# Growing Through the Grades: 2nd–3rd Grade



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# Introduction

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Licensed Clinical Psychologist

- Practicing in the field of psychology since 2005
- Extensive experience working with children, families, adults, and couples
- Owner of Mental Health Group Practice in San Jose: **Relucent Psychology Group**
  - Treating children, adolescents, adults, families, and couples
  - Specializing in Child Therapy. Parent Coaching, Co-Parenting & Family Therapy

# What to Expect Tonight

- What's Normal?
- The meaning of your child's behavior
- Supporting Big Feelings
- Friendships and Social Conflicts
- Anxiety and Frustration Tolerance
- Building Confidence
- Power Struggles and Independence
- Repair

# What changes in 2nd and 3rd grade?

*Children this age are in an important in-between stage:*

They want more independence but still need considerable support.

Their academic and organizational demands increase.

Friendships become more important and more complicated.

They compare themselves to others more often.

They become increasingly sensitive to fairness, embarrassment, and belonging.

They can sound mature one moment and completely fall apart the next.

**That inconsistency is developmentally normal.**

*A child can know what to do and still be unable to do it when overwhelmed.*

# Key Message

*“My child’s behavior makes sense, even when it is not acceptable.”*

### Understanding vs. Permitting

Seeing behavior as meaningful does not mean permitting it.

### Action & Boundaries

Understanding the meaning of the behavior helps us respond to what is driving the behavior while still holding the boundary.

# Moving from Behavior Control to Skill -Building

***At this age, challenging behavior may look less like a traditional tantrum and more like:***

- Arguing about every direction
- Ignoring repeated reminders
- Blaming others
- Saying, “I don’t care”
- Refusing homework or chores
- Lying or hiding mistakes
- Becoming extremely upset about losing
- Melting down after school
- Saying, “I’m stupid” or “I can’t do anything”



# *Before assuming defiance or laziness, ask:*

- Is my child overwhelmed?
- Is the task too big or unclear?
- Are they afraid of failing?
- Are they trying to regain a sense of control?
- Are they hungry, tired, overstimulated, or socially depleted?
- Is there a skill they have not yet developed?



# “Two things are true”

*This framing allows us to hold empathy and expectations together:*

“You really don’t want to do your homework — and homework still needs to get done.”

“You’re furious with your brother — and I won’t let you call him names.”

“You were afraid I would be upset about the test — and it is still important to tell me the truth.”

**Validation is not agreement.**

*Why is showing empathy and understanding important?*

# One Helpful Strategy: Connect, Limit, Support

## 01

### Connect

Name the child's experience.

## 02

### Limit

State the expectation or boundary clearly.

## 03

### Support

Help the child take the next manageable step.

**Example:**

*"This assignment feels enormous right now. It still needs to be completed. Let's look at the first two questions together, and then you can decide whether to keep going alone or have me stay nearby."*

# Supporting Big Feelings without Fixing Everything

Kids at this age may have bigger vocabularies, but that doesn't mean they can regulate independently. They still borrow calm from the adults around them.

## When a child is highly dysregulated:

- **Use fewer words**
- **Lower your voice**
- **Avoid lectures, questions, and consequences in the moment**
- **Focus first on safety and regulation**
- **Revisit the behavior after the child has recovered**



## The parent's job is containment, not immediate resolution

### Children need to experience:

*"My feelings can be big, and my parent does not become frightened, overwhelmed, or rejecting."*

### Being the Steady Adult

This does not require parents to be perfectly calm. It means working toward being the steady adult in the room.



## What to say in the moment:

“You’re having a really hard time. I’m right here.”

“I’m not going to argue with you while we’re both upset. We’ll talk when our bodies are calmer.”

“You don’t have to feel calm yet. I’ll help you stay safe while the feeling moves through.”



# After-School Restraint Collapse

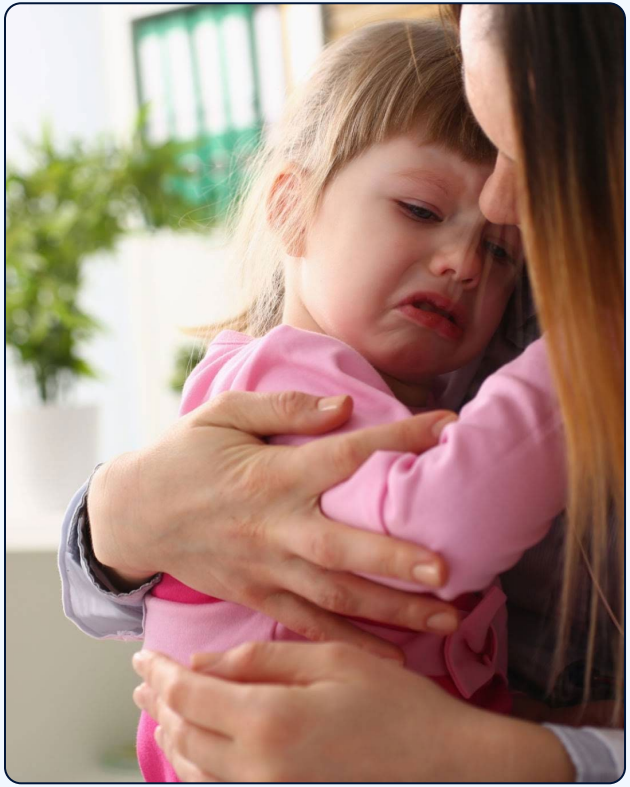
Children may hold themselves together all day and release feelings once safe at home. This can look like irritability, crying, fighting, or refusing questions.

**Create a predictable decompression period:**

- Food and water
- Movement or outdoor time
- Quiet sensory activity
- Limited questioning
- 10–20 minutes without demands
- Connection before homework or chores

**Instead of immediately asking, "How was school?" try:**

***"I'm happy to see you. Whenever you're ready, I'd love to hear about your day."***



# Friendships, Belonging, and Social Conflict

**Children at this age are beginning to notice:**

- Who is included and excluded
- Who is “best friends” with whom
- Social status and popularity
- Differences in abilities, appearance, and possessions
- Teasing, shifting alliances, and group dynamics

**The Parent's Role:**

Parents naturally want to fix social problems, contact another parent, or tell the child exactly what to do.

**But children also need support developing their own social confidence and problem-solving skills.**



# Friendships, Belonging, and Social Pain

### #1 Start with validation

*“That really hurt. You thought you were going to play together, and then they chose someone else.”*

**Avoid immediately saying:**

- “It’s not a big deal.”
- “Just find someone else.”
- “They aren’t a good friend.”
- “You’re being too sensitive.”
- “I’ll call their parent.”



# Friendships, Belonging, and Social Pain

**#2 Then help the child think through the issue.**

Once the child feels understood, ask:

- **“Do you want me to listen, help you think, or help you do something specific?”**
- “What felt hardest about it?”
- “What do you wish you could say?”
- “What are a few things you could try tomorrow?”
- “Would you like to practice with me?”



# Friendships, Belonging, and Social Pain

### #3 Skills to rehearse at home

Use role-play to practice:

- Joining a group already playing
- Responding when someone says no
- Disagreeing without insulting
- Setting a boundary
- Asking a teacher for help
- Repairing after hurting a friend
- Deciding when to walk away
- Identifying when an adult needs to intervene



# Anxiety and Frustration Tolerance

**As children become more aware of performance and comparison:**

You May Notice

- Avoiding unfamiliar activities
- Becoming upset by small mistakes
- Erasing work repeatedly
- Refusing to try unless success feels guaranteed
- Frequent stomach aches or headaches
- Asking for repeated reassurance
- Saying, “I’m the worst” or “Everyone is better than me”

## The Reassurance Trap

**Parental Impulse:** “You’re not bad at math — you’re great at math!”

**Unintended Impact:** Can communicate that the child cannot tolerate uncertainty or disappointment.



# Increasing Frustration Tolerance

## Validate Before Reassuring

- “You’re worried you might get the answer wrong.”
- “It’s hard to see someone else do something that feels difficult for you.”
- “You wanted that to go perfectly. Mistakes feel especially uncomfortable today.”

## Then Communicate Confidence

- “I believe you can handle the feeling of not knowing yet.”
- “You do not have to feel confident before you begin.”
- “Being frustrated does not mean you cannot do it. It means you are doing something hard.”



## Our goal is to build resilience and confidence through manageable struggle

Confidence does not come only from praise. It develops when children experience:

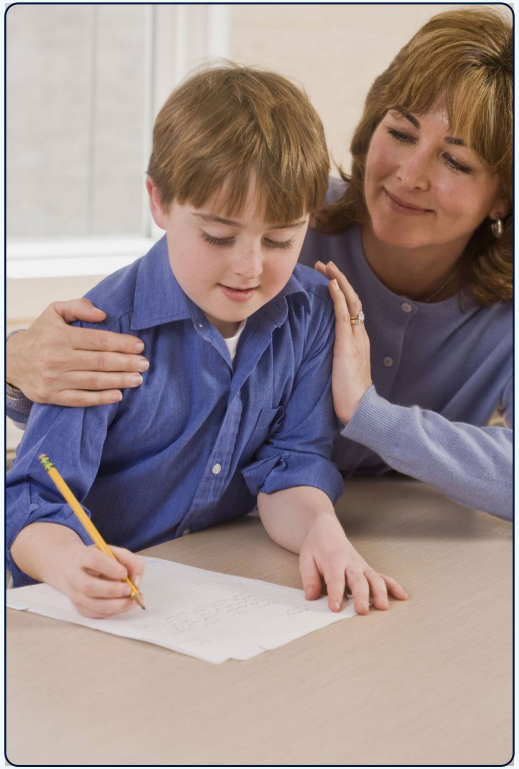
| 01 | 02 | 03 | 04 | 05 |
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| Something feels difficult. | They become uncomfortable. | They receive support without being rescued. | They take a manageable step. | They discover that they can cope. |

## Support Without Taking Over

- “Would you like help starting, help making a plan, or quiet company while you try?”

## Praise the Process Specifically, Not Necessarily the Outcome

- “You stayed with that even when it was frustrating.”
- “You asked for help instead of giving up.”
- “You noticed your mistake and tried another strategy.”
- “You were nervous, and you participated anyway.”



# Independence, Responsibility, and Power Struggles

Children need more opportunities to learn how to be independent at this age, and they aren't ready to manage everything on their own. They still need structure, repetition, and support for planning and organization.

## Offer autonomy within a firm structure

"Homework happens before screens. You can choose whether to start before or after your snack."

"Your backpack needs to be ready tonight. Would you like to do it before dinner or after?"

"The answer is no to another show. You can turn it off, or I can help."

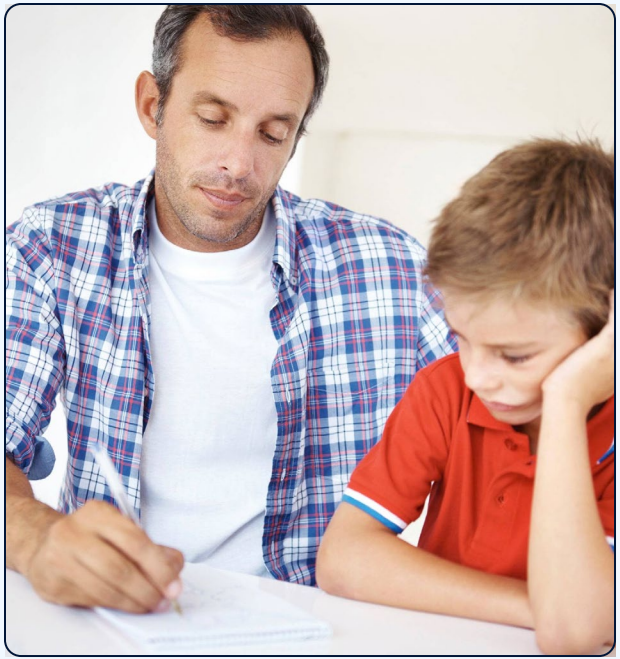
### Key Principle

The child is allowed to dislike the boundary. The parent does not need to make the child agree with it.

## Use systems instead of repeated verbal reminders

**Consider:**

- A visual morning or evening checklist
- A designated backpack and homework area
- One consistent time for school preparation
- Breaking tasks into smaller steps
- A family screen plan established outside the heat of the moment
- Collaborative planning during calm periods



# Collaborative Problem-Solving

When the same struggle happens repeatedly, address it when everyone is regulated:

**Example Script:**

*"Mornings have been stressful for both of us. You have a hard time stopping what you're doing, and we have to leave on time. Let's figure out what might help."*

## Key Principle

Collaboration does not mean the child has final authority.

The parent remains the **sturdy leader** while inviting the child into the problem-solving process.

## Questions to Ask:

- **"What is the hardest part?"**
- **"What ideas do you have?"**
- **"Here's what I need to make sure happens."**
- **"What plan should we try this week?"**

# Repair: The Most Important Attachment Skill

Parents will yell, overreact, give in, or handle something differently than intended. Secure attachment does not require perfect parenting.

**What matters is returning and repairing.**

**A helpful repair includes:**

- **Naming what you did.**
- **Taking responsibility without blaming the child.**
- **Acknowledging its impact.**
- **Sharing what you will try next time.**



## Effective Repair Example

*“I yelled at you during homework. You were having a hard time, and I became overwhelmed too. My yelling was not your fault. I’m sorry. Next time, I’m going to pause before I respond. We can try that conversation again.”*

## What to Avoid

“I’m sorry I yelled, but you weren’t listening.”

## Why Repair Matters

Repair teaches children that relationships can survive conflict and that taking responsibility is safe — not shameful.



# Closing

The goal during these years is not to raise a child who is always happy, compliant, or successful.

**The goal is to help raise a child who gradually learns:**

- **My feelings make sense.**
- **I can ask for help.**
- **My feelings do not control every action.**
- **My parent can hold boundaries and remain connected to me.**
- **I can make mistakes without becoming a bad person.**
- **Conflict does not mean the relationship is broken.**
- **I can experience disappointment and recover.**
- **I am good inside, even when I am struggling.**



# Closing

**Final Takeaway**

Children become more independent when they trust that connection is still available.

**Our job is to offer both:**

| Roots | Space |
| --- | --- |
| A secure relationship to return to. | Enough space to practice doing hard things. |



# Thank you for listening!

# Have more questions or need more support?

## EMAIL SUPPORT

Reach out via email for general inquiries, detailed questions, or personalized support:

s.mohsen@relucentpg.com

## PHONE CONSULTATION

Directly schedule a free phone consultation by scanning below: