

Reading your child's report by Michael Grose

Could try harder..... always does her best.... lacks concentration. Do these comments, taken from a batch of student reports sound familiar?

Student reports bring mixed feelings for parents. Pleasure and pride if they are performing well but considerable angst when children are not progressing as you hoped.

Reports can mean anxious times for children too. Will my parents be disappointed or proud? is the main concern of most children. Kids of all ages take their cues from their parents, so your reaction to their school report can affect they way they see themselves as learners and as people.

Before you rip open the sealed enveloped containing the report do a little self-check to see if you are in the right frame of mind:

1. **Are your expectations for your son or daughter realistic and in line with their ability?** Expectations are tricky. If they are too high then kids can be turned off learning. Too low and there is nothing to strive for. Pitch your expectations in line with your child's abilities.
2. **Do you hold the belief that children learn at different rates?** There are slow bloomers, late developers and steady-as-you-go kids in every classroom, so avoid comparing your child to siblings, your friends' children and even yourself when you were a child. Instead look for individual progress.
3. **Are you willing to safeguard your child's self-esteem rather than deflate it?** Self-confidence is a pre-requisite for learning, so be prepared to be as positive and encouraging as possible.

Here are some ideas to consider when you open your child's report:

... Focus on strengths. Do you look for strengths or weaknesses first? The challenge is to focus on strengths even if they are not in the traditional 3Rs or core subjects.

... Take into account your child's effort and attitude to learning. If the report indicates that effort is below standard, then you have something to work on. If your child is putting in the required effort, then you cannot ask any more than that, regardless of the grading.

... Broaden your focus away from academic performance to form a picture of your child's progress as a member of a social setting. How your child's gets along with his or her peers will influence his happiness and well-being, as well as give an indicator to his future. The skills of independence and co-operation are highly valued by employers so don't dismiss these as unimportant.

... Take note of student's self-assessment, whether written or oral. Kids are generally very honest and will give a realistic assessment of their progress.

... Discuss the report with your son or daughter talking about strengths first before looking at areas that need improvement. Ask for their opinion about how they performed and discuss their concerns.

After reports are read and discussed celebrate your child's efforts with a special activity or treat. In this way you will recognise progress and remind them that the holidays are just around the corner when they can forget about assessment, tests and reports for a while. **OK**

Michael Grose is a leading parent educator, a trained teacher and author. For further ideas about raising confident kids and resilient teenagers visit www.parentingideas.com.au

Helping children grieve by Michael Grose

Many children experience grief due to a change in circumstances. The separation of parents, a pet's death or a good friend moving home are losses many children experience. However the loss of a loved one through death is perhaps the most significant loss a child can experience.

For children it can affect their sense of security. Pre-schoolers usually see death as temporary. Between the ages of 5 and 9, children begin to experience grief more like adults.

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Our Kids

'Helping children grieve' continued

Helping a child grieve a loss of a loved one is perhaps one of the most important roles an adult can play. In effect, you are helping that child develop skills that can last a lifetime. Denial or avoidance of grief is also unhealthy and may resurface at a later date. The following ideas may help you assist a child overcome the loss of a loved one:

- ... Answer their questions about death simply and honestly. Only offer details that they can absorb. Don't overload them with information. Young children are concrete thinkers so terms such as "he is sleeping" can be confusing.
- ... There is no right way to grieve so parents need to be mindful of children's different coping and grieving styles. Give children choices in how they express their grief and how they participate in any services.
- ... Give them a chance to talk about their fears, particularly their own fear of death or fears for the future. It generally takes time to recover from loss so allow children to be repetitive in their response to loss.
- ... Grief is generally cyclical. Anniversaries, birthdays and other occasions reawaken grief. Be available to talk at these times.
- ... Children express grief in different ways. Some children, particularly boys, are physical and need play and activity to express grief. Others will use creative, artistic means to express grief, while others will be verbal and talk easily. It is useful to develop a vocabulary with children to help them express their grief.
- ... Children grieve as part of a family. They frequently grieve the changes in behaviour of others in their family following a death. Keep regular routines as much as possible particularly those that children enjoy.

OK

Michael Grose is a leading parent educator, a trained teacher and author. For further ideas about getting your family flying in the same formation visit www.parentingideas.com.au

What you should know aboutsleep and learning by Andrew Fuller

A good night's sleep (at least eight hours) is essential for optimal brain functioning at school. Memory consolidation occurs during sleep especially during dream (REM) sleep. During the normal 8-9 hours sleep (REM) five dream cycles occur. Children and adolescents who get only 5-6 hours sleep lose out on the last two REM cycles and thereby reduce the amount of time the brain has to consolidate information.

There is no such thing as a sleep bank. So just because a child slept for ten hours one night doesn't mean he or she can get away with only sleeping six hours the next night. Students who don't get enough sleep have to work much harder to succeed at school.

Everyone has a down time when they learn new information less well. As a rough guide, think of the time they go to sleep, then think of the time they usually wake up, calculate

the midpoint of their sleep, then add twelve hours to find their down time.

For example, if your child sleeps from 9.00pm to 7.00am, the midpoint of their sleep is 2.00am. Add twelve hours takes us to 2.00pm, which is the time your child is likely to learn least well.

It is useful for parents and teachers to know students' likely downtimes so they can schedule active, hands-on learning at these times.

OK

Andrew Fuller is a clinical psychologist and author. Further information about this topic can be found in Andrew's latest book: "Help Your Child Succeed in School – A Guide for Parents." It is available at www.inyahead.com.au



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