

Teaching Study Skills to Improve Self-Esteem

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When children or adolescents become depressed or anxious, get into mischief or develop low self-esteem, the reason behind such psychological problems may be traumatic early childhood experiences, conflicts in the family, or biological factors. But often the problems are much closer to the surface and can be dealt with effectively simply by teaching good study skills.

When a child has good study skills, he/she can be successful in school, receive the praise of adults and peers, identify him/herself as an effective student and build social relations with others based on these types of positive attributes. To teach good study habits, is often difficult because in many cases parents were never taught them when they were going to school. But even with poor study habits of their own, many parents still value their children's education and can help their children to develop good study skills. When we look at the following list of suggestions for teaching study skills, we discover that much of it is self-evident and simply common sense. Thus, the following list is intended to be a useful reminder to do what most people already know is helpful.

Supplies

Students need a quiet, uncluttered, well-lighted place for studying.

Bookshelves should be available for books, completed homework and work yet to be done.

A dictionary and encyclopedia should be readily available and used often. Let your children see you using these study tools.

Every student needs a box of pencils, pens, paper, erasers, a ruler, a compass, a stapler, paperclips, tape, colored pencils, etc.

Schedules to Live By

Your child's class schedule can be taped onto the bedroom door and an after-school schedule can be put on the refrigerator door. Clocks, calendars and schedules such as these are particularly helpful for the child who is having difficulty managing his/her time.

Play and socializing are important aspects of growing up and they need to be included in the life of every child but children need to learn that play is either responsibly scheduled into the day or it comes after schoolwork has been completed.

If your child isn't finishing his/her homework on a regular basis, suspend playtime until chores and homework are completed.

Teach your children to manage their time in order to finish their homework, play, eat dinner, prepare for the next day and be ready for sleep by a reasonable hour.

Track your child's progress in school by keeping all report cards. Look at poor grades as areas in which your child needs help, rather than as examples of failure or misbehavior.

Impress upon your child that school is his/her 'job' and that he/she is responsible for handling that job.

Doing Homework

Don't do your child's homework. Learning is more important than simply getting a good grade. Your child's legitimately earned average or poor grade is better than an excellent grade for work that he/she did not do. Don't simply focus on getting the right answer. Help your child to learn the material.

Pay attention to how your child is receiving your assistance and modify your approach so that it is actually helpful.

If, for whatever reason, you are unable to help your child with his/her homework in an effective fashion, find someone who can be a tutor to assist your child when he/she needs help.

Strategies for Getting the Job Done

Strategies for getting work accomplished include an appropriate work environment, a schedule for staying on track, a clock to monitor progress, rest breaks and specific times designated for evaluating progress and seeking assistance from parents.

Tactics for NOT Getting the Job Done

Delaying tactics include behaviors such as talking on the phone, eating snacks, taking showers, playing video games, watching TV, drinking yet another glass of water, going to the bathroom again, taking a nap, etc. One will notice that many delaying tactics are often necessary and very adaptive activities. They can even include cleaning one's room or organizing one's notebook. What marks them as delaying tactics is the fact that no matter how good or benign the activity is, the end result is the same – the homework does not get completed. It is sometimes useful to make a list of typical delaying tactics that your child uses. Then point them out and help your child with the anxieties associated with beginning the homework. Ask what homework needs to be done and help your child think about how to proceed with the task.

Managing Overwhelming Homework Tasks: Or How to Eat a Giant Cake

Often children can become overwhelmed by an assignment leaving them frustrated and unable to begin. In such cases, it may be useful to offer the metaphor that the assignment is like a giant cake that they want to eat and yet don't know how to begin. You can then help them cut up the cake (the assignment) into bite-sized pieces (more approachable tasks) that they can more easily handle. In other words, if there are twenty problems to be solved and that feels overwhelming to the child, it may be useful to break up the assignment into four bite-sized pieces with five problems in each. Then help your child to

plan a stretch-break or show the work to you after the completion of each set of five problems.

If your child has difficulty focusing on the homework by him/herself, it may be useful to keep a clock on the table and monitor progress with a schedule for the day's homework. It may also be useful to put a smiling picture of the parents on the table or desk with a small message written underneath saying, "Your education is important to us." Or "Give it all you've got." Or "We know you can do it!" That way, even when you're not there physically, your child can still feel your presence and your interest in his/her performance.

Make a time and place to honor your child's accomplishments. Demonstrate an interest in your child's work. Avoid perfectionist attitudes. Expect mistakes and help your children to learn from them. Maintain healthy habits like good nutrition, exercise, and exposure to the culture and the values that you adhere to.

Make sure you attend parent-teacher conferences at school whether your child is having problems or not. And ask your child's teacher for additional suggestions for teaching good study skills.

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