

FAMILY

Making the grade

Seven tips on how to handle your child's report card



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Report card time can be as stressful for parents as it is for children. Here are some tips to help everyone cope.

1. Keep in mind that a report card is like a snapshot, frozen in time, of where a child is right at that particular moment. Things can change depending on the child's emotional state, the class moving on to a new unit that interests him or her more, or any number of highly subjective factors.
2. No matter what, find something positive to comment on when reviewing the report card with your child. If all grades are low, focus on good attendance, and if that's poor, point out a lack of tardiness. Sandwich the discussion of the negative between two positives, whenever possible, for optimal effect.
3. Remain calm. Allow your child to speak out freely about this, and draw him out by asking non-judgmental questions like "How do you think this happened?" and "What can we do as a family to make changes that will help you help yourself with this?" Most of all, stress that a C grade does not in any way mean that they are a C person.

4. Encourage your child to talk about his feelings connected to the report card. You might ask if he feels particularly proud of a positive report, or upset inside because of a poor one. This is a golden opportunity for you to help your child learn that feelings of any kind are not right or wrong, they just exist normally as a matter of course in all human beings. Stress the fact that feelings always be safely expressed at home if the child chooses to do so.
5. Separate yourself from your child emotionally in terms of the report card. For example, some parents pressure a child to achieve academically to satisfy their own unmet needs. If you feel you were never able to meet your own potential as an individual, that is a whole other problem for you to deal with as the adult involved, in terms of your own fulfillment. Dealing with it, or at the very least being aware of it, will take the pressure off your child to perform academically for all the wrong reasons - namely, yours.
6. Never pay a child for good grades or withhold love and attention for bad grades. Coercion may work in the short term but looking at the big picture, it is much better to work toward instilling a lifelong sense of self-motivation and pride in one's own work in your child.
7. After reviewing the report card with your child, make a plan to keep up the good work and work on correcting the trouble spots. The plan should be as practical and concrete as possible and you can consider writing it down. Both of you could sign it as an informal contract agreed upon by parent and child. Report cards can be important guideposts along the path of your child's academic progress, but even more important is the quality of the relationship you have with your child, and the way you are able to interact with him to respond to the evaluation by keeping his individual self-image intact and strong.