

Parent Guides by Project uP!



**Curated for you to have even
better days with your children!**

DISCLAIMER:

This parent guide has been curated for a parent to understand the basics of Bullying, and a few points that could help while dealing with it.

The prevalence of the suggestions made might differ from case-to-case. Please consider a child psychologist in before taking any concrete actions.

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**If you've ever
said something
similar to a child...**

"your grades define you."

*"if you don't get an A+, you'll
not achieve any success in life."*

*"give up your hobbies
if you have to!"*

*"look how well other
kids have scored!"*



**it might have
implications!**

**Scroll through this guide to
learn how to deal with it.**

This Parent Guide covers the following:

- The Grading System
- Correlation between Grades and Mental Health
- Case Studies
- Role of Parents and Teachers
- Resources.
- Frequently Asked Questions.

The Grading System

The grading system may be a means to provide feedback on a student's performance. Its objective nature is helpful in measuring academic success and even a teacher's performance, which can be used to evaluate and improve learning. In some cases, grades may also hold importance in terms of getting college admissions, affecting, to some extent, the kind of future colleges and jobs a student may hold.

But how can this affect a child?

It gets tricky when we examine the relationship between the grades and a student's mental health, or even the actual knowledge a child may possess.

We may see students stressing over a low grade, or some resorting to cheating to pass an exam. Teachers and parents may induce unhealthy comparisons by behaving differently towards an academically brilliant child as compared to those who may not be one. One's positive/negative impression in one area is generalised to their entire personality, and can leave a long-standing impact on one's identity.

Let's try to dive deeper into this with an example...

Meet the Three Musketeers!



This is Khushboo!



This is Radha!



This is Mahima!

Imagine this, Khushboo is not interested in Chemistry, and has to sit through a 40-minute lecture of the same. The teacher may be teaching at a particular pace to complete the syllabus on time.

Even if Khushboo has some doubts, she may not like to ask them in class, as she would fear drawing attention to herself, especially if she asks a basic doubt which should have gotten resolved in the previous class.

She is stressed out before the examinations, as she sees Radha and Mahima boasting about their knowledge. In the examination hall, Khushboo can only recall parts of what they had memorised the night before.

Upon receiving the grades, Khushboo breaks down immediately, seeing the teacher's remarks written across their paper with a red pen, thinking about how their parents may react to it.

Instead of focussing objectively on what made her performance go down, she believes that there is something wrong with her intelligence that makes her get such marks, and that her marks are an indication of whether she can hold a good job and be successful. Feelings of worthlessness and frustration cloud her mind.

Interestingly, Radha who gets 90% wants to try harder to get a 95%. And Mahima, who gets 95% will try to maintain their scores, be the best at everything under the sun because everybody has their hopes pinned on them.

The reactions of teachers and parents only strengthen the beliefs the girls have. Khushboo avoids attending chemistry classes altogether for the fear of being picked on, Radha gives up her favourite hobbies in order to impress her parents, and Mahima feels like she has failed everyone around her whenever she isn't the best at anything.

Do you feel any of them are happy?

When we discussed this situation with Ms.Komal, a School Counsellor, here is what she had to say about it:

As you have observed in the given situation, it is not only an academically 'weak' student but also those who are the top few scorers who experience academic pressure. The amount of pressure on them might result in different outcomes because of their potential in the particular subject.

Nevertheless, in this whole process of pressurising the kids to score better, we completely ignore their individual needs and potentials. This becomes the reason for low self esteem amongst children. Rather than focusing on the process we focus only on the end result and that is extremely harmful for the child.

In Khushboo's case, the overall experience she went through was a combination of negative emotions including anxiety, fear, inferiority complex, sadness, tension, and final break down. Such intense negative emotions can be severely damaging for her leading to lowered self esteem and even suicidal thoughts. Adults around such children need to become more empathetic in order to help and heal the child. At the end, it is the what/how the child is and not how well they do things which really matters.



**Ms.Komal Pandey
School Counsellor**

Advisory Board Member,
Bond and Beyond by
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Correlation between Grades and Mental Health

The Direct Impact of Grades on Mental Health

a) impact of grades on mental health

b) impact of mental health on grades

a) To understand the reactions of others around them, a student may try to reason out the causes for that behaviour. This reasoning style may be positive, as the child may evaluate their poor grades to a single event; for example, by thinking- “it was just a bad day”, and work towards performing better, actually doing so in the process. Or, they may choose the opposite method of associating the grades with internal faults, which could be “I am not smart enough”, or that, “I may never do well in life”.

In the long run, these thoughts may actually result in the following:

- make children doubtful of their core belief about their
- potential,
- further affecting their real-life behaviours,
- a child not putting the efforts into things that may help them
- in future,
- or back out of activities in order to not fail, and may unfortunately, never know or optimise on their fullest potential.

As you may realise, these negative self beliefs do not exist in a vacuum. They may also impact other non academic aspects of their life, ultimately leading to the child developing some potential mental health struggles.

For instance, examination anxiety is a type of performance anxiety which can affect anyone regardless of academic level or level of preparation. It may manifest in the forms of physical signs such as vomiting or fainting spells before an exam, or emotional reaction such as feelings of inadequacy or fear. In its extreme forms, examination anxiety can lead to anxiety related disorders such as Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD).

In a study conducted on 190 students from grade 11 to 12 from 3 private schools in Kolkata and 3 government-aided schools, it was found out that almost two-thirds of the students experienced pressure from their parents to perform better academically.

In 2018, there were 1.3 lakh suicides in the country, out of which eight per cent were accounted for students.

According to WHO, one in every four children between the age group of 13 and 15 in India are depressed.

The Lancet Report states that India has the world's highest suicide rates among the youth. Parental pressure for better academic performance is found to be mostly responsible for academic stress.

b) At times, grades may be indicative of some serious mental health issues such as depression, stress or sleep difficulties. Mental health problems can affect a student's energy level, concentration, dependability, mental ability, and optimism. The impact may also be prevalent in other areas such as physical health, and relationships with family and friends.

Observations: Indirect Consequences on Parents

Cases of parents who had experienced such as a "nervous breakdown," "high blood pressure," sleep deprivation, anxiety, and/or depression due to their children's exams:

1

One case described parents of a 10th grader who had been "spending sleepless nights for the past one month, keeping their daughter company as she studies through the night, which left them anxious and with high blood pressure."

2

Stress levels were noted to be particularly high prior to college entrance exams. Other parents were described as having taken breaks for up to six months to help their children with exams.

3

Counsellors from crisis phone lines in India reported that the total number of calls they receive has doubled and that parents and even grandparents are frequenters of this service.

Positive Role of Parents and Teachers

Role of Parents:

In the present Indian competitive scenario, many parents fail to strike a balance with regard to academic pressurisation. They tend to show demanding and controlling behaviours that exert much pressure on their children. Excessive parental pressure on the children for achievement in school can be destructive to the 'Creativity' and 'Self-esteem' of the children. Parental pressurisation might adversely affect their 'Academic interest' and 'Academic achievement' in school, quite contrary to parental expectations.

Parents can help this function by allowing students to **approach them without fear of judgement**. Research states that teens, especially if they're 17 or 18, have more positive social behaviour when they have secure attachments to their parents or caregivers. This means that parents should:

- **Provide open spaces** for communication,
- Encourage kids to **talk about their emotions** without shame,
- Teach kids how to process their emotions,
- Help their kids understand how to empathise with others.

When parents include these strategies in their adolescent's upbringing, it can help students understand where their positive and negative reactions stem from.

This can further help them in processing emotions that stem from academic performance, it means that they:

- Have more clarity or **awareness** of how their academic performance affects them.
- Know how to **regulate reactions** to disappointments, in particular, that they might have in response to their academic performance.

Role of Teachers:

- Teachers can educate their students about the importance of time management that can considerably reduce stress. They should allow flexible due dates to submit the assignments- not only will this reduce stress but also keep them motivated to deliver their work,
- Teachers should acknowledge the effort of every student instead of discouraging them,
- Teachers should put in the effort to encourage laughter and humour in the classroom. At times, they can share incidences related to their own childhood with the students to strengthen the bond,
- Lessons should aim to create a deeper level of understanding instead of burdening the students with figures and facts.

Answering some common questions for you!

Should parents punish their children for bad grades?

When we talk about punishments, it is important to understand the difference between punishment and negative reinforcements. Punishments involve implementing activities that weaken the likelihood of a behaviour to occur (here, the child getting poor marks).

Verbal and physical harassment, or taking away things that boost the child's self esteem are not an advisable option as they create resentment and might only superficially target the problem. Instead, negative reinforcement involves removal of activities that are preventing a behaviour from occurring (here, not getting good marks).

Instead of taking them out of their sports club, parents should give time limitations to their activities like video games etc.

Do family situations affect academic performance?

Yes! Family situations (for e.g., parent disputes, bullying by siblings, etc.) influence children very much.

They may make children feel neglected, guilty, etc., and make them lose focus in school.

What should parents do when children perform poorly in academics?

It is normal for parents to feel negatively when their child brings home bad grades. The correct way to address the situation is taking some time to form your thoughts.

Never react impulsively and with anger. Talk to your child in a calm and composed manner and express your concerns. Communication is always the key.

Should parents reward their children?

Yes and no.

If your child brings in a report card with all A grades, you shouldn't buy them a car or a TV. Instead, give them short-term rewards like taking them out for their favourite movie or for dinner.

Materialistic rewards last longer than the motivation for children to perform which is why such rewards are not recommended.

Should parents encourage extracurricular achievements?

Yes. Often, children achieve certain things that are important to them but may not be to the parents, such as a prize in an art competition or winning a race. These achievements boost the self esteem of children and should be appreciated wholeheartedly by parents.

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