

Keeping Your Son From Underachieving in School

Many parents are eventually faced with a child apathetic about what they see as a critical opportunity, such as their child's education. Often apathy in school masks frustration or confusion around learning, but this aspect of the problem usually goes uncommunicated. When boys don't perform well in school, there could be a number of reasons behind the slipping grades and misdemeanors. These can include emotional upset from problems at home, previously unrecognized learning disabilities, vision or hearing issues, excessive pressure from parents, or peer pressure not to care about school. As a parent, there are a number of ways you can approach your teenage son to help him through whatever is bothering him.

Respect Your Teen's Space

A parent's first reaction may be to start checking their child's homework every night when they see grades slipping. However, sometimes it's best not to get directly involved. Instead, set guidelines that support getting homework and projects done. For example, find out how long it usually takes your son to complete an assignment, and make sure he has that time. Don't interrupt him during that time, but make sure it's done before allowing him to play video games, use the internet for recreation, or call friends. Your teen should be able to exercise choices within a structured schedule that you set.

Be a Coach, Not a Helicopter

Coaches can get a lot out of kids, and there are a few tips parents can learn from them. Coaches set firm boundaries for their players. First, coaches clearly lay out consequences and then follow through on them. If a child is late to practice or doesn't follow directions, they will be benched, required to run extra laps, and so on. If a child doesn't do homework, they should know what the consequences are beforehand and know that you will follow through with them. Second, a coach gives constructive criticism. Their advice is targeted to give players feedback on how they've improved or how they can improve. Instead of constantly saying "good job," they'll say "nice footwork" or "Your stance was better that time. Keep it up."

Above all, a coach guides players rather than takes over for them. Parents should give their children the freedom to make decisions and use their own judgment within the boundaries they set. This will help foster a sense of independence instead of learned helplessness.

Understand "I Don't Care"

Parents will often see an underachieving son retreat behind "I don't care" or "It doesn't matter." For teens, these phrases dismiss everything. The child doesn't have to worry about the future, your expectations of him, pressure to compete with other students, the consequences of "underachievement," or anything else. It immediately dispels the anxiety surrounding any issue. It gives him a sense of control over a situation he may be struggling with. Your child may be deflecting responsibility because he doesn't want more expectations, more pressure, and even more responsibility. The ultimate counter to an [unmotivated learner](#)'s apathy is to teach him how to handle

responsibility and face challenges despite fear or anxiety. Children may feel strongly that they have little power in their lives, and they may rebel in the one way they know they can, by doing nothing. As a parent, you have the ability to create an empathetic and supportive environment that provides your child with reliable structure and allows them independence.