

# How They Grow in Fourth Grade

## Where They Are

Nine is a time of rapid learning for kids. Nine-year-olds:

- Want to put some distance between themselves and adults, and may rebel against authority.
- Need to be part of a group.
- Seek independence.
- Possess a high activity level.
- Can express a wide range of emotions and verbalize easily.
- Can empathize.
- Can think independently and critically, but are tied to peer standards.
- Begin to increase their sense of truthfulness.
- Are typically not self-confident.

## Where They're Going

At nine years old, your child is learning how to make decisions and set standards. You can help by encouraging your child as she:

- Begins making decisions.
- Gains a greater sense of responsibility.
- Sets personal standards.
- Develops personal interests and abilities.
- Develops social skills.
- Learns to engage in group decision-making.

# The Fourth-Grade Pressure Cooker

## Introduction

It's 10:00 P.M., and 9-year-old Bradford Randall is having trouble sleeping. He should have done his homework before dinner, but he couldn't resist hanging out with his friends. Now he's in for it, *unless*. . . . He begins to plot: "If I get up early, and stay in at recess, I can finish it in time." Plan in place, he drifts off to sleep.

## Homework Anxiety

Homework anxiety is common among kids Bradford's age. He's in the fourth grade, and the pressure's on. In grades K-three, teachers are focused on children's social development and basic skills. "In fourth grade, it's not just the concrete stuff anymore," says Maureen Morgan, adjunct professor of education at Lesley College in Massachusetts. "Teachers are now asking kids to look at abstractions and synthesize information, and the amount of written work increases."

This change in expectations has not gone unnoticed by Bradford: "As fourth graders, we've got more privileges -- we can walk all over the building." But along with that comes more responsibility. "We read more -- the books are a lot bigger, and I spend a lot more time on homework than I used to," explains Bradford. "The teachers used to let us off easy 'cause we were younger, but now if we don't get all our assignments done by Friday, we get detention."

### **Social Pressures**

As if the academic pressures weren't enough, fourth graders are also going through a host of developmental and social changes. On the edge of puberty, they're beginning to recognize who's smart, who's popular, and where they fit into the mix. As extracurricular activities abound, kids are also becoming more social outside of school. "Friends and their opinions are becoming increasingly important," says Sandra Fox, associate professor of education and department chairperson at Lake Forest College in Illinois.

### **How You Can Help**

How can parents help their fourth graders adjust? "It's very important for them to be supportive," says Fox. "Kids this age are not ready to reject their parents' approval, but they are beginning to exert some independence."

This can make for a few power struggles, but hang in there, says Sarah Finley, coordinator of educational services at Tomorrow's Children's Institute of Hackensack University Medical Center. As schoolwork becomes more demanding, parents need to help kids learn how to structure their time. She recommends that you and your child hammer out a homework schedule together and stick to it.

## Fourth Grade: What Will They Learn?

School changes quite dramatically for students in fourth grade. Your child will be applying reading skills in content area subjects such as social studies, science, and health. Study skills will become very important as kids will now be asked to write reports and handle long-term assignments. Find out what else your child will learn this year.

- Divide by one-and two-digit numbers.
- Use calculators and computers.
- Add and subtract fractions.
- Use contextual clues to discover the meaning of words.
- Understand and use the steps of the writing process from pre-writing to the final draft.
- Write research reports.
- Locate information in the library.
- Use encyclopedias, newspapers, atlases, and magazines as resources.
- Understand the history and geography of their state.
- Recognize how science is at work in the world around them, especially through technology.