with fourth-grade children by Iowa State University Extension. For more information about parenting education, contact your local county extension office or access the Iowa State University Extension to Families website, www.extension.iastate.edu/families.

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