

Developing Academic Potential

From "An Allowance is Not a Bribe" by Allan M. Gonsher, LMHP, CMSW

In a few short weeks summer vacation will be over and a new school year will begin. As parents send their children to school there is usually one question they ask themselves, "How can I insure that my child will have a successful academic year?"

There are several steps that a parent can take to help each child work to the best of his or her academic potential. The first is to know the child's learning capabilities. While labels such as average, gifted or learning disabled can be detrimental to a child's self-esteem if improperly used, it is important for the parent to be realistic about the level of success that the child can attain.

The second step is for the parent to offer positive reinforcement in those areas where the child is successful. This means that if the child is a one or two student in English or History the parents should find ways to help the child become even more proficient in that subject. This could include encouraging the child to take on extra credit projects which will enhance his or her knowledge.

The third step is to realize that most children are not proficient in all subjects. The same child who earns a one in English may receive a four in math. A parent can devise ways to help the child such as working with him or her on flashcards drills or purchase work books that the child can use for independent study. Most importantly, the parent should not put undue emphasis on the lack of proficiency in math while ignoring other academic success.

Taking all of the steps into consideration there is one more factor that each parent must keep in mind when helping a child to be academically successful. Children today are subject to many stresses including the expectation to succeed by teachers, parents and peers. Parents need to encourage their children to be academically successful in a loving, caring and stress reduced atmosphere.