

Helping Hand

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Poor Grades Not Always a Lack of Effort

Most concerned and responsible parents want their children to do well in school. Whether it's a positive or negative report card, a parent's reaction can affect a child's approach to his or her education and study habits.

Some questions that often emerge:

- Should I give my child money if he or she gets good grades?
- Should I punish my child if he or she does poorly in school?
- How can I help my child achieve better grades?
- How should I talk to my child's teacher?
- What are possible reasons for bad grades?

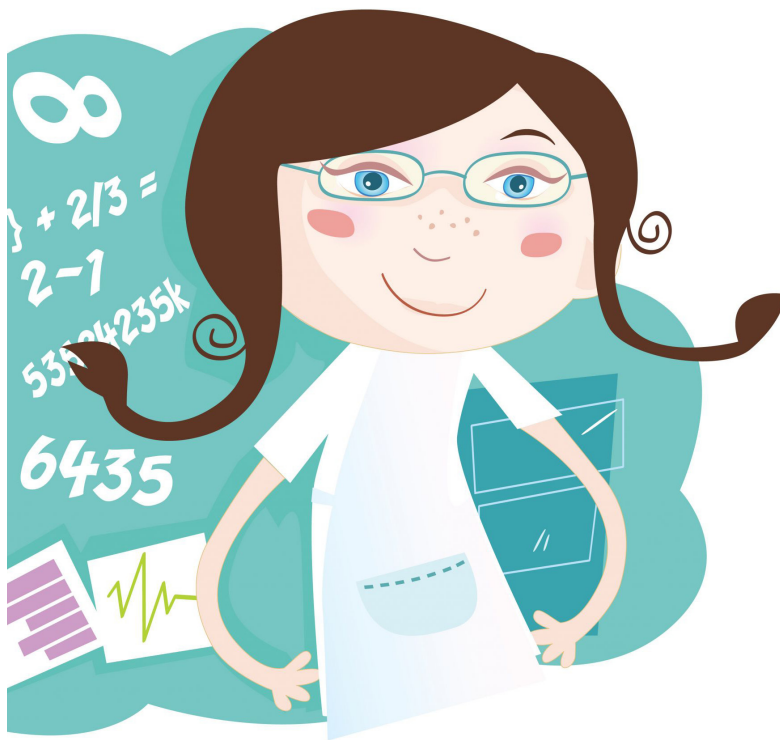
First, it's important to step away from the issues of grades and look at the overall goals of a child's education. Many experts feel that developing the desire to learn, and learning how to learn, are two of the most important objectives of education.

The following are essential elements that children should be learning through schoolwork:

- The practice of delaying gratification and the value long-term goals
- How to work hard and stay on task
- To view less-than-acceptable responses as an opportunity for future improvement
- To be creative and seek alternate ways of solving problems

Instead of simply looking at grades, parents need to focus on the process that went into the student's good performance: hard work, creativity, accomplishing goals, etc. Parents often assume that a student's poor grades are simply indications of a lack of effort on the student's part. "Our Bobby simply isn't trying or else he would be making better grades" is a typical response. Sometimes parents attribute poor grades to lack of desire.

Grades are certainly one measure of progress, and they're part of the standard by which we measure successful education. However, focusing on grades alone detracts from the student's broader focus on the learning process.



Making an Educated Choice: What to Look for in a College

Each year, when U.S. News and World Report publishes its issue ranking U.S. colleges and universities, the copies fly off the shelves. This is not surprising, considering the fact that choosing a college is one of the most important decisions facing many teenagers and their parents.

While many factors, including financial resources, test scores and academic history, can narrow the field of prospective schools, the possibilities are still overwhelming. Students should make an honest evaluation of personal and career goals when searching for a school.



Among the many factors to consider are:

- **Location** - Geographic location often is a major influence on college choice.
- **Academics** - Before looking at specific schools, students should determine what is important to them academically. In addition to academic reputation, look at faculty-to-student ratios, percentage of courses taught by graduate students, and professor profiles.
- **Extracurricular activities** - College can be a wonderful place to pursue long-held interests or develop new ones.
- **Student body** - Many people make lasting friendships in college. In many ways, whom a student studies with can be as important as what and where he or she studies.

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Effects of Domestic Violence on Children

Even if a child isn't directly the victim of abuse, witnessing domestic violence within their home has significant harmful effects. In fact, the symptoms are similar to those of children who have been physically, emotionally or sexually abused themselves. Children who witness domestic violence in their homes may withdraw socially, and can develop behavioral and emotional problems. Often times, because of the behavior they've witnessed in their home, they demonstrate poor impulse control and may have issues controlling their anger. Physical symptoms such as headaches and stomachaches can also develop.

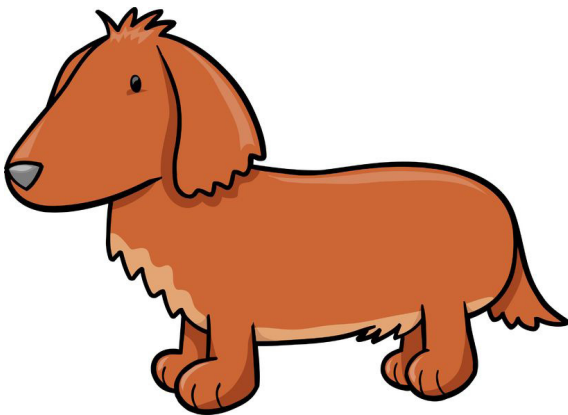
If you suspect a child is witnessing domestic violence in their home, don't keep silent. Talk to a teacher or school counselor – ask for help.

Your Child's Question: Can We Get a Dog?

Some parents give in to requests for a pet because the pleading is incessant or they really believe the dog will teach their child responsibility. This is a common parenting myth. Getting a dog just to teach a child responsibility will make you seem like a nag, it will lead to Fido becoming a burden, and it will make what should have been a happy addition to the family an obligation.

Only get a dog if you—the parent—also want a dog. The “adult by default” (you) will likely walk and clean up after the dog more than anyone else.

We may fantasize about giving a young child a puppy gift-wrapped in a box, but the truth is that toilet training two small beings at one time is a huge challenge. One option: adopt an adult dog from a shelter or rescue that is already house-trained and has a good track record with children.



The ASPCA offers these guidelines to those who are considering adopting a family pet:

- Ask yourself and your children why they want a pet. Don't forget that your pet will be part of the family for the next 10-15 years
- Remember that puppies need a lot of attention and training, can chew up household items, and do not remain small. Young animals have needle-sharp nails and teeth that can hurt youngsters by accident. Most toy-size or touch and noise-sensitive dogs are not suitable for young children.
- Make sure no one in the family has allergies. Unsure? Have your children spend time (several hours minimum) in the home of pet-owning friends before bringing home a dog.
- Young animals and children may not mix well. Very young children may unwittingly mishandle or hurt a puppy.
- Make sure the pet suits your home and lifestyle.

Pets can teach your children lessons about love and companionship. If the right conditions are met, an appropriate pet can be a wonderful addition to your home.

Talking to Children about Inhalants

The most important action parents can take is to talk with their children about the dangers of experimenting, even once, with inhalants. By discussing the dangers of inhalant abuse openly and stressing its potentially devastating consequences, you can help prevent a tragedy.

Don't make the mistake of saying, “not my kid.” Abuse of inhalants often begins very early, sometimes as early as elementary school, often as early as age 8 or 9. It's never too early to begin the discussion—Sudden Sniffing Death can take place the first, tenth, or one hundredth time a young person abuses inhalants.

This means parents should start the conversation when children are young and continue talking with their child throughout the school years. Does this

work? YES! A Partnership for a Drug Free America survey conducted in 1999 found that among teens whose parents talked regularly about inhalants, only 14 percent used them. In contrast, 28 percent of teens whose parents never discussed inhalants were abusers. So parents can provide prevention messages and help keep their children safe and healthy.

Remember also that inhalants are not drugs. They are poisonous toxins and must be discussed with that in mind. Be alert for symptoms that your child, or other children, have been abusing inhalants. If you suspect a problem, you should consider seeking professional help. Contact a local drug rehabilitation center, community or other school services available to you.

Helping a Child through a Divorce

Divorce is a painful process for all those involved, especially children. Parents must realize that they are still the most important people in their children's lives.

Some tips that can help smooth a child's transition:

- Don't lie or cover up what's happening to the family. The first rule is honesty.
- Don't fight in front of the child.
- Don't use the child to carry angry messages to the spouse.
- Don't worry the child with legal/financial problems.
- Don't expect emotional support from the child; that's a role for adults — friends, family members, or a therapist.
- Don't imply that the child should take on adult roles by saying things like, "Now you're the man of the house."
- Assure the child that the adults in his or her life will continue to take care of him or her.
- Prepare the child for changes that will take place.
- Convince the child that the divorce wasn't his or her fault.
- Talk to the child. Help him or her work out feelings and perceptions about the divorce.
- Help the child to express feelings of fear or anger.
- Assure the child that relationships with other important adults in their lives will remain the same.
- Allow the child to mourn the loss of the family as it was before the divorce.

Some children cope with divorce-induced upset by seeking comfort and counsel from family members. Others may benefit from the professional assistance of a therapist trained to help children of divorce with their feelings.

During and following a divorce, both parents must remain alert to signs of extreme distress in their children. If a child is engaging in one or more of the following behaviors, he or she may need help:

- Lack of interest in friends or fun activities
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Excessive conflicts with family members
- Unusually rebellious behavior
- Lack of interest in school

