



Tips for Parents: Expectations

What do you think will inspire kids the most when it comes to learning: praise or criticism? Your children will live up (or down) to the expectations you set for them.

Two examples

When parents (or teachers) think that a child is smart because he or she scored high on a standardized test, they tend to treat the child differently and set higher expectations for achievement. The child will often live up to their expectations.

When parents (or teachers) think that a child is not smart because he or she scored low on a standardized test, they tend to react to the child differently, setting lower expectations. The child will often live down to their expectations.

What the research says

The research on teachers' expectations for their students has generally found that students tend to live up to the expectations that teachers set for them.

When teachers use a score on a standardized test to determine the ability levels of students, teachers tend to adjust their teaching to the test score.

If a student scores well, teachers have high expectation for students when it comes to learning. If a student scores poorly, teachers tend not expect as much.

In school and at home

Remember to take scores on standardized tests with a grain of salt. These scores represent a student's effort on one test, on one day, on one type of test. They do not tell you what your child can actually achieve when it comes to learning.

This same principle, often called a self-fulfilling prophecy, also applies to parents. If you expect your kids to be dishonest and you make frequent comments to that effect, sooner or later you'll probably have children engage in dishonest behavior. They are living down to your expectations.

When you set strong expectations for your children regarding school, and encourage them along the way, over time your child will likely achieve at higher levels.

How to communicate positive expectations

- When you ask a question while your child is working on a learning activity, wait for your child to respond. If you rush to supply the answer, you're sending the message that you don't think your child can answer. A longer "wait time" may communicate higher expectations and, therefore, increase student achievement.
- Avoid comparing brothers and sisters.
- Treat all of your children equally and with respect.

Increasing motivation

Parents are the primary influence on a child's motivation. You can help your child develop that "can do, want to do" attitude. Here's how:

- Show your child how to set goals. Remember, the more specific the goal, the easier it is to achieve.
- Teach your child how to handle a challenge. Show how a big task can be broken up into smaller parts.
- Talk about schoolwork every day, and don't forget the specifics.
- Use praise wisely, not freely: only provide praise when it's deserved.
- Emphasize progress. Compare work your child brings home to work done several months ago, then point out any improvements.
- Display your children's achievements on the refrigerator or in the bedroom. Alternatively, help your child make a scrapbook of work he/she is particularly proud of.

For more information:

Web links:

Sullivan, Patricia. National PTA's "Great Expectations: What's the Best Way for Parents to Help Children Be Their Best."

http://www.pta.org/archive_article_details_1118085001546.html

Videos:

"Improving Instruction: A Look at Motivation"

"Making the Grade: Helping Parents Understand What's Important"

"Motivating Kids: What Works"

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