



## Expect Success for your Child

Adapted from an article written by Jane Faulk

**Do you accept** second-rate school performances from your kids? If you have expected less than the best in the past, now's the perfect time to change. As school gets under way, make this your motto: Don't settle for the mediocre. There are many reasons why some parents might be accepting less from their kids academically:

- They could fear the negative ramifications of stress and don't want to appear pushy.
- They feel their kids are so over-scheduled with extracurricular activities that they don't have time to devote to schoolwork.
- They've let TV dominate the home, so homework happens hurriedly or as an afterthought.
- Or maybe they're settling for less because they're simply too busy to show interest.

This fall, consider getting more involved in your kids' education and encourage--yes, even **push**--your kids to work to their potential. Why this suggestion for a more assertive approach to academics? It's not so kids will get into the best colleges or because they need good grades to get good jobs. It's because kids who perform at their intellectual peak gain satisfaction from mental exercise and acquiring knowledge. Kids can learn to dig in, spend a little extra time, get help when needed, and then, when they grasp that new concept or make sense out of a new piece of information, they'll feel competent and excited because they figured it out.

Often what's missing from kids' school life is academic discipline, which means training children to acquire the self-discipline to concentrate, stay on top of assignments and master certain skills and information. Just as you train your children to tidy their bedrooms, write thank-you notes for gifts and groom themselves, it's important for you to expect a daily discipline for schoolwork.

### **CREATE A TIME AND PLACE**

When your child comes home with that first homework assignment, don't make it seem like a dreaded disease: "Oh no, not homework." Instead, take this approach: "You have your first homework assignment; this is an important responsibility. You're growing up." At this point, set aside a consistent time and place for quiet homework with the TV off.

### **GIVE HOMEWORK HELP**

At first it's okay to oversee your child's homework and help her by making baby steps toward excellence with specific suggestions like these:

- I see two incorrect problems on your arithmetic homework. Try these two again.
- Let's go over your spelling words one more time.
- You need to re-copy your social studies homework. It's difficult to read.

With older kids, don't hesitate showing them how to outline a chapter from their science textbook. When studying for a math test, give a tip or two about checking work and doing the problems that are easiest first, saving the tougher ones for last.

Convey any study skills that worked for you, but then respect that your child may not follow your advice. Ultimately, each child must find his own way. Even if your son says, "Oh, Dad, you went to school in the old days, that's not the way we do it today," at least you've established your interest, clearly indicating you value academic responsibility and achievement.

#### **FOUR STEPS TO SUCCESS**

As you set off on this new campaign to encourage your children to reach their academic potential, proceed cautiously. It's not effective to just tell your children to work harder, and you can't simply demand that your C student turn into an A student overnight. But you can set the stage so your C student can turn some of those C's into B's.

- 1) Keep the TV off between 7 to 8 P.M., or establish this rule: The house is quiet between 6 to 9 P.M. on school nights.
- 2) Involve your child in only one extracurricular activity if you see there is frustration or problems balancing work, tiredness, and irritable behavior. Do this especially if you notice that taking on more means schoolwork suffers.
- 3) No evenings out on school nights- It may work for some kids, but others need more down time and may be too tired for school the next day if they were out a little late.
- 4) Occasionally, but not habitually, challenge your child with a reward. Be sure the goal is reasonable and within your child's ability. "I see you got a C+ in math; I bet you can bring that up to a B. If you do, we can talk about doing something special." However, the best reward is often the proud feeling your child will have. Also, be careful about promises of rewards that come too often and become meaningless.

#### **The Right Way to Get Kids to Excel in School**

Between some parents and children, the chemistry for assistance with academics just doesn't work. Power struggles erupt, the child resists and schoolwork deteriorates. Now it's time to call the teacher, hire a tutor or back off completely, allowing your child to come to terms on his own with his academic responsibilities. If you drop out, do it in the following manner: "You know that in our family schoolwork is important. You're smart, you can do the work. I'm confident you'll figure it out on your own."

And when your child does well and receives a good grade, don't attribute it to luck or chance. Instead, say, "You got a B+ on your history test; good for you. Your grade reflects your hard work."

Rather than focusing only on grades, show genuine interest in what your child is learning and doing in school: "You're coloring a map of the United States. I'll show you the states I've been to; let's count them," or "You're learning about the holocaust. Do you think such horror could occur today?" When kids go to school to learn, good grades follow. Your sincere interest supports acquiring knowledge.

When children are challenged by something new, or when you require them to redo or correct an assignment, they may show frustration. A little of it actually promotes learning.

Here's a scenario that might help you understand your role when tears and frustration prevent your child

from completing a challenging assignment.

**SIXTH GRADER:** I just can't write this paper on hurricanes. I don't know how. You write it, Mom. I'll tell you what to say.

**MOTHER:** I know writing this paper is difficult, but I can't write it for you. You can cry and cry; I'll sit right here by you. And then when you're done crying, you'll need to write your paper.

This situation actually occurred between Janet and her son Alan. Janet sat by Alan at the kitchen table as tears rolled down his face, with her hand on his arm. After 2 minutes of tears, Alan picked up his pencil and wrote a full page about hurricanes. It wasn't perfect, but he did it. With Mom by his side, Alan absorbed his feelings of frustration and fears of inadequacy. Once those feelings subsided, he completed the assignment. If you give in to your child and "rescue him," you are giving him a subliminal message that he cannot complete the work by himself; thus teaching him to underestimate his own abilities.

In your zealotry to promote academics, be careful not to overdo it. Too much frustration leads to anxiety, which is counterproductive to academic achievement. It's a fine line you walk. You need to know when to push, when to listen to your child's frustrations and when to back off.

### **THE DON'TS:**

- Don't expect perfection and constantly criticize your child's work.
- Don't expect your child to perform when tired or hungry.
- Don't expect kids to work nonstop. They need breaks.
- Don't make comparisons: "Your sister always got A's in English. Why can't you?"
- Don't complete assignments for your children. The teacher gets a distorted view of what your child knows. Again, as mentioned above you send your child an "I don't think you can do it by yourself" message.

### **WHEN TO PUSH**

There are clearly lots of cautions for this new active approach to academic excellence, but go ahead, push a little and see what happens; you can always pull back. Encourage and challenge your child to learn more, because the active brain makes for a satisfying life. The dull, unchallenged mind leads to lifelong frustration.

### **WHEN TO BACK OFF**

Between some parents and children, however, the chemistry for assistance with academics just doesn't work. Power struggles erupt, the child resists and schoolwork deteriorates.

If you back off, do it in the following manner: "You know that in our family schoolwork is important. You're smart, you can do the work. I'm confident you'll figure it out on your own." And when your child does well and receives a good grade, don't attribute it to luck or chance. Instead, say, "You got a B+ on your history test; good for you. Your grade reflects your hard work."

Rather than focusing only on grades, show genuine interest in what your child is learning and doing in school: "You're coloring a map of the United States. I'll show you the states I've been to; let's count them," or "You're learning about the Holocaust. Do you think such horror could occur today?" Asking your child's opinion about certain events in history (or other concepts that require him to pontificate on a personal level) helps build higher level thinking skills.