

Trails of Trouble—Children and School Performance

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At some point in the lifecycle of a family, a child could experience school trouble for one reason or another. It may have to do with the schoolwork itself. Or it may be a particular subject a student is struggling with. I struggled with Algebra in middle school, even though I was a good student. I barely passed and have been marked with math-phobia ever since. That was a year of tears—not only for me, but also for my mom who heard my lament night after night (she probably bears the scars as well). I was glad to leave math behind after that experience... never forced to return!

Some children, however, struggle year after year. Their struggles are not only educational ones, but emotional ones as well. The brain can be understood in two parts—one is an emotional part and one is the thinking/feeling part. The emotional brain is recording patterns of events, particularly the threatening events, which get “ignited” or triggered in the child when the brain becomes aware of those patterns. Thus, children who struggle in a subject may have a reaction even before they sit down to approach the homework.

Other school challenges for children are the social groups they encounter and the pressure of relationships. These challenges can also make school an emotional struggle. As parents we want to help encourage our children to get along with each other, to share and not be territorial. These values are not always shared on the playground.

What’s a parent to do? Try your best not to keep a hidden ledger of all your child’s “worst moments.” When a parent begins to be preoccupied with these, the parent tends to feed their own sense of anxiety and disappointment. This “reviewing of the bad” instead of “getting a fresh start” attitude will likely affect the child in a negative way. A parent will not even have to open their mouth and the child will know that the parent is thinking in one of these two ways!

Think “fresh start.” Talk to the teacher. Form relationships that have a “we’re on the same team” kind of feeling. It’s hard to be in the game alone. As a parent, I have sought many ideas from school officials, advisors and friends. Support is a key feature of breaking the cycle of worry. So...I encourage you—ask for help!

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