

Report Card Anxiety: Tips for Parents

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Report cards are more than just an indicator of a student's academic success or lack of it. They are a reflection of a student's attitude, effort and self-worth. As parents it is our responsibility to help our children see their own potential for success through our words of encouragement, support and keeping our children accountable for their choices and actions. Self-feelings of adequacy lead to continued mental growth and emotional maturity.

When you receive your child's report card, stop and reflect on what the card is telling you about your child. Ask your child, "How do you feel about your grades?" "Is there anything you would like to change?" Try to confirm these feelings and offer assistance if they need it.

School has always been a struggle for your child, but now the grades seem to be going down even more. Or maybe your child has always barely passed and nothing you are doing is working. Or as the school year progresses, the grades slide downward and you aren't sure what to do to stop the slide.

Whatever may be happening, there are steps you can take to help your child improve their grades. Even more importantly, children many times attach their feelings of self worth to their performance at school. If they are not doing well, their self-esteem could plummet. Loss of hope can add to failing grades and make it even harder to pull back up. Intervening early and becoming more involved often can help you keep your child on track in school and create success.

Report card season can cause plenty of anxiety in students, but it can rattle parents as well. The following tips are designed to help parents provide their children with positive and constructive responses during what is often a challenging time.

Talk frequently with your child about his or her academic performance. Don't wait until the report cards are issued--it's often too late then.

Clearly communicate your expectations to your child. Also, determine if your expectations are realistic considering your child's ability level.

Establish academic goals together with your child. These should be both short and long range, and must be appropriate to the age of the child.

Meet with your child's teachers. Explore what resources the school offers students, such as tutors, homework centers, before-school study halls, or online support.

Discuss problem areas with your child's teacher. Any skill deficiencies that are causing performance problems must be correctly identified and addressed.

Establish a study plan with your child. He or she needs to develop regular study habits and should spend an adequate amount of time daily on homework and studying for tests.

Recognize and praise your child's successes. For example, with an elementary school age child, you might talk about how pleased you are about better behavior in class.

Get help immediately if you see a problem. Don't fall prey to your child's promise to do better. He may not be able to correct certain issues without some help from the adults in his life.

Stay in touch with your child's school counselor. The link between home and school is vital. The counselor can request periodic progress reports between grading periods and set up conferences with teachers, parents, and students when necessary.

Think about what motivates your child. Positive motivators include offering rewards such as video games, CDs, concert tickets, or driving privileges for improved grades. Consequences include restricting phone or Internet time, restricting time spent with friends, and taking away other privileges such as use of the family car.

Reward your child for a good report card. Rather than giving money, spend extra time with your child, go for a walk together, take a family excursion, or go to a favorite restaurant.

Be sure to keep report cards in perspective. Remember that this is just one measure at one particular time of how your child is doing.

Follow these simple **STUDY** rules:

S - Stay on top of your child's study schedule. Be aware of assignments and whether your student is using time effectively to tackle homework.

T - Team with your child, the teacher, and counselor. Work together to develop a meaningful contract that clearly outlines expectations and sets desired goals.

U - Use a daily assignment planner and project calendar.

D - Define your child's deficiencies and identify the skills that are needed to address performance problems.

Y - You are your child's greatest advocate. Be a partner to help your student achieve his or her highest academic potential.