

Parent Tips: Helping Your Child with Test-Taking

Testing is used in schools for two main purposes. One is to find out how well an individual student is learning in the classroom. For instance, teachers can test how well a child is responding to reading instruction by using assessments that measure specific skills necessary for fluent reading.

The other purpose is to find out how well the school is meeting local and national benchmarks for student achievement. For this purpose schools use standardized tests, usually administered in the spring.

As a parent, there are many ways you can support your child's academic success, which will in turn help your child with test-taking throughout the school year.

Throughout the school year

Talk to your child about homework, grades, and testing at the beginning of the school year

It's helpful for children to understand why schools give tests and to know the different kinds of tests they will take. Most tests are designed and given by teachers to see if students are learning important information in the class. These tests are associated with the grades on report cards. The results tell the teacher and students whether they are keeping up with the class, need extra help, or are ahead of other students.

Make sure that your child attends school regularly

Tests reflect children's overall achievement. The more effort and energy your child puts into learning, the more likely it is that he will do well on tests.

Meet with your child's teacher to discuss his progress

Ask the teacher to suggest activities for you and your child to do at home to help prepare for tests and to improve your child's understanding of schoolwork.

If you have concerns about the test or testing situation, talk with your child's teacher

Discuss your concerns with the teacher and/or school administrator. If you're not satisfied with the outcome, however, you can reach out to some other organizations that monitor testing, including your local PTA, The National Center for Fair & Open Testing or the ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation (Narang, 2008).

If you believe that your child's difficulty with standardized tests may be the symptom of a problem such as a language or learning difficulty, speak with your child's teacher to learn if your child qualifies for any assessment accommodations.

Provide a quiet, comfortable place for studying at home

Make sure your child is completing all daily assignments. Let your child know that you think education is important and that homework needs to be done each day. You can help your child with homework by setting aside a special place to study, establishing a regular time for homework, and removing distractions such as the television and social phone calls during homework time. [Helping Your Child With Homework](#) offers some great ideas for ensuring that your child gets homework done.

Make sure that your child is well-rested and eats a well-balanced diet

Children who are tired are less able to pay attention in class or to handle the demands of a test.

Provide books and magazines for your child to read at home

Reading materials and enriching experiences will spark your child's curiosity and build vocabulary. Ask your child's teacher for lists of books for outside reading or get suggestions from your local library.

Encourage your child

Praise her for the things that she does well. If your child feels good about herself, she will do her best. Children who are afraid of failing are more likely to become anxious when taking tests and more likely to make mistakes.

Help your child avoid test anxiety

When well-meaning parents focus too much on test results, they put undue pressure on young children. For kids who struggle with attention or memorization tasks, testing can be extremely stressful because it requires students to draw entirely on these skills, and it can cause test anxiety.

Test anxiety is worrying too much about doing well on a test. Students with test anxiety can worry about success in school and about their future success. They can become very self-critical and lose confidence in their abilities. Instead of feeling challenged by the prospect of success, they become afraid of failure. If your child worries too much about taking tests, you can help to reduce the anxiety by encouraging the child to do the following things.

Take a deep breath

Step away from the flashcards. As a parent, the most important way you can help your child do well on tests is to read with your child regularly, talk with her about her experiences, and provide a quiet work space at home.

Plan ahead

Make sure your child starts studying for the test in advance and understands what material the test will cover.

Discourage your child from "cramming" the night before

This will likely increase anxiety, which will interfere with clear thinking. Make sure your child gets a good night's sleep.

Remind your child to:

- Read the directions carefully before beginning the test.
- Ask the teacher to explain something he doesn't understand.
- Look quickly at the entire text to see what types of questions are on it so that he can decide how much time to spend on each question.
- Mark questions that he doesn't know the answer to, skip them, and go on. Tell him if he has time at the end of the test, to return to it and try again.

Don't get upset because of a single test score

Many things can influence how your child does on a test. She might not have felt well on test day or she might have been too nervous to concentrate. She might have had an argument with a friend before the test or she might have been late to school because the school bus got caught in traffic. Remember, one test is simply one test.

After the Test

Your child can learn a great deal from reviewing a graded exam paper. Reviewing will show him where he had difficulty and, perhaps, why. This is especially important for classes in which the material builds from one section to the next, as in math. Here are some helpful steps to take when your child gets a test back.

Discuss the wrong answers with your child and find out why he chose the answers

Sometimes a child didn't understand or misread a question. Or, he may have known the correct answer but failed to make his answer clear.

Read and discuss all comments that the teacher writes on a returned test with your child

If any comments aren't clear, tell your child to ask the teacher to explain them.

Finally, remember that tests and grading systems are not perfect

Each format has its own limitations. As you help your child do her best on the tests she takes and in all of her schoolwork, also remind her that testing is just one part of her education. With your support and involvement, she will be well on her way to her own bright future!

References

Narang, S. (2008). Standardized tests: What you should know before your child sharpens his #2 pencil. Retrieved April 2, 2008, from <http://content.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=1403>.

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