

Helping Kids who Struggle in School but Don't Qualify for Special Services

Has the public school determined that your child doesn't have a learning disability or qualify for special education services — yet she continues to struggle in school? How can this be? What can you do to help her?

Everyone struggles with learning at one time or another. Just because your child isn't eligible for special education services or a 504 Plan doesn't mean her problems aren't real. If she was assessed by the public school and didn't qualify for any special services, the good news is that her test scores show she's learning. Be sure to compliment her about the strengths and achievements her testing showed. Encourage her to stay motivated because that's the key to success.

Uncovering the Cause of Her Struggle

It may be helpful for you to try to determine whether any of the following factors are causing her to struggle in school:

- **She may feel overwhelmed by the amount of work expected of her or panicked about how to do her homework.** Could anxiety be a factor? [Emotions](#) have a strong effect on whether a child is able to learn. Teach her ways to relax when she begins to feel anxious — count to 10, take a deep breath, practice yoga, take a break, get a drink of water — depending on whether she's at school or at home.
- **If she attends a school with many high achievers, she may struggle with curriculum even though her test scores indicate average skills.** This kind of competition can be frustrating and lead to feelings of inadequacy. You'll have to decide if she's in the right school for her or if a change needs to be made to protect her [self-esteem](#).
- **A child may feel she's the only one in the class who doesn't understand, has to work hard, or spends hours on homework.** Check with the teacher or other parents to see if this realistic. Examine your own expectations for her performance and decide whether she's putting unrealistic demands on herself. Let her know how proud you are of her hard work, and help her find ways to ease up on self-expectations. Remind her that no one is perfect.
- **Certain grade level transitions create a jump in expectations for kids.** For example, the transition to middle school can place a strain on all kids, but if a child already has problems organizing, then this transition becomes exceptionally stressful. Since [academic stress points](#) can be anticipated, you can prepare your child with necessary support and structure ahead of time.
- **Sometimes problems are specific to a subject area.** A conference between you, your child, and the teacher can help to identify where the breakdown occurs. Does she have the necessary basic skills, understand the vocabulary, need to review the subject matter with you or a study group, need to get additional explanation from the teacher, or work with a tutor? Once you get this information, you can plan ways to help her learn.

Provide Support for Your Child

It's important to let your child know that you believe in her and recognize her efforts. She needs to see you're "in her corner" — there to [listen](#), provide support and guidance, and seek help for her.

Remember that these struggles are only a part of the special and unique person she is. As her parent, you'll want to find ways to reinforce instruction, keep her motivated, lessen the pressure, and celebrate her talents.

- Help her set realistic expectations for herself.

- Let her know that it's OK to ask for help when she doesn't get a new concept or understand directions.
- Meet with her teacher(s) and make a plan of how you can work together to help her.
- Help her to organize her materials and develop a plan for effective studying.
- Find ways to help her with her homework.
- If necessary, provide academic support programs outside of school hours, such as tutoring, or peer study groups.
- If necessary to help her deal with anxiety and unrealistic expectations, get some counseling.
- Identify her strengths and interests, and encourage her to continue to build them.

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About the Contributors

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Other Resources

Books

Emotion: The On/Off Switch for Learning
www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1567620566/schwabfoundation/
By Priscilla Vail

The Will to Learn: A Guide for Motivating Young People
www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0521556791/schwabfoundation/
By Martin V. Covington

Websites

Kid's Health
Developing Your Child's Self-Esteem
kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/self_esteem.html

Raising Resilient Kids
What is Resilience?
www.raisingresilientkids.com/resources/articles/what_is.html