

ParentBrief



Solutions for the under-achieving child

Every kid is unique. No child is the same when it comes to temperament, interests, activities, capabilities, strengths and talents. The same goes for their motivation to achieve. When a child's unique needs are not sufficiently understood and catered for, motivation drops and they're at risk of **underachieving**. For different reasons, it is common for children and adolescents to achieve at a lower level than they are capable of - this is what is meant by under-achievement.

This can be quite frustrating and scary for parents.

Light at the end of the tunnel

Sometimes we might think there is nothing else we can do for our child to help him or her perform better at school. We might feel like we are in a big black tunnel with no light at the end.

However, it's worth knowing that many students recycle into achievement at various stages of their schooling. Some do so because of a favourite teacher who maintained an interest and faith in them over the years and whom students remember as making a big difference.

Others recycle because their parents were sensible enough not to withdraw them from extracurricular activities as punishment for their poor performance at school. For some students the confidence they receive from their hobbies and activities enables them to take the risk of trying once again in their schoolwork.

5 steps to helping an under-achieving child

When this happens, you will want an action plan to turn things around. If you have an child who is under-achieving, here are five steps you can take.

Step #1: Call a family meeting

- Identify any barriers to schoolwork
- If additional coaching or mentorship is needed, decide on ways to resolve this
- Talk about ways to provide our child with necessary structure and support
- Discuss, and where possible resolve issues such as criticism, teasing, sibling fighting, or any other existing family conflict
- Where possible create a study space
- Communicate realistic expectations

Step #2: Schedule a parent-teacher interview

- Email or phone the teacher to make an appointment
- Set out in the email the purpose of the interview
- Share our concerns with the teacher, indicating our willingness to enter into a partnership to address the problem
- At interview, establish that our child is in fact underachieving, and the teacher's viewpoint as to reasons why
- Identify our child's learning style and how to work with it
- Establish regular communication with the teacher to put plans into action

Step #3: Doing it tough and persisting

- Ensure our child takes responsibility for completion of ALL schoolwork, not just work he finds interesting
- Help with homework where possible
- Find someone interested in her welfare and progress at school (one or other parent, grandparent, relative, family friend). Ensure our child reports on a regular basis.
- Offer appropriate praise for persistence

Step #4: Provide frequent reinforcement for effort

- Focus on current and future progress, not past under-achievement
- Put personal expectations on the backburner
- Provide positive reinforcement immediately following achieving behaviour or attitude
- Encourage, smile, be enthusiastic

Step #5: Monitor ongoing progress for all to see

- Establish with our child's teacher how to keep track of progress on a daily basis
- Visually display a representation (graph, spreadsheet) of the progress of our child's work
- For younger children, introduce incentives - gold stars, happy stickers
- For older children, establish privileges and rewards