

Dealing with Report Cards and Assessments

“We can only do the best we can with what we have. That, after all, is the measure of success.”—Marguerite de Angeli, author and illustrator

It happens two to four times a year: you receive a report card or assessment of your child’s progress in school. The way you respond has a big impact on how much your child feels motivated to do his or her best at school. Consider these ideas to keep your child’s motivation high.

Try it...

For all parents

- Even if you have an emotional reaction to a report card or assessment, calmly talk to your child about the report. Be careful not to allow your emotions to set off a negative response in your children, which can be detrimental to their enthusiasm about school. If you are shocked by your child’s report card, perhaps you are not talking enough with your child about what’s going on at school, what kind of homework your child has, upcoming projects, and tests to prepare for. Stay engaged every step of the way and talk about how important your child’s education is.
- Talk with your child soon after the report card arrives. First focus on where your child did well. Point out your child’s strengths. Then ask your child about the areas where he didn’t do as well. Use the time to gather information rather than to punish your child.
- Set goals together that will motivate your child. Choose goals that are easy, simple, and doable. For example, goals could include, “I will raise my hand to participate at least one more time a day” or “I will ask my teacher or dad for help when I don’t understand something.”
- Make sure both you and your child understand on what basis a teacher’s grades are awarded. Knowing the rules will help your child be more likely to get higher grades.
- If your child has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), advocate for your child during every step of the process. For more information, visit Kids Together Inc. at <http://www.kidstogether.org/IEP/IEPPlanning/IEPplanningreport.htm>.

For parents with children ages birth to 5

- Preschool and child-care assessments tend to focus on the overall development of your child, which is critical to your child’s success. Instead of pushing your child to memorize the ABCs, help your child develop in all areas, such as getting along with others (social skills), learning to cut with scissors (fine-motor skills), and paging

through picture books and making up stories (imagination skills).

- If your child care or preschool doesn't offer assessments of children, ask the teacher for a meeting at least once a year (or two, if possible) to get information about how the teacher sees your child's development, strengths, and weaknesses.
- Your child most likely will show talent and skill in one area over another. Continue to stimulate your child in those areas, but don't neglect the areas where your child struggles. It's just as important that children develop physical coordination as well as intellectual curiosity.

For parents with children ages 6 - 9

- Hopefully school report cards will focus as much on your child's character, behavior, and social skills as well as academic skills. If not, ask if you can meet with the teacher to learn how your child is developing socially, intellectually, physically, and emotionally.
- Place as much stock in helping your child develop social and emotional skills as well as literacy, mathematics, and other academic skills. How well liked a child is at third grade "has shown to be a better predictor of mental-health problems at age 18 than anything else," writes Daniel Goleman in *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ*. Kids with strong social and emotional skills often have better academic skills.
- No matter what kind of marks your child receives on report-card day, make the day one that you celebrate. Point out what you're proud about, and set the stage for making report-card day one that kids look forward to instead of dread.

For parents with children ages 10 - 15

- Kids at this age are often shocked how quickly their grades can drop, and many need to learn even more study skills to do well academically. Monitor your children's grades and also set firm boundaries around getting homework done and the importance of education.
- If your child is struggling in a class, call the teacher and set up a teacher-parent-student meeting. Talk through the issues before your child gets too far behind.
- This is a critical age when many kids can easily disengage from school. Don't allow this to happen. Work with teachers, counselors, tutors, and other interested adults to keep your kids interested and enthusiastic about school. Explain that sometimes school gets hard, but when you work at it, you can feel good about the progress you make.
- Talk about how grades matter since colleges, vocational schools, and other post-high-school educational opportunities consider grades in deciding whom to accept. Grades typically start counting in ninth grade, but kids who learn solid study skills and get good grades in the earlier years will be more ready for ninth grade.

For parents with children ages 16 - 18

- This is another critical academic time for teenagers since it's easy to disengage from learning, especially when classes get hard. Continue to monitor your teenager's academic progress. Many schools now have online portals that will connect you to your teenager's grades, attendance records, and homework assignments. If your school offers this, sign up and monitor it weekly. Encourage your teenager to monitor

it as well.

- Continue to talk about how grades impact post-high-school graduation education opportunities. Be clear that these institutions also evaluate standardized test scores, co-curricular activities, and signs of leadership. Help your teen to develop a well-rounded resume that brings out her best.
- Monitor your teenager's stress levels. Some find high school academically competitive and can psych themselves out. Others think high school is a waste of time and try to do the minimum. Talk about how high school is a key part of your child's *life* and how he can make the most of it.