

Why Children Exhibit Overall Academic Failure in School

Introduction

Many times parents are unaware of the different reasons why their children may not be performing or successful in school. For a teacher this may be hard to explain to parents. This ***Parent Teacher Conference Handout*** provides the parents with an explanation of all the possible reasons why children may not be learning in school.

Academic Possibilities:

There is no doubt that a lack of skills can have a direct effect on a child's ability to perform in school. Whether this has occurred as a result of inconsistent school attendance, frequent changes in schools by parents, poor teaching, trauma, etc. the result is the same. Pure academic deficiencies tend to accumulate year to year if not recognized early. After a while, the child feels so much pressure and feels so far behind that he gives up.

Environmental Possibilities:

Children may fail in school as a result of several environmental factors. Children who come from dysfunctional homes may not have the routine, supervision nor boundaries required at certain ages to enhance achievement. Also, children who come from a home with high levels of tension (i.e. abusive, alcoholism) may be so preoccupied with fear of reaction or preoccupation with upsetting a parent that they cannot muster enough energy to concentrate, retain, and focus during school. Sometimes, children fail due to excessive parental expectations which they feel they cannot fill, so they give up, others may not succeed due to competition or comparisons with a successful sibling.

Intellectual Possibilities:

Limited intellectual ability will be a significant factor in a child's academic performance levels. If a child has limited intellectual capacity, he will lag behind other students and may eventually give up. Also, gifted children who go undetected may find school boring or not challenging, and thereby lack the motivation for performance.

Language Possibilities:

Children with language disorders or who are bilingual may fail in school because they cannot understand what is being taught nor expected of them.

Medical Possibilities:

Some medical conditions may result in limitations in performance (i.e. eye muscle problems which affect eyesight, preoccupation with a health condition (i.e. heart condition)) or limit performance directly (i.e. neurological disorders).

Perceptual Possibilities:

Perceptual deficits that result in learning disabilities can result in school failure. Children who have slow processing speeds as a result of these deficits will lag behind, feel inadequate, and in many cases give up. Processing information slowly, in spite of adequate intelligence, can be very frustrating and embarrassing for children who then see academic resistance secondary to the fear of being ridiculed.

Psychological Possibilities:

Children may fail in school as a result of low self esteem, low confidence levels, high anxiety or depression. Any one of these factors can greatly interfere with a child's ability to adequately perform over a consistent period of time.

Social Possibilities:

Some children fail in school because they want to be accepted by a social group that does not respect academic performance. Sometimes, bright children are drawn to social groups of underachievers, and the group message is clear: "Don't achieve if you want to be part of this group". The group message is to protect the members from realizing their inadequacy. The child will then sacrifice his academic performance for entrance into this social group. Other children may fail because they do not feel they can compete or keep up with peer performance.

WHAT TO DO WHEN THIS HAPPENS

- ***Set up a meeting with the school psychologist to discuss all possible reasons why the student may be failing.***

- ***Review the student's records including past teacher comments for similar types of symptoms exhibited by the child in earlier grades.***

If this is found, the problem may be more serious. Also, it would be very helpful to talk to the student's prior teachers to get feedback on what they tried that worked and did not work, since you do not want to repeat something that proved ineffective in the past.

- ***Review past report cards looking for consistent difficulties in certain subject areas.***

Sometimes, children with serious learning problems or learning disabilities will show patterns of academic failure over a long period of time.

- ***Review the child's group achievement test scores which may give you some idea of skill levels.***

However, be aware that since it is a group administered test, some children with serious learning problems may not have taken it seriously.

- ***If available, review the child's IQ scores.***

They may offer insight into the child's overall intellectual ability. If you believe the child is working to his capabilities, has an average to above average IQ, and yet is still failing in school, this warrants immediate attention.

- ***Meet with the school nurse to review the child's medical records for any medical reason that might be contributing to school failure.***

Ask about hearing and eyesight and whether or not the child is on any medications.

• Finally, refer this child to the Child Study Team in your school for further discussion, especially if you have found patterns in your review of the child's records.

It is very important to understand that referring a child who is exhibiting overall school failure to the child study team should never be looked at as a reflection of your teaching ability.