A Newsletter to Help Parents and Teachers Volume 19 Issue No. I

Bright Kids, Poor Grades: And What You Can Do About It*

My third edition of Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades celebrates

more than 30 years of developing and using the Trifocal Model to reverse Underachievement Syndrome
for capable children who are not
working to their abilities in school.
While this new edition continues
to provide the same principles that
have reversed underachievement
for thousands of children, I've added sections that reflect information that has been gleaned from my clinical experiences, my research and that of others, and the successful experiences of other educators and parents.

"Reversing underachievement is about guiding children toward leading fulfilled lives."

As a psychologist who has worked directly with families and educators, I find that whenever I give a presentation or workshop, at least one—and sometimes more than one—teacher or parent takes me aside to thank me for making a difference for their child or student. For me, this is an awesome experience and it motivates me to continue working with underachievers as well as to disseminate my work.

Reversing underachievement is more than just about achievement. It's really about guiding children toward leading fulfilled lives. My work is for parents who value achievement in their children and for the

teachers who are challenged to motivate all students. Although Underachievement Syndrome continues to be epidemic, with your help and knowledge we can motivate and inspire children to achieve, feel good about themselves, and make contributions to our society that needs their contributions. I hope you will use this information to both prevent and reverse Underachievement Syndrome in your classroom and/ or in your home.

*Adapted from Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades: And What You Can Do About It (Great Potential Press, 2008).

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What is underachievement and what causes

it? There is no gene for underachievement.
Instead, underachieving children seem not to I wonder

have learned the process of achievement—in I invite me fact, they have learned to underachieve.

What is Underachievement Syndrome?

Underachievers are often disorganized,
dawdle, forget homework, lose assignments,
and misplace books. They daydream,
don't listen, look out the window, or
talk too much to other children. They
have poor study skills—or none at -
all. They have innumerable excuses
and defenses. School is boring when
they are young, irrelevant when they are
older. The boredom or irrelevance is constant and tends to be unrelated to the actual assignments. They blame their poor grades, which they say don't matter, on "terrible teachers." They think that drama, sports, music, or, in particular, having a good social life is more important than school work.

Underlying these children's poor study habits, weak skills, disorganization, and defensiveness is a feeling of a lack of personal control over their educational success. Underachievers aren't really certain that they can achieve their goals even if they work harder. They lack self-efficacy.
These children set
their goals either too
high or too low, and as
a result, they guarantee
failure. They want to be
millionaires, professional
football players, inventors
of computer games, rock
stars, Olympic gymnasts,
or presidents, and they have
magical ideas about the
effort necessary to arrive at
these unrealistic goals. They
have not yet discovered what the word work actually means. They can't build firm self-confidence because they haven't learned perseverance or a real sense of effort.

Underachievers often have highly competitive feelings, but they may not be obvious. They aspire to be winners and are poor losers. If they don't believe they can win, they may quit before
if Olivia will they begin, or they may select only to her party. those experiences in which they are certain of victory. They are
competitive, internally pressured
children who have not learned to cope with defeat.

"Underachievers often have highly competitive feelings, but they may not be obvious."

What Do Underachievers Look Like?

Underachievers come in many varieties, and although they are truly individual, they often fit into prototypical categories. In real life, the prototypes are not pure in any one child but are blended. The Inner Circle figure from my book Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades will help you to identify if you have an underachiever in your home or classroom. These children have not learned to work hard or persevere. They have not learned to cope with competition and avoid full school effort by making excuses.

The Inner Circle of Achievers

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How You Can Reverse

Underachievement Syndrome Using the Trifocal Model
At Family Achievement Clinic, we are able to reverse underachievement in roughly four out of five children by using a three-pronged approach. We call it the Trifocal Model because it focuses on the child, the parents, and the school.

Many schools have also used the Trifocal Model with excellent success. It has been utilized effectively in regular school programs, programs at underperforming schools, special education and gifted programs, and for children in kindergarten through Grade 12. It has also been used with college students.

The Trifocal Model includes six steps, of which the first five apply to all underachievers. In step six, which is divided into three types of underachieving children, you will select the ideas that most apply to your underachieving child or student. See the figure below illustrating the Trifocal Model. The full model and strategies are described in Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades.

TRIFOCAL MODEL FOR CURING

UNDERACHIEVEMENT SYNDROME

Assessment

[Communication

Changing Expectations

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Role Model Identification icie7ncie]s F

correction of Def

Modifications at Home and School

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Conforming Dominant

Adapting the Trifocal Model for Disadvantaged Students
While ideally the Trifocal Model should include parent involvement, sometimes parents either refuse to get involved or are experiencing difficult life events that prevent their
becoming involved. Stu-
dents whose parents
cannot participate in
the model for reversing
underachievement are
defined as disadvantaged
for the purpose of
reversing their underachievement.

Students will need an adaptation of the Trifocal Model that a school in Colorado facetiously termed "the bifocal version" of the Trifocal Model. Most steps of the model are similar to the original Trifocal Model, but a "child advocate" substitutes for the parent reinforcement role and meets with the student weekly to monitor progress. Also, instead of the typical homework routine that parents conduct, an after-school study club can be instituted where students complete all their homework under
teacher supervision. These
two modifications make
the model very effective
for disadvantaged
students, despite the
lack of active parent
involvement.

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Strategies for Reversing Under-achievement
Listed below are strategies from my new book, Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades. Parents and teachers can select and implement those that most apply: Easing Perfection
• Independent Homework
• Teaching
Concentration

• Goal-Directed Tutoring
• Multiple Methods for
Giving Instructions
• Teaching a Growth
Mindset
• Building Resilience through Biography
• Teaching Organizational Strategies
• Teaching Other Children
• Reversing Early Childhood Dominance
• Avoiding Confrontations
• Differentiating Curriculum
• Building Task Value
• Teaching Healthy Competition
• Teaching to the Emotional Needs of Students
• Organizational Skills
• Encouraging Activities with Intrinsic InteresStrategies Concento4ghpgTj 1 0t 0 0 1 s0MpIu1ers

Sylvia Says...

Alf Dear Dr. Sylvia.
- ' I have a fifth-grade daughter
who up until recently has been
an A-B student. Lately, she has
been bringing home papers
and tests with scores of D's and F's on them. She forgets to bring material home from school to study and is making careless mistakes. I've asked her if she has a problem with school, and her answer is always "no." She seems to like school
and her teachers and friends. One of
her problems is that she doesn't know
how to prioritize her work to organize

I suggest you ask for an evaluation by the school psychologist or arrange to see a private psychologist. An evaluation can help you determine if your