

# Wiring your kids for success

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## To deal with potential problems is the best way parents can avoid pitfalls

As the school year starts, many parents are concerned about how their child will do this year. While some parents prefer not to think about a problem until they are faced with it, I have found that having a plan to deal with potential problems is one of the best ways to avoid pitfalls.

HECTOR GABINO MCCLATCHY TRIBUNE



**Anticipating how to deal with a recurring school-related problem can help lower stress for both parents and children.**

Anticipating how to deal with a recurring school-related problem by having a well-thought-out plan can lower your stress and make you feel more proactive in facing the new school year. Giving your child the tools he needs to handle every day challenges will empower him. Waiting until the problem has occurred and then trying to minimize the damage can stress you out and discourage your child, leaving him feeling inadequate and withdrawn.

Take, for example, a simple task like getting your child up in the morning. I know from the parents I see in my practice how stressful and frustrating this can be. Deciding on a reward system can be extremely helpful in motivating your child to get up on time. Also, using a timer, to let him know when the time is up, is helpful and a good visual and auditory aid for your child to gauge his time.

Whether the challenge is getting your child to do his homework, not arguing, playing quietly or being more respectful at home, all these behaviours have a much better chance of succeeding when being tackled with calm and good humour, using effective rewards and consequences. Most parents, having the best of intentions, hope things will improve on their own, and then react when feeling stressed or losing their patience. This often results in an angry scene at home and sending a child off to school feeling hurt and frustrated. This unpleasant scene can be avoided.

Another challenge many parents face is when siblings fight with each other. What most parents don't know is that one of the biggest reasons siblings argue with each other is to get their parent's attention. The problem is they are getting negative attention rather than positive attention. Most children, however, will take negative attention over no attention.

If you take the time to notice and praise your child when they are playing well together, you will be encouraging more positive behaviours. Most parents, however, are so happy to see their children being quiet that they are afraid that if they say anything, the peace will end.

From a child's point of view, however, if you give them attention only when they are misbehaving, then you are unknowingly reinforcing the negative behaviour and extinguishing the positive. If their goal is attention, they will take it anyway they can get it.

Another valued activity for most children is having some one-on-one time with each of their parents. Everyone is busy and time is precious and in short supply. If you invest in a timer, and tell your child that he can earn 10 minutes of time alone with you, watch his face light up. The 10 minutes you give him for his good behaviour will save you much more time than you would have spent by punishing bad behaviour, giving him a time out and dealing with his reactions and your frustrations. I have a feeling that most parents can easily relate to this situation.

I have been working with parents and their children for more than 20 years, and have consistently found that positive reinforcement and logical consequences are much more effective for improving behaviour than punishment and threats. They also make life much more pleasant for everyone involved. Try it and let me know if it is working.

Wiring your children for success may take time and effort initially, but it will save you hours and days of frustration and stress. It will raise your child's self-esteem, help you feel like a more competent parent, and will instill much more harmony in the home.

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