



A newsletter from the Parent-Educator Connection

for families and educators of students receiving special education services

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Great Expectations: What's the Best Way for Parents to Help Children Be Their Best

By Patricia Sullivan

All parents have similar dreams for their children. For some, it's dreams of their sons being NFL quarterbacks or architects. For others, it's their daughters growing up to be concert pianists or doctors. For others still, it's being the first in their family to graduate from college or to earn a doctorate. The common thread through all these dreams is children growing up to fulfill their parents' expectations of success. To some extent, all parents transmit these dreams to their children in the form of expectations. Many parents believe that transmitting a sense of high expectations to children is one way parents infuse them with confidence, self-esteem, and personal standards of merit and value. But too much expectation to succeed can be crushing, in some cases as destructive as telling children they're not good enough. The key is balance.

Expectations fall into two main categories: behaviors and accomplishments. Behaviors are the character traits parents want their children to develop or exhibit, such as good manners, ambition, diligence, and responsibility. Accomplishments usually are either academic (school performance) or recreational, in activities such as athletics, art, or music that are supposed to be fun and enriching. Knowing what should be expected of a child at any given age is a good start toward setting reasonable expectations.

That special something

"Parents need to be realistic," said William Sears, a San Clemente, California, pediatrician and parenting educator. "Identify your children's special something. What are they good at? What are their skills? Create an environment that fosters them," he said. In this way, "You can have expectations because you know they're good at that one particular thing."



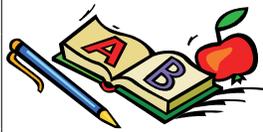
Setting these realistic expectations based on a child's strengths will go a long way toward building the kind of confidence that is essential to long-term successes. "I'm a firm believer in setting up a child to succeed," said Sears, the father of eight.

Parents need to consider what it is that they want for their children and whether how they act on those expectations will actually help their children achieve those goals. All parents want their children to grow up to be happy, healthy, and strong. Setting high expectations is one way many parents think they are working toward those goals. But if children are pushed to perform at levels for which they aren't ready, the result will be the opposite of what parents want. Instead of developing confidence, children may become afraid of taking risks. For example, instead of being proud of their accomplishments, children can begin to feel like sources of disappointment for their parents.

Listen up

Children will let parents know when they're overwhelmed, either directly or indirectly. "They'll tell you if [something's] too hard for them," said Janine Bempechat, author of *Against the Odds: How "At-Risk" Students Exceed Expectations*. When parents hear children say something like "I hate reading" or "I hate the violin," that's a very clear sign to step back. According to Bempechat, the goal is for children to be self-motivated, so proceed slowly and listen carefully to what they are saying.

Parents should build on children's strengths and offer support, said Martha Pieper, a Chicago clinical social worker who, with husband William Pieper, a psychiatrist, has written *Smart Love*. "Let children struggle as long as they're happy struggling," she said. "If they're uncomfortable, show them you'll help them when they ask. You want to offer positive, helpful encouragement."



Parent Involvement in Your Child's Life

As parents, we are involved in our children's lives from the moment they are born and stay involved throughout their lives. The Parent-Educator Connection program promotes parent involvement in all aspects of their children's lives, focusing on their school lives because research indicates that student achievement increases when families are involved in their child's education (Henderson and Mapp 2002).

We know that programs and interventions that engage families in supporting their children's learning at home are linked to higher student achievement. We are also aware that effective programs to engage families and community embrace a philosophy of partnership. To that end, we are addressing parent involvement in all stages of a child's school life. Because the Parent-Educator Connection feels so strongly about this issue, we are devoting this edition of *Partners* to the promotion of parent involvement.

Great Expectations
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What is success?

According to Bempechat, the skills most essential to success aren't academic ones: "It's the smartest kids who often fall apart at the first sign of failure. Being smart isn't necessarily going to help you. But knowing how to pace yourself, how to keep going when you're completely stuck, and how to ask for help will."

The overriding concern parents have in setting expectations is their children's future success. But those expectations can have a negative effect if parents don't teach children the lessons they need to negotiate life. It's those life lessons—not academic knowledge or recreational skills, but qualities like diligence, perseverance, and responsibility—that will have the greatest effect on their lives. Parents need to remember that making sure their children acquire those skills is more important in the long run than whether a child gets an A on a report card or wins a swimming meet.

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10 Tips for Helping Your Child Succeed in School

1. Create a smooth takeoff each day. Give your child a hug before she ventures out the door and you head to work. Look her in the eye, and tell her how proud you are of her. Your child's self-confidence and security will help her do well both in school and in life.
2. Prepare for a happy landing at the end of the day when you reconvene. Create a predictable ritual such as 10–20 minutes listening to your child talk about his day—before you check phone messages, read the mail, or begin dinner. That way you are fully present to listen, and your child has a touchstone he can count on between school and home.
3. Fill your child's lunchbox with healthy snacks and lunches. Have dinner at a reasonable hour and a healthy breakfast. A well-balanced diet maximizes your child's learning potential.
4. Include calm, peaceful times in your children's afternoons and evenings. Maintain a schedule that allows them to go to school rested, and if they are sick, have a system in place so they are able to stay home.
5. Remember it's your children's homework, not yours. Create a specific homework space that's clutter-free and quiet. Encourage editing and double-checking work, but allow your kids to make mistakes, as it's the only way teachers can gauge if they understand the material. It's also how children learn responsibility for the quality of their work.
6. Fill your child's life with a love for learning by showing him your own curiosity, respecting his questions, and encouraging his efforts.
7. Fill your home with books to read, books simply to look at, and books that provide answers to life's many questions. The public or school library is an excellent resource.
8. Be a partner with your child's teacher. When you need to speak to him or her in reference to a specific issue with your child, do it privately, not in front of your child. Make a point never to criticize your child's teacher in front of your child.
9. Set up a system where routine items are easily located—such as backpacks, shoes, signed notices. Create a central calendar for upcoming events to avoid the unexpected.
10. Tuck a "love note" in your child's lunch bag to let her know how special she is. Knowing they are loved makes it easier for children to be kind to others.



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IDEAS FOR PARENTS OF TODDLERS

By Lesia Oesterreich
Edited by Muktha Jost

- Baby proof everything! Store toxic substances such as dishwasher detergent, make-up, paint, or medicine up high. Put safety latches on cabinets, and covers on electrical outlets. Lower crib mattresses so an older infant can't fall over the rail. Cover sharp corners of tables or shelves that your infant might bump into.
- Provide interesting objects for baby to mouth and explore. Square nylon scarves, plastic measuring cups, large wooden spoons, and colorful washcloths are favorite household toys. Keep easy-to-swallow objects out of infant's reach. Baby should not be allowed to play with anything smaller than a half dollar (about 1 1/4 inch).
- If your baby is bottle fed, be sure to hold him or her while feeding. Even if your baby holds the bottle, being held and cuddled helps develop a strong nurturing parent-child relationship. Do not prop an infant drinking from a bottle as it may cause choking.
- Respect your baby's natural schedule. Most babies will settle into a regular routine for eating, sleeping, and soiling their diapers, but the schedule will vary depending on the baby. Some babies need to eat more frequently than others. Some will sleep through the night early on, others will continue to wake briefly well into their second year.
- Talk to your baby. Face your infant when talking so he or she can see you and smile with you. Talk about what you are doing, familiar objects, or people. You may even want to babble back or echo sounds your baby makes much as you would in a regular conversation. Even though your infant cannot understand everything you say, he or she will be learning many words that will form the basis for language later on.
- Read to your baby. Babies enjoy cuddling on a parent's lap, looking at colorful picture books, and hearing the rhythm of a parent's voice. With time they begin to understand that words have meaning and can be used to identify objects.
- Encourage older infants to feed themselves by offering pieces of banana and soft bread. Give your baby a spoon with some mashed potatoes or other sticky food and let him or her practice eating with a spoon. Yes, it will be messy! Be patient. Learning this skill takes lots of practice!



- Play peek-a-boo. Hide your face behind a blanket, then peek out at your baby. Older babies will learn to do this themselves and will enjoy this game for a long time.
- Give your baby the freedom to move around. Young infants enjoy being on their back so they can kick, wiggle, and look around. Older infants need space and time to practice crawling, creeping, pulling up, and walking. Spending too much time in a walker, play pen, or infant swing may inhibit the development of these important skills.
- Help your baby develop a sense of trust and security by responding to baby's cries. Feeling secure encourages your baby to try new things. Be consistent so your baby knows what to expect.
- Stay with your baby when someone new is around. Encourage strangers to approach slowly. Introduce your infant, and let him or her explore someone new in the safety of your presence.

From Iowa State University Extension Service Bulletin PM 1530A, *Ages & Stages*, http://www.extension.iastate.edu/homefamily/children/development/ages_stages.htm



SPECIAL NEEDS DAY

Mississippi Valley Fair

2815 W. Locust St., Davenport, Iowa

The Mississippi Valley Fair extends an invitation to all Special Needs people to enjoy a day at the fair.

Tuesday, July 31, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

FREE admission to the grounds, carnival rides and lunch for all children and adults who are physically or mentally impaired. Limit one free parent admission with a Special Needs person. Feel free to stay for the remainder of the day if you wish. However, grandstand admission is NOT included in this offer.

10:30 a.m.—Entertainers will be performing

Approx. 11:30—Pizza will start being served in the Genesis Health System Variety Tent. Also, canned pop and cookies while they last.

See the many exhibits, animals, machinery, and other free grounds attractions.

The Elementary Years

Elementary school offers parents a wonderful way to connect and support their child's education and school. Parent groups, whether affiliated with national advocacy groups such as PTA or networks such as PTO, or functioning as informal and independent school groups, give the time, energy, and finances to enrich all children's education with the extra resources and opportunities every school needs to support a high level of achievement.

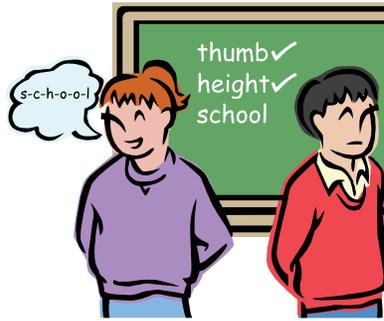
It's hard for busy working parents to attend every meeting or participate in every committee or event sponsored by the parent group or school. Smart parent groups and schools divide up the work so that no one is overwhelmed. If time for meetings is lacking in your life, go to the first and last meetings of the year at least, so that you will know what is planned. Choose an activity or event that works for you and do your part to support the goals of the group.

Making your home a place of learning

Make your home a rich environment for learning. Dinner conversations, trips, games, reading time, family sports, appropriate supervision, home organization, and daily routines all contribute to your child's academic achievement at school.

Utilize resources in your community to provide enrichment activities for your child. Experiential learning through museum trips, music, dance, and art lessons, sports programs, libraries, and colleges' community outreach education will enrich your child's store of knowledge and stimulate a lifelong learning habit.

Use your computer to enrich and support your child's educational achievement. Start with understanding what your child is learning at school and what her learning strengths and needs are. Look through her textbooks and



familiarize yourself with her test scores to get clues for finding the best online resources and software to enhance her understanding of the academic material and remediate where she has deficits.

Make the Most of Parent-Teacher Conferences

This is your opportunity to ask questions and voice any concerns you have about your child. Before you go, think of two or three issues that you want to discuss with the teacher.

Take a notepad to the conference so that you can jot down important information the teacher gives you about your child's test scores, homework, class participation and attitude, social adjustment, and curriculum. Ask the teacher how you can help your child achieve the goals for your child's grade level. Be sure to remember the positive things the teacher says about your child to report to her when you get home!

Most teachers have an email account these days. If your child's teacher is into technology, give her your email address and ask her to contact you when there is a problem or if she just wants to let you know something about your child. Ask her if you may also contact her by email when you have questions about your child at school.

(adapted from ASK:Parenting of K-6 Children)



What's New in the Parent-Educator Library?

The following are some of the children's books that have been added:

I Have a Sister--My Sister Is Deaf—A young girl describes how her deaf sister experiences everyday things—for children ages 4 - 8

My Buddy—A young boy with muscular dystrophy tells how he teamed up with a dog trained to do things for him that he can't do himself.

Glasses (Who Needs 'em?)—A boy is unhappy about having to wear glasses until his doctor provides an imaginative list of well-adjusted eyeglass wearers.

Don't Call Me Special—A First Look at Disability—A picture book which explores questions and concerns about disability in a simple and reassuring way.

Different Just Like Me—Girl discovers that people, like flowers, have different needs and come in many colors, shapes and sizes but are really very similar.

The Don't-give-up Kid and Learning Differences—Boy learns that he and other children have different learning styles and that he needs to keep trying different solutions just as his hero Thomas Edison did.

Let's Talk about It: Extraordinary Friends—Challenges the stereotypes that often plague children with special needs - for ages 4 - 8

What about Involving Parents at the Middle and High School Level?

A growing body of evidence recognizes that family connections with schools make a difference in middle and high school students' success. Families of all cultural backgrounds, education, and income levels can and often do have a positive influence on their children's learning. What can this mean for all of us parents? The following are recommendations from Ann Henderson and Karen Mapp, both researchers in the field of Parent Involvement, on ways to keep involved with our children's education as they go through the middle and high school years.

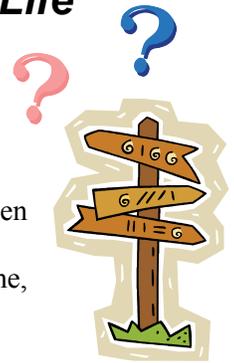
1. Talk with your child about school activities.
2. Contact your child's teacher and learn about his/her progress as well as what the teacher's expectations are.
3. Monitor your child's out-of-school activities and encourage those that are "learning related."
4. Volunteer at your school.
5. Attend school activities like parent/teacher conferences and other events.
6. Stress the value of education and guide your child toward postsecondary education opportunities.
7. Make sure your child reads and does his/her homework.
8. Talk about career and education options and provide experiences for students to learn about both.
9. Get involved in programs at school or in your community that support families in guiding students' learning.
10. Embrace a philosophy of partnership with your child's teachers and other school staff.

If you have concerns or questions that might impact your child's ability to learn, do not hesitate to contact your child's teacher. Participate in any available training that the school may provide that will help you understand the standards and benchmarks your school is using to gauge student improvement. Read your child's school newsletter. Get involved with the decision-making process of your child's school by participating on their leadership team. The more you can support your child's learning and educational progress, the more your child will tend to do well in school and continue his/her education.

(adapted from www.IowaParents.org)



Seven Questions for Life after High School



It is particularly important for you and your high school child to discuss all the issues that arise as you help plan for life after high school. You have probably been thinking about what your child will do when he or she "grows up" for a long time, but as your child nears the end of his/her school years, it is time to go beyond just dreaming or thinking about, to planning and working towards real goals. All students face a big transition from high school to "the real world," and it requires thoughtful planning. The following questions may help lead you and your child to a meaningful discussion about the future.



1. **What are your child's goals?** This is a big question that should drive all of your other questions.
2. **Where does your child want to live?** Think about the skills your child will need to live where he or she would like to live.
3. **Can your children advocate for themselves if necessary?** They may need to develop some good communicating skills to do this.
4. **If your child is disabled, does he/she have the documentation of his/her disability?** This may be necessary in order to receive certain services in the adult world.
5. **Can your children manage finances?** They will need the skills to budget their money, keep and balance a checkbook, and use credit cards wisely as well as other money skills.
6. **Does your child have the necessary skills and classes to go to college, attend technical school or other training programs?** Have they taken the SATs or ACTS? They may need other types of entry exams or classes to go into the fields they are interested in.
7. **Does your child have the skills needed to be successful at a job?** Many employers are ready and willing to offer training on how to do the job if people demonstrate they are reliable, will show up for work on time, pay attention to their work and get along with co-workers.

Planning and preparing for the transition from high school to adult life is both exciting and scary. These questions can form a basis for your child's transition planning. From that basis, you can start asking more specific questions about what skills to focus on, what classes to take, and what resources you might need.



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The **Parent-Educator Connection** provides support and resources for families and teachers.

For more information, please contact the Parent-Educator Facilitator in your service center:

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Director of Special Education



Websites of Interest

www.pta.org..... National PTA Website

www.iowaParents.org . Iowa Statewide Parent Information Resource Center

www.aea9.k12.ia.us Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency—This publication, **PARTNERS**, is available on this site. Click on Programs & Services. Next, under Special Education, click on Departments, then click on Parent-Educator Connection, and in the left column click on Partners Newsletter.

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