



REPORT CARDS...REDUCE THE STRESS, AND BUILD SUCCESS! TIPS FOR PARENTS

Report card time can be stressful for children and parents alike - especially if the child has received a less than stellar report or has developed difficulties in a certain subject. However, it can also be a constructive time for parents, teachers, and children to work together and set goals for improvement. Here's how:

Know when report cards are distributed. Find out from the school how often and when report cards are released during the year. Are they mailed? Are they given to your child? Are they given at parent/teacher conferences? Knowing in advance when report cards are due may decrease the chance of being left at the bottom of your child's backpack unnoticed for weeks.

Talk with your child regularly about school. Engage in on-going dialogue with your children about how they are doing in school - whether they are four or fourteen years old. Parents are often surprised when their child receives an unfavorable report card; however, children have a pretty good idea what their strengths and weaknesses are. Talking with your kids long before report cards come out may alert you to any difficulties they may be having. Ask open-ended questions such as:



- *How do you think you are doing in...(math/reading/spelling)?*
- *How do you think you will do in each subject?*
- *What are you learning about in ...(science/social studies/etc.)?*
- *How do you feel about your teachers?*
- *What is your favorite subject? Why?*
- *What is your least favorite subject?*

Stay calm. Your initial reaction to a report card may be to notice only the bad, then become emotional and blame your child, your child's teachers or school, yourself, or others. Remember, a less-than-perfect report card is NOT a reflection of your parenting skills or your child's worth. It indicates there is a problem in certain areas that can be solved with a little team effort from parents, school staff, and the child.

Identify the problem. There could be many reasons why your child is having difficulty. Find out what is going on by calmly talking to your child and his/her teacher(s). Is your child not handing in all assignments? Is s/he having trouble on tests? Is s/he over-scheduled with extra-curricular activities? Is s/he trying hard to learn the material, but still can't understand it? Or, is s/he experiencing other problems such as bullying at school?

Avoid comparing your children to each other: You may have one child who is doing superbly and another who is struggling. Talk to each child individually about their report cards. Comparing children to each other and criticizing them will not help them learn and could damage self-esteem, while fueling sibling rivalry.

Talk about goals and solutions. What can your child do to improve? Enlist teachers and guidance counselors to help create an action plan with attainable goals. Talk about steps your child should take to reach those goals and concrete ways you can help your child improve. You know your child best and will be able to help develop an effective approach. Your child will need to be part of the "team" for improvement to occur so get his/her input on the plan. Solutions such as setting up a quiet homework area; helping your child create a homework notebook; reducing TV time; reducing absences; enrolling your child in a study skills course; increasing reading time at home; or extra tutoring may be all that is needed to get on track. Use the resources available in the school. Check in frequently with "the team" to see how the plan is working and modify it when necessary.



Make sure expectations are realistic. If your child received a "C" or "D" in a subject, it may be unrealistic to expect an "A" grade next quarter. Your child should still aim high, but jump from a "C" to a "B" should be acknowledged as a positive step forward.

Remember to always praise successes. Point out strengths and the highlights on report cards!