

Parents, STOP Asking About Grades

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SPEAKERS

Seth Perler

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Parents, we are well intentioned. We want our kids to do well, we want to be happy, we want them to have good grades, because there is this idea that if our kids get good grades, then that means that they're getting a better education. If they're getting a good education, then that means that they're going to have a good future. That's the idea. But is that really the reality? So we're so focused on this parents, in this video, I'm going to break this down for you. This isn't the end-all-be-all video, but I'm going to give you a framework to think through this stuff in a different way than you might be used to thinking it through and in a different way than culture might encourage us to think it through.

S Seth Perler 00:37

My name is Seth Perler. I'm an executive function coach based out of Maui. I help struggling students navigate this thing called education, so that they can have a good life. And these kids, they struggle with grades, but are they really struggling with grades? No, they're struggling with the things that create good grades. So what is that? What does that mean? So I'm going to give you some ideas here and I'm going to get into some of the executive function things last. So basically, what I'm suggesting to you is that the

conversations, we want to change the conversation. We often have these conversations, "How are your grades?" First of all, it starts here, we say things like, "Do you have any homework tonight? What do you have for homework tonight?" "I don't have anything to do." "You don't have anything due? Are you sure you don't have anything to do? Are you positive?" "Yeah, leave me alone. Get off my back, stop bugging me. Stop nagging me, stop lecturing me. I've got this, why don't you trust me," blah blah blah. So our kids have these sort of resistances that they've built in these excuses, these ways to push us away at those times, a lot of kids do. And we're trying to ask because we want to know what's going on so that we can help them. Then we really want to trust them. And we're like, "Okay, fine, I trust you." And then the same cycle happens if you kid started with executive function, you know, the same cycles happen at the end of the semester, you see, everything's falling apart. The grades have taken a nosedive, and there's a lot of zeroes, missings, incompletes, late work and stuff like this.

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Seth Perler 02:07

So then we want to help them the next semester, we say, "If you get straight A's, I'll give you 100 bucks," or so this reward or that reward. "If you get all A's and B's," blah, blah, blah, "For every A you get," blah, blah, blah, "For every F you get, here's this punishment," blah, blah, blah. We have that sort of mindset. I know not all of you do this the same, but I'm just saying that the mindset is, is we want to find what's going to work. So we're thinking essentially, forms of punishments and rewards. And then we also want to use logic and reason and lecturing, and nagging, and bugging, and helping, and supporting, whatever we call it. But we have these ways of trying to use logic with them, thinking that if we can just be logical with our child and tell them how much easier their life would be if they got good grades, and if they just did what they needed to do it. That that logic, you know, "If you just try a little harder," blah, blah, blah. And that stuff misses the point. So what I'm going to challenge you about here in this video is stop asking so much about grades, stop asking so much "Do you have homework?" think about the questions that you're asking. But then, think about what you really want to be asking, and what's really important to you. So I'm going to give you a framework here to help this out. And believe it or not, I'm going to talk about executive function with this stuff, last. So what I want to challenge you to do is change the conversation to stop asking so much about grades, and change the conversation more about asking about the things that get the good grades. Now, first of all, you should know something about me. I don't believe in letter grades. I think they're morally wrong. I think they're archaic. I think they're outdated. I don't think they tell us the information we think they're telling us, but they exist. And our kids are in systems where they exist. So knowing that, let's think about this. What are the things that give them good grades? And are those things valuable? Well, yes, they are valuable because they have a lot to do with the things that people will need to be able to do in

order to accomplish any of their goals in life. So the things that help them get good grades will help them with other goals in life. I will explain momentarily.

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Seth Perler 04:12

Now, first of all, think about yourself. If you were trying to get something done, and you were being asked as an adult, you were being asked to do something, what would help you do that thing? Okay, let's say you were going to be graded on something that needed to happen, what would get you that A? Alright, so first of all, meaning and purpose is the thing that you're being asked to do meaningful. Does it matter to you? Is it purposeful to you? Are you concerned about it? Is it a value of yours? How often do you as an adult, do things that you're told to do that are not aligned with your values? Our kids are in a system where they're told, "Take this class with this teacher and do these things. If you do these things in this class with this teacher, regardless of your relationship with the teacher, your relationship with the content, and your relationship with the task you're being asked to do to prove that you are learning and the thing you're supposed to be learning. Then we will reward you with these things called grades, these letters, these numbers, right? So we need to be asking ourselves, how much meaning and purposes is in it? That's what we ask ourselves. So if we want our kids to be getting good grades, they should be engaged in activities that have meaning and purpose, right? The other thing is the relationship. How is your relationship with the person who's telling you to do it? If your boss is telling you to do it, your spouse, your friend, you know, the government if you get a parking ticket, or a speeding ticket, or this, that or the other? And if you have a teacher, is that a teacher, you're crazy about or a teacher you don't feel cared about you? The relationship is very, very, very important to our ability to do the things that need to be done.

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Seth Perler 05:55

What is your relationship like with your kid when you're trying to help them? Let's let's look at that, okay. You can say things like, a lot of times we're telling our kids advice and what they need to do, but we want to change that conversation more to be something like "How can I be helpful?" Using reflective listening, making it more of a cooperative experience, rather than a top-down experience. That is going to help them do the things that they need to do. Our kids need to, and you would need to, in this type of situation, feel seen and supported and accepted. And a lot of times these kids, especially the ones that struggle with executive function, feel like they can't do anything, right. Nobody sees how much effort they're putting in. So how can we do that? And when they feel more seen and supported and accepted, they can have more buy-in and ownership. How much buy-in do they have to what they're doing? How much ownership do they have and how they're learning and what they're learning? Okay? How about their interests, and their passions,

and their curiosities? How much are those things involved in what they're learning and they're being asked to do to get the good grades? How about their talents? Or their gifts? Or their strengths? Are those being capitalized on in the learning environment and the things that they're supposed to be doing to get good grades? And how about experiences of feeling successful? They're supposed to be doing these things for the class, are they feeling success? Does it feel like the efforts that they're doing are being noticed? That it feels successful. For most of these kids, it feels daunting, feels like they can never do enough. It feels like anything they try, they don't do it right. And it gets harder and harder as they get older, and they get more and more disengaged, and frustrated from this stuff as they get older, a lot of them, a lot of kids that I work with.

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Seth Perler 07:36

So you know, what gives kids that success experiences in a classroom? Well, the right pacing, sometimes the pacing is off. It might be too slow, might be too fast, whatever. What's called differentiation, is the teacher differentiating well for different needs. Are they being rewarded for their growth and their effort rather than points for compliance. Then we want to look at engagement. How engaging are the things that we're being asked to do that get them the grades? Okay.

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Seth Perler 08:14

Now, those are some things that we want to be thinking about. So we're saying, "Do you have homework? Are you doing what you're supposed to be doing? How are your grades? What's going to get you better grades?" Well, those are some things to consider. But then, we also want to consider executive function skills. So rather than saying, "Did you do your homework? How are your grades?" things like that. Say, "How's it going with planning? How are your planning skills?" Do they have the planning skills to be able to plan their time, and prioritize, and focus, and blockout? Like, how's the planning? Really? Do they know how to actually sit down and make a plan for the day. How to use a planner for their weekly and monthly tasks, things like that. How are their organizational skills? So, "How are your organizational skills? How is your organization going with your backpack? In your folders?" It's not just try harder, like these are skills. Planning and organizing are skills. Do they have the skills to organize their locker, their desk, their folders, their backpacks, their stuff? If they're not organizing it, the skills are not really there, even though they may do it sometimes, it's really not a skill that they've really integrated into a good way. How about skills for advocacy? "How's it going, kiddo? How are you doing advocating for yourself asking for help, being honest with the teacher, letting people help you, receiving help? How are these sorts of skills going?"

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"Hey, kiddo, how is your electronic world, like your portals? Do you have the skills of checking your portals regularly and effectively? Do you check your grades in a meaningful way on a regular basis? Do you deal with your inbox on a regular basis?" These are things we didn't have to deal with as kids that they have to deal with. "However, the skills around that? How are your skills for maintaining this?" sit at what I call a Sacred Study Space (SSS), a great study space. "How are your skills for being able to focus and remove distractions? How are your skills for your study habits? How are your skills around self care? Taking care of your sleep nutrition, exercise, fitness movement. Your self care, teeth brushing, things like that? And how about your ability to declutter, and minimize, and have a clean slate, you know, with the stuff that you have with your electronic world, with your backpack, your folders, how is your ability to manage these systems?"

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Seth Perler 10:25

The point I want to leave you with here parents, is that we want to really consider and contemplate the conversations we're having with our kids. We often default to what seems to make sense, which would be "How are your grades? How's your homework? What do you have for homework? Are you sure that's all you have to do?" And we get into these sort of repetitive, automatic, robotic conversations that aren't really helping anybody, they're not really helping anybody. We may be able to apply pressure in the short term to get our kids to do what we think they're supposed to be doing. But is that really giving them the skill sets to be able to navigate school, and life, and do what they need to do? So we want to change the conversation, stop asking about grades so much and ask more during the process of what are the things that need to happen to get them the good grades. And then we don't really even worry about the grades, because they take care of themselves. Once our kids have the skills to do the things that need to be done, the grades take care of themselves. They start improving, things start getting easier and more manageable for our kids. Because we're really focusing on supporting them to develop the skills that enabled them to do that, and those executive function skills, and relational skills, and the other things I mentioned earlier, will help them when they're adults, to be able to achieve their goals, go for their dreams, go for things that are important to them, and be able to really have a more meaningful, purposeful aligned life with who they are.

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Seth Perler 12:04

Anyhow, I hope that's helpful just to consider the questions that you're asking and the conversations that you're asking. Again, this is not the end-all-be-all video, but I just want to plant that seed to get you off this video thinking "Hmm, okay, cool. I like that. How can

I? How can I change the conversation? How can I change the conversation?" So if you're going to take anything away from this video, pull out a sticky note and jot down "How can I change the conversation? And is the conversation really getting me what I want?"

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Seth Perler 12:34

So my name is Seth Perler. I'm an executive function coach based out of Maui. I help struggling students navigate this thing called education so they can have good life. If you like this, share it with somebody. Leave a like, comment. If this helped you, help me support me, and support people who need to hear this message. My site is called SethPerler.com. I have a bunch of freebies there for parents and teachers. If you're interested, go over there. Subscribe, do the stuff. Have a fantastic day. And I really want to wish you some peace of mind and some joy today, and some connection with your your child and your family. Take care.