



Helping Your Child Achieve Academic Success: A Brief Overview For Parents

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Thank you for joining us for this discussion of how parents can help to promote their kids' academic success. We're glad that you're with us tonight and hope that you find this to be an informative and useful discussion. We'll be covering a number of the points below during the presentation and we welcome your participation—feel free to share your own thoughts about the information presented and to ask any questions about the items listed below, or other related issues.

- General considerations
 - The degree of success enjoyed by any particular student will be shaped by a variety of factors, some of them internal to the student, others related to environmental and family influences. This is a difficult area of parenting with few “absolutes” –perhaps the best way to approach it is to inform yourself as to the general factors which are thought to promote academic success as well as those which sometimes can seem to hamper academic performance. Try to keep it simple and focus your attention of these broad categories:
 - What factors are believed to enhance academic success?
 - What factors are thought to interfere with academic performance?
 - Which of these can I, as a parent, have impact upon? Where do I start?

- A brief review of the research concerning factors associated with improved academic performance:
 - Psychological issues within the student which can shape a student's educational adjustment fall within four broad categories:
 - Achievement motivation—this refers to the degree to which the student desires to succeed.
 - * Studies show that kids who feel they belong at school, who like the academic environment, who are motivated by an intrinsic appreciation of learning—who value learning for the simple sake of learning—tend to do better in school.
 - * Research findings indicate that adolescents whose parents are more involved in their schooling and who provided a stimulating home environment tend to be more academically motivated.
 - * The school environment is key in fostering academic motivation: students tend to endorse the attitudes towards learning emphasized in their schools.
 - School engagement—this refers to a students' degree of “connectedness” to the school and is indicated by such behaviors as attendance, completion & quality of homework and overall feelings towards the school setting.
 - * Kids who participate in school-based events and activities and who identify with a sense of pride in their school tend to work harder academically.
 - * Kids model themselves after their peers in school and can be inspired by the examples set both by family and friends with respect to their attitudes towards the school.
 - * Schools which are perceived as supportive learning environments where personal relationships are available to foster success tend to be associated with greater success than overly large and impersonal institutions.
 - Academic self-concept—how does the student perceive himself/ herself?
 - * Students who regard themselves as competent and who incorporate the identity of being a student as prominent in their sense of themselves tend to have higher levels of academic success.
 - Educational aspirations and expectations
 - * Kids tend to exert more effort in a consistent fashion if they anticipate success and, also, if they feel that their parents have confidence in their capabilities.

- Other factors
 - Use of time outside of school: working more than 20 hours/week is associated with declining performance. However, a similar degree of involvement in school-affiliated extracurricular activities is associated with greater academic achievement. Interestingly, time spent watching TV, per se, has not been shown to be related to academic achievement although excessive amounts of time listening to music has been negatively correlated with success.
 - Family variables: research has consistently demonstrated that adolescents whose parents are more involved in their lives have higher levels of academic achievement. Collaboration between the parents and school is consistently associated with higher degrees of educational achievement.
 - Peer influences have been shown to impact upon levels of achievement—kids tend to take on the values of the peer group with which they associate.
- General suggestions for parents
 - Examine your own attitudes towards school and academic achievement—do both parents have the same set of expectations?
 - Consider the model you set: do you display an interest in learning, just for the sake of learning? How do you perceive the school, teachers and instructional content? Try to model support and confidence of the school—resolve any differences you may have with teachers or administration privately. Do academics come before sports, fun, time with friends on a consistent basis?
 - Try to foster longer-term goals and aspirations. Encourage your child to dream and tease out their own interests, linking academic success with future choices.
 - Make sure the home environment and student’s daily structure is conducive for the development of successful study skills:
 - Don’t overlook the basics:
 - * Minimizing distractions
 - * Having a regular schedule
 - * Organizational skills are very important—be prepared to provide whatever assistance your child needs to stay organized and focused. Work together to devise a system to better organize school materials as well as consider the best way for your child to manage their time. Organization also includes helping your child prioritize tasks in a way that makes sense—try to engage your child in these discussions—make school and their approach to their work discussable and try to position yourself as a helpful resource for your student.
 - Address any barriers that might be interfering with success:
 - Depression
 - Substance abuse
 - Attentional difficulties
 - Engagement in too many extraneous activities/interests
 - If you are having a difficult time gauging your child’s capabilities, consider pursuit of formal achievement/intellectual testing
 - This may be available through the school district or privately from a clinical or school psychologist
 - Make full use of all of the opportunities to communicate and collaborate with your child’s school
 - Attend the conferences, use online tracking of grades, email your child’s teachers and, if necessary, consider the use of an assignment notebook
 - Consider the pro’s and con’s of rewarding and/or punishing achievement
 - Remember: your goal is to inspire the development of internal motivation within your child—it’s usually best to focus upon rewards for achievement rather than resorting to punishment of failure. If you do decide to employ consequences for academic disappointments try to have the consequences which are logically connected to studying (e.g., reduced time playing computer games, etc.).
 - Make use of all of the in-school resources which are available to you, including exploration of school-based social work support, support groups, tutors and special education services.

Dr. John Jochem is a clinical psychologist with many years experience working with adults, adolescents, couples and families. Should you have any questions about this presentation, or wish to learn more about the range of services available through Dr. Jochem’s practice, Hawthorn Counseling Group, feel free to call Dr. Jochem at (847) 680-0755 or contact him via email at jjochem@aol.com.