

If you want your child to bring home better grades, stop yelling and try this

October 29 2015, by John Pickering And Jinny Hong



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The end of the year is speeding towards us, and for teachers, kids and parents alike, that means one thing – report card time.

Right now, teachers across Australia are busy marking reports for nearly [4 million school students](#). Each report is filled out according to different [guidelines](#) and [curricula](#), as well as differing degrees of [flexibility](#).

But what about parents? What guidelines, if any, can help prepare you to respond in the right way when you receive your [child's report card](#) – especially if your child isn't doing as well as you might like?

A recent [University of Michigan study](#), published in the [Journal of Family Psychology](#), offers some useful advice.

Researchers asked parents of nearly 500 US children how they would respond if their 11- to 13-year-old child brought home a report card with lower-than-expected grades or progress.

They sorted those responses into two broad categories – "punitive" vs "proactive" – and then investigated whether the parents' responses predicted better or worse [school](#) results five years later.

The study found that children whose parents said they would respond by lecturing, punishing or restricting their child's [social activities](#) actually had lower levels of literacy and maths achievement by the end of [high school](#).

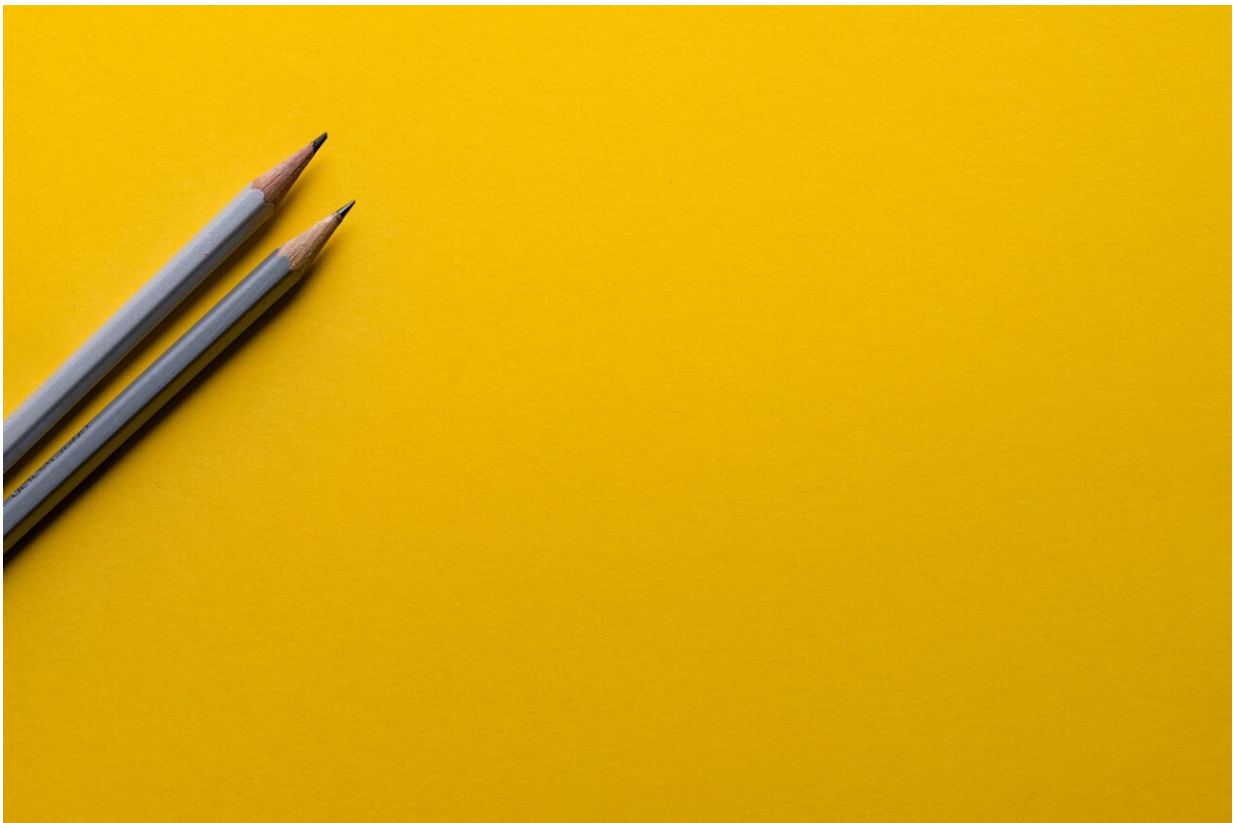
The main reason that "punitive parenting" strategies like those are unlikely to work is that they do not directly address the underlying problems that lead to the poor result.

For example, the researchers argue, limiting social activities is only likely to improve [school performance](#) if going to too many social events is the reason underlying the poor performance.

Perhaps just as importantly, parents who use punitive parenting practices

may inadvertently deny their children the opportunity to learn the very skills and knowledge they require to improve their grades. Even worse, punitive strategies may increase children's sense of frustration and aversion to school work.

If punishment won't work, what are some proven solutions?



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On the positive side, the [University of Michigan study](#) and [others](#) have shown that children growing up in a cognitively stimulating home

environment – characterised by things like access to books, musical instruments, and trips to the museum – are likely to show higher levels of achievement in reading and maths in high school.

Other evidence also points to the value of creating a less punitive and more [nurturing environment](#) with warm, [consistent and responsive parenting](#), though still with limits and boundaries for their children.

Such an environment not only stands to enhance your child's academic achievements, but many aspects of their [biological](#), [social, emotional and behavioural](#) development too.

In addition, the University of Michigan study said teachers should consider providing comments with grades so that parents can understand the reasons behind the child's performance, such as lack of comprehension of the concepts versus not submitting homework on time.

Other research has shown the importance of giving and seeking [specific feedback](#) from an external source, such as a parent or teacher, on what good performance is, how their current performance relates to the ideal standard, and how they can act to close that gap.

Teachers are a great source of information so that parents can understand the reasons behind their child's poor performance, and not make faulty attributions about the underlying cause.

And no matter how bad the report card might be, don't fall into the easy trap of taking out your child's poor performance on the school.

Teachers are not only there to help, but are an important ally in helping improve your child's school performance. Engage in [co-operative and constructive collaboration](#) with your child's school that is built on mutual

respect and understanding.

It is important to note that there are plenty of other factors that can predict academic success: [genes](#), [parents' level of education](#), the [age of parents when a child is born](#), [school infrastructure](#) and [teacher performance](#).

Some of these factors can't be changed, but many can.

The challenge for [parents](#) is to tune in to those things that can be changed and act on them accordingly.

Three tips to remember at report card time

- When unexpected or poor results come in, research shows that reacting with frustration, anger, lecturing or punishment isn't the best way to get better results.
- Consistent and responsive parenting will do more good than a punitive approach.
- Give and seek specific feedback on your child's progress – especially the reasons behind any unexpected results.

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