

The Parent 'Hood

Where moms and dads share their expertise

Helping your child make the grade

Your son just got his first report card and isn't doing as well as you hoped. How do you motivate him without pushing him too hard?

Parent advice

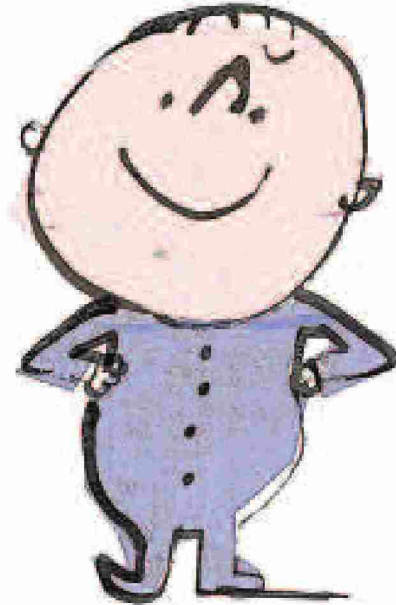
I would take the lowest grade there and say, "This grade is a little low, and I think you can do better. We are going to work on this subject five extra minutes a day during the school week and I bet by the next report card, this grade will be higher." Then let the subject drop. If you make too much of a fuss over it, you will not get the result that you want.

— Sharon Brinkman

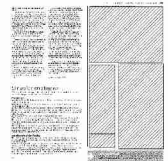
My opinion is that there should be no surprises when the report card comes out. Parents should be involved along the way, and most schools now have ongoing grades posted online. Parental involvement is a big factor in the child being motivated, and parents setting clear expectations based upon the child's ability is key also.

— Deb Murray

The best way to be aware of ongoing school success is to attend fall/spring conferences in advance of report card distribution. The teacher can



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recommend a reasonable amount of time to spend addressing skills at home. Younger children's skills should be addressed in short, fun, rewarding time increments.

— *Paula Glenn*

Expert advice

Don't approach a child in the midst of your panic attack over his grades, says clinical psychologist Margret Nickels, director of the Erikson Institute's Center for Children and Families.

"The first impulse is to turn to your child and say, 'What happened in math?' You will make your children react defensively and make them feel insecure, that maybe they're incompetent and that they just have to live with failure."

Think about it, talk with the teacher, your spouse and friends, and then approach the child in a supportive, solution-focused mode.

Ask the teacher for specifics: Instead of asking if your child has been struggling in math, ask whether it's a problem with getting distracted, for example, or a specific math skill.

"Especially with younger children, keep in mind that you want to support your child's learning, but the actual teaching and drilling, leave up to the teacher," Nickels said. "You don't want to get in a situation where your child dreads your involvement at home: 'Oh, no, here comes Mom again and I have to do flashcards.'"

Incorporate "deficit skills" into activities. If you do puzzles, talk aloud about how to think through matching pieces: "Look, there's a blue piece, and you're doing the sky. ..." At the grocery store, involve the child in weighing one onion versus several.

"The other thing is reading, reading, reading," Nickels said. "Even if it's just a simple story for 4-year-olds, you can ask questions like, 'What do you think is going to happen with the kitty on the next page?'"

She discourages basing your entire strategy on punishment and rewards.

"You want to instill in your child a sense of curiosity, that they want to learn these things that have to do with their environment and goals in their lives, other than getting the next version of Xbox."

— *Compiled by Wendy Donahue, Tribune Newspapers*