



# Parent Partners

How parents can make a difference in their child's education

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## What are the best predictors of successful students?

### ***Research shows...***

- That students are successful when the home environment encourages learning
- That students are successful when parents/caregivers demonstrate reasonable expectations
- That students are successful when parents/caregivers are involved in children's education at school and in the community

## Barriers to Parent Involvement

- Time
- Culture
- Language

## Characteristics of Parenting that Promote Academic Success

**Acceptance** — parents are involved, responsive and liberal with praise.

**Firmness** — parents set clear limits, have reasonable standards, have consequences for behavior and are consistent.

**Autonomy** — parents value self-expression, independence and speaking up for what you believe in.

### ***Research shows...***

...that parents who are closer to acceptance, firmness and autonomy have children who are more successful in school.

## **Discussion Strips**

1. Establish a consistent daily family routine. Get children ready for school every morning. Be firm about times to get up and to go to bed. Help with homework.

### ***Research shows...***

Families whose children do well in school have a home life with a daily routine that helps their children be prepared to learn at school; that encourage their child's growth and progress in school.

2. Read to your children and have them read to you. Talk together about what you have read. Write letters, lists and messages.

### ***Research shows...***

Families whose children do well in school have a home life that includes reading, writing, and discussions among family members.

3. Listen to and talk with your child about things that are important to you both. Have high expectations and show interest in your child's progress at school.

### ***Research shows...***

Families whose children do well in school have a home life that includes discussions among family members. Families whose children do well in school express high but realistic expectations for achievement.

4. Set limits on TV watching, video playing and internet surfing.

### ***Research shows...***

Families whose children do well in school monitor out-of-school activities. Too much time spent watching TV can reduce time available for more active learning situations; can affect children's relationships and attention span.

5. Respect and understand a teacher's role in your child's education, as well as your own role. Stay in touch with teachers and school staff.

### ***Research shows...***

The most powerful combination for learning is the family and school working together. Children's attitudes and performance in school increase when parents and teachers understand and respect each other, share similar expectations, and stay in communication.

## **What parents can do to make a difference – Homework**

- Provide the least amount of support necessary
- Be available and accessible
- Let your children take the lead
- Do not provide answers...instead, give hints and suggestions
- Praise effort and progress
- Clarify and simplify instructions
- Make sure your child understands all the words. If not, provide a dictionary or a translation.
- Help break tasks into pieces or chunks.
- Model how to approach tasks by thinking out loud
- Work with your child to set manageable goals
- Build in breaks, i.e., with a timer or watch
- Provide a place to work at that is distraction free and that is organized with such items as pencils, erasers, etc.
- Listen to what works best for your child – listening to music while working or complete silence (earphones to block out sound)

## **What parents can do to make a difference - Home**

- Provide time and a quiet place to study
- Assign responsibility for household chores
- Be firm and consistent about times to get up and to go to bed
- Have dinner together – discuss the day, tell stories, share problems
- Set limits on TV, video playing, internet (screen time)
- Check up on children when not at home
- Arrange for after-school activities and supervised care
- Maintain a warm and supportive home
- Get children ready for school every morning
- Establish a daily family routine

## **What parents can do to make a difference – School**

- Work with your child to set manageable goals
- Have reasonable expectations for your child's performance at school
- Stay in touch with teachers about concerns and appropriate expectations
- Show interest in what your child is learning
- Be a life-long learner
- Let your child teach you
- Avoid comparing your child's grades with others
- Develop a consistent and effective discipline plan at home while supporting the school's discipline plan
- Remember there are multiple sides to any story
- Be careful about misinformation and gossip
- Come to school meetings when you are invited
- Let the school know what is going on at home, i.e., hasn't slept, is anxious, etc.

# Four Common Ways Parents Discourage Their Children.

- ***Focusing on Mistakes.***

It's easy to look at a piece of homework and ignore the thoughtful ideas and amount of effort a child put into it—noticing instead the three misspelled words. Often the first thing we do is point out the errors. If we're not also careful to comment on the things that were done well, a child soon comes to think she does more wrong than right. Such discouragement leads to more mistakes, which produce more criticism from the parent, and so on. Children need to be corrected when they make mistakes; correction helps them know what to do differently next time. But they probably need to hear four to five times as much about what they do right to balance the effect our criticism may have on their courage and self-esteem.

- ***Personality Attacks and Perfectionism.***

When we call our children names, such as “lazy,” “careless,” or “stupid,” “immature”, we're attacking their self-confidence and courage at their core. Not only that: such tactics usually backfire. After all, if you tell a child he's lazy, then what should you expect in the future but lazy behavior? Instead, focus your comments on the problem behavior. Don't say “*Why are you so lazy?*”; say instead, “*You haven't done your homework.*”

A more subtle form of personality attack is perfectionism. This is the tendency always to require more from the child than she's giving. The message of perfectionism is that no matter how well you do, you should have done better. When children come to believe that they are never quite good enough, they lose motivation: “*I never did it well enough anyway, so why try?*” Even when these children seem to keep trying, they never feel secure in their achievements. They may get all, but rather than enjoy the accomplishment, they're already worrying about the next challenge to their perfection. Such perfectionist thinking has been linked to eating disorders and depression in adolescents.

- ***Negative Expectations.***

In a classic psychology experiment, teachers were told that half the students in their classes had tested high on a measure predicting academic success, and the other half had tested low. In fact, the students were randomly assigned to the two groups, regardless of academic abilities. At the end of the semester, guess which group had the better grades? The group the teachers thought would do better actually did do better. Conversely, the teachers' negative expectations for the other group was a significant factor in the group's poor showing. Negative expectations from teachers and parents discourage children from trying.

Our children can sense when we expect the worst from them, even if we don't use the words. If you yourself believe your child is hopeless in math, you can say, “*I know you can do this,*” but your tone of voice will give a different message. Or perhaps you wait only a few seconds for

your child to answer a question and then hurriedly give him the answer. You and your child may not even be consciously aware of this difference, but the message is received: *“You don’t think I can get it.”*

• ***Over-protection.***

When we step in and do for children what they could eventually do for themselves, we send the message that *“you can’t handle it.”* Children must be free to overcome their frustrations, solve their own problems, and accept the consequences of their choices if they are to develop the stamina required to succeed in school and in the community. The overprotected child easily gives up when things are difficult. She’s quick to shout, *“It’s not fair”* at the slightest transgression. She looks for someone else to solve her problems, and lives with many unrealistic fears that hamper her growth.

Think of the problems such attitudes cause in the classroom, where teachers cope with 25 or more students and must rely on a degree of independence from each one. An overprotected child who expects special treatment at school is in for a frustrating, discouraging time.

*How can a parent tell when she’s offering reasonable protection and when she’s overprotecting? Two rules of thumb may help:*

1. Ask yourself the worst that could happen if you don’t step in.
2. Never do for your child on a regular basis what your child can do for herself. Be on guard against the rationalization, *“But it’s easier to do it myself.”* It may be easier and faster in the short run, but think of the damage you do in the long run. Eventually your child may not be able to do much of anything for himself that presents a challenge including school work.

*Helping Your Child Succeed in School: A Guide for Parents of 4 to 14 Year Olds, by Popkin, Youngs and Healy, Active Parenting Publishers, Atlanta, Georgia, 1995.*