

Shaping *your child's* Success

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A monthly column to supercharge families for educational success

Parents, guardians and other adult family members play the most important role in supporting and preparing their children to be successful in school. Much of this preparation involves: adults sharing their high expectations for success with their children; talking with and showing children the differences between behaviors that are appropriate in school, versus out of school; and forming positive relationships with school staff.

Talk with your child about your expectations for their success

Tell your children that they are capable of success and they must do the things necessary to create success. One way to start is to dress for success. I run a group for African American males. I have told them, "We're going to look the part of a student and we're going to get positive recognition. If we look good, our attitude is influenced by how we look. As a result, our actions are influenced by our attitude." As a parent/guardian, you need to be active in providing clothes that support the school's dress code and that also demonstrate that their child is a serious student that is focused on academic success in school.

Most importantly, be responsible for making sure your children are up and ready for school. Know the school's start time and don't allow them to miss school.

Another way to make your expectations clear to children is to help them engage in activities that shape them as leaders and will result in positive recognition from schools. These include volunteerism, being a good citizen and doing well academically. Many African American students don't know what it means to volunteer, or to be a part of the community in a way that is measurable. In order for our students to successfully fill out college and scholarship applications, you need to be aware of these

opportunities and guide your children to those activities so that they will build their character as well as qualify for the programs offered by colleges and scholarship organizations.

Be clear about the difference in their behaviors in school and outside of school

Read your child's school handbook regarding behavior and discipline. When you are looking at your child's behavior in the community, there might be a different set of rules from when the child is in school. Teach your children the differences between street and school behavior, if they are taught to defend themselves on the street. Start the conversation with, "In the street, if someone hits you, you hit them

Supporting Children to be school-ready

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back. But, when you are in school, you can't do that, you have to follow the code of conduct. You have to talk out the conflict." Go over the school handbook with your child.

If your child is struggling with discipline in school, develop a common language and set of rules that support your child. Find out what struggles your child may have with following the rules, so that you can create a system to teach your child how to adhere to the rules in difficult circumstances. If your child is suffering in school, and getting into trouble, due to what you might think is mental illness, go to your insurance and inquire about mental

health coverage in order to get your child the services s/he needs.

Form positive relationships with school staff

When parents/guardians build a partnership with schools, this creates a circle of support around the child. What are your goals and dreams for your child? What is the specific mission for your child in school? Help your child see the connection between his/her mission in school and his/her goals in life.

Develop a common language with the school so that you can back what school staff are saying at home. I tell parents, "I have a role to play as a social worker, and you have a role to play as a parent. If we work together, if you stick with me, and I stick with you, this will work." Make sure that you give current phone and address information. If you move after registration, give the new contact information to schools.

Make the effort to be part of a parent group so that you can build community with school staff. If you can't join a parent group, communicate with school staff and tell them what is important to

you for your child's success. At the same time, as part of the partnership, staff can share information they think you need to know, as a parent/guardian.

