

Reasons why your child may not be performing well at school

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Many experts believe children do better in school when their parents are actively involved with their education. But while it's always important to take a healthy interest in your child's schooling – for instance, helping them to do their homework and speaking regularly to their teachers about their progress – there is some evidence to suggest such parental involvement may not make any difference to a child's academic performance whatsoever.

All parents want their children to do well at school. But if your child is struggling with their school work, there could be one or more different reasons. And it certainly doesn't always have to mean your child isn't bright or academic.

If you feel something is holding your child back at school, perhaps it's one of the following problems listed in this guide.

Did you know?

One in five children leaves primary school with below the national expected levels in all of reading, writing and mathematics levels. (Source: Department for Education).

They're having vision problems

Good vision is essential for children of all ages,

especially in the classroom. So if your child is having eyesight difficulties, they may not be able to see the blackboard or focus on their books or computer. And if the problem isn't picked up, they could easily fall behind with their school work – though most teachers these days are trained to notice when children are having difficulties with their vision.

There are also signs you can look out for at home that can indicate your child has a problem with their sight. For instance:

- They may sit too close to the TV
- They may squint or tilt their head a lot
- They may hold books very close to their face when they're reading
- They may rub their eyes a lot
- They may blink a lot
- They may get frequent headaches or complain of having tired eyes

If you suspect your child is having a problem with their eyesight, take them to an optician to have an eye test (they don't even have to be able to read to have their vision checked).

Your child should have a routine NHS eye test at least every two years from birth – the test is free for all children under the age of 16 and for those under 19 who are in full-time education. Having regular tests could pick up any potential problems early, which could prevent them having problems following lessons at school.

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They may be dyslexic

If your child is having difficulties learning to read and spell, it may be worth finding out if they have dyslexia. According to the charity Dyslexia Action, 10 per cent of the UK population is affected by dyslexia, which means your child has a one in 10 chance of being dyslexic. If dyslexia runs in your family, their chance may be even higher.

Dyslexia affects people at different ages and in different ways, with its effects ranging from mild to severe. There are also many different signs to look out for, including the following:

- Reading slowly
- Struggling to learn sequences, such as the alphabet or days of the week
- Poor handwriting
- Spelling the same word in different ways
- Struggling to learn songs or nursery rhymes
- Answering questions verbally with ease but struggling to write the answers down
- Putting letters and numbers the wrong way round
- Struggling with mental arithmetic such as times tables

Dyslexia can be difficult to diagnose in young children. But if you think your child may be affected, speak to their teacher or their school's special needs co-ordinator. Dyslexia cannot be cured, but if your child is diagnosed they can get the specialist help they need at school.

They're not getting enough sleep

Even something as simple as not getting a good night's sleep on a regular basis could be affecting your child's performance at school more than you might think.

Children who are poor sleepers may have less energy than those who sleep well, and they may find it more difficult to concentrate on their lessons. Studies also suggest children with sleep disturbances are more likely to be hyperactive and have attention difficulties, while some experts claim the difference between getting an A or B grade and a C, D or F grade is just 25 minutes of extra sleep.

There are several things you could do to make sure your child sleeps better. Find out more about how much sleep your child needs, as well as tips that may help them to get more sleep by reading our ['Good sleep guide for children'](http://www.licensedtradecharity.org.uk/educationand-training-support) www.licensedtradecharity.org.uk/educationand-training-support

They're eating too much junk food

Most parents know only too well how much children would love to survive on a diet of crisps, chocolate and chicken nuggets, and it's no secret that many struggle to make sure their little ones eat healthily. But there is another good reason to limit your child's intake of junk food.

According to a study of 14,000 children in Bristol, those who ate lots of unhealthy foods from an

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early age were 10 per cent more likely to fail at school than their classmates. As a result, the experts who wrote the study claimed eating poorly could have a big effect on school performance.

Eating breakfast, for instance, is linked with better behaviour and better grades, with healthy breakfasts such as porridge or boiled egg and soldiers boosting learning more effectively than sugary cereals.

For more information on children's nutrition, read our guide entitled ['How to feed your children healthily'](http://www.licensedtradecharity.org.uk/education-andtraining-support) www.licensedtradecharity.org.uk/education-andtraining-support; .

They're not reading at home

It's common for many children to want to watch TV or play computer games when they come home from school. But there's evidence that those who pick up a book outside of school hours are more likely to do better at school than those who don't read much for pleasure. In fact, reading for pleasure has been found to be more important for a child's education than their family's wealth, level of education or social class.

You may think it's not as easy as it sounds to encourage reluctant readers to open a book after school hours. But it's not impossible.

First, lead by example. If your child can see you reading for pleasure in your spare time, they may start to do the same. Also get into the habit of taking your child to your local library or book shop, and try to notice what type of book gets

their attention. Ask yourself what their interests and hobbies are, and leave books or magazines that feature these interests around your home. If you need inspiration, try using the Book Trust's online book finder.

Another way to get your child more interested in books is to read to them from an early age. One study, carried out by experts from University College London's Institute of Education, claims children who were read to regularly by their parents at the age of five perform better in maths, vocabulary and spelling tests when they are 16 than others whose parents didn't read to them when they were younger.

They're being bullied

Children who are bullied regularly don't just suffer from lack of confidence and self-esteem, they may do worse in school than other children too. One study by the UK-based anti-bullying charity Ditch the Label claims more than half of bullied teenagers said it was having an impact on their education, with those bullied more likely to achieve a grade D or lower at GCSE level.

And these days, bullying doesn't stop at the school gates. Thanks to so many children having access to smartphones, computers, tablets and other digital devices, cyberbullying is having an impact on many of their lives too.

Your child may not want to tell you they're being bullied. But there are some warning signs you could look out for, including your child becoming withdrawn, worrying about going to school, suddenly doing less well at school or complaining of headaches or stomach aches.

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If you suspect your child is being bullied, talk to them and try to reassure them that it's not their fault. You may also want to talk with their teacher, so that the school can help to deal with the problem.

Every school has an anti-bullying policy, so find out what steps your child's school has pledged to take to prevent and deal with bullying (you can usually find details of anti-bullying policies on school websites and in the information you received when your child joined the school).

They're stressed out

For older children especially, the pressure of doing exams can be harmful in more ways than one. Studies show exam stress can leave young people with mental health problems such as low self-esteem, anxiety and depression. But it can also make them more likely to do badly when compared with those who aren't worried about their exam performance. In fact, some experts believe the difference between those who say they never worry about failing and those who feel anxious about not doing well is 1.5 GCSE grades.

Some researchers believe effective stress management can help young people to do better in their exams. Some of the things parents can do to help during exam time include making sure their child or teenager eats healthily and gets enough sleep, and to encourage them to be active when they're revising.

However, according to the support group ChildLine, many children say their parents are the

greatest source of stress during exam time. So instead of adding to the pressure, try to reassure your child or teenager and be positive, and let them know it wouldn't be the end of the world if they didn't do well.

Meanwhile, if you feel your child or teen isn't coping with the stress of exams or just school in general, talk to them about it, and let their teacher know you're concerned.

There's lots more help for parents who are worried about their children being under too much stress at school on the Young Minds website.

Useful links

If you are experiencing any of the issues covered in this guide, in the first instance call our free helpline on 0808 801 0550. Our Advisors will listen without judging and will work with you as best they can to achieve a positive outcome.

If you prefer you can email:

helpline@ltcharity.org; . Visit our website: www.licensedtradecharity.org.uk; It's full of useful information about the kind of issues we know people who work in the licensed trade face.

Other sources of information

Citizens Advice

www.citizensadvice.org.uk For free practical advice on a wide range of issues, including benefits such as Working Tax Credit.

College of Optometrists

www.lookaftryoureyes.org Provides information and advice that can help you look after your – and your family's – eyesight.

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Bullying UK

www.bullying.co.uk Part of Family Lives, a charity set up to support parents and families.

Ditch The Label

www.ditchthelabel.org

Anti-bullying charity based in the UK.