

Bad Report Card Blues

By Judy Arnall

Your child brings home a bad report card. Your first instinct may be to punish him in order to make him raise his marks. However, will that really solve the problem? We know from research in the workplace, that punishment never solves motivation or performance problems, so why would it work for children? What can you do to encourage him instead? It's good to keep in mind that a report card is only one "view" of your child. It's a picture to report to parents what the child is like in school. However, he is a multifaceted learner with strengths and room for improvement in all areas of his life, just as anybody is. Think of your child's performance like a three legged stool. All three legs are required for the stool to function and all perspectives can give an accurate assessment of the child as a learner.

One leg of the stool is from the teacher who gives an academic skills report. This report should include information on how the child is doing learning subject matter in the four cores of math, language arts, science, social studies, and options. Schools like to report on character and other things that are not academic, but they only see the child participating in an institutional setting with many peers. The teacher does not see the child at home, or "outside of school" social situations.

The other leg is the parent who also gives a report card on two of the most important learning's: life skills and people skills. The parent can present the report card to the child at any given time. Life skills include chores, money management, organization skills, problem-solving, initiative, responsibilities, health and wellbeing maintenance, and volunteer commitment. In other words – all the skills that parents witness at home. People skills include sharing, sibling conflict resolution, attitude, listening, assertiveness, and politeness, emotional intelligence at home and out in social situations. Most people with academic and technical brilliance lose their jobs not because of inefficiency in that area, but because of lack of people and life skills. These are the some of the most important skills to develop. These skills can be learned and practiced by all children. Not all children can get an "A" in math, but all children can learn to be polite and organized.

The final leg of the three legged stool is the child. He can self-evaluate and give himself a report card on all three components – Academic skills, life skills and people skills. This is the most important evaluation and parents and teachers can ask how they can support growth and success for the child in all these areas.

Finally, the parent, teacher and child should discuss where the strengths are and room-for-improvement and come to an agreement on how to go about setting improvement in place.

Education is a journey, and is not a race. The letter or number grade does not indicate learning or self-awareness. In fact, when children only chase a grade, they can be more prone to cheating and learn nothing. We learn the best when we fail or make mistakes which over insight and reflection, give us ideas for change. When children make mistakes, ask them "what did you learn from this?" The ability to self-evaluate, and find motivation to start again is the real learning and the upmost key to success. The

Winklevoss twins learned more about life and resilience in their court battle with Facebook, than all those academic years at Harvard.

Parents, de-emphasize the numbers. As a society, we tend to treasure what we measure, but learning can't be denigrated to a number. Most of what we do in life that really counts; love, help, volunteering, life learning, and kindness can't be evaluated by a number, but can be observed, noticed and appreciated.

No one is perfect and we all have room for improvement. Your job as parents is to figure out with your child, how can you pick him up, dust him off and support him moving forward?

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