

Why Do Some Children Fall Behind At School?

Children often seem to [lose interest](#) in school. They may find the work boring or too hard, or they might have more serious problems, such as bullying. Thankfully, the reason is usually something less dramatic and the situation only temporary.

Children are not yet grown up and they have shorter attention spans than us adults. Hopefully, the situation will only be temporary but, if it continues, their grades might drop and their education suffer. So, what can parents do to rekindle their child's interest before they start falling behind? This guide has advice and useful tips which should help.

Why Do Children Fall Behind At School?

Each child is different and there may be a variety of reasons why their schoolwork suffers. Here are a few of the most common causes to look out for:

- Lack of sleep – It's well known that not enough sleep is bad for us all, and especially for children. One study found that just one hour of sleep deprivation every night can lower youngsters' IQs. Make sure that your child has sufficient sleep (11 hours for a 5-year-old and 9 for a teenager is a rough guide)
- Poor diet – We are what we eat! Children need the right nutrients for growth and brain development. Make sure that your child has a balanced diet and don't forget exercise – you may be surprised but physical activity increases blood-flow to the brain and helps to keep it functioning well
- Boredom – This can be a problem for children who are not being challenged enough by the work they are given in class
- Work too difficult – Just as some children are set work which they find too easy, others are given tasks beyond their current level
- Learning difficulties – A good proportion of children have undiagnosed learning difficulties, like autism, ADHD or dyslexia
- Other issues – There may be problems at school (such as bullying or social exclusion), ones at home (bereavement or divorce) or mental issues (like depression or anxiety)
- Laziness – This is perhaps the most common reason why children fall behind but, thankfully, it's also the easiest to tackle

Should I Talk to my Child's Teacher?

Teachers want to get the best from the children they teach so they'll notice if your child is falling behind. They should notify you either at parents' evening or via a report. However, if you notice your child is struggling before they do, then you should arrange an appointment to speak to your child's teacher (in primary school) or subject teacher (in secondary).

An information fact sheet from [Education Quizzes](http://www.educationquizzes.com) at www.educationquizzes.com

When you do speak to the teacher, ask them about the areas in which your child is falling behind. They should be able to identify the reasons and come up with a plan to tackle them. For example, they may be able to provide extra help or offer suggestions you can implement at home. If it's suspected that your child may have some learning difficulties then they will be able to guide you towards the necessary help or refer you to the schools SENCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinator).

If you have arranged a meeting because of worries you have, then tell the teacher about your concerns. Explain what you've seen at home that has worried you and ask how your child is behaving and performing at school. Teachers are very observant and will be able to shed light on the matter. They can usually tell you if your child is hanging around with the wrong crowd, finds the work too hard, or is simply bored or tired.

It's a good idea to keep the lines of communication wide open – the better your relationship with your child's teacher, the better it is for their education.

Should I Talk to my Child?

Once you've noticed your child is falling behind, you'll need to talk to them about it. Communication with children can be difficult and questions are often replied to with answers like 'Dunno' or 'Nothing'. Pick your moments carefully – bath time and bedtime are good opportunities with young children and car journeys work well with older ones. Whatever age they are, avoid questioning them as soon as they get home from school – we all need time to wind down after a hard day at work!

You should also choose your questions wisely too. You could start by asking them about their day. If they are not forthcoming then try more specific questions like, 'What was the best part of your day?' or 'What was the worst?' You can learn a lot from their answers, even if they aren't that detailed. Replies like 'Boring', 'Nothing' or 'OK' may betray that your child is unhappy.

Once you've opened the conversation you can then move on to the main issue. It's important that you remain calm, even if you don't feel it! Children can have intense emotions and get very defensive. Keep the conversation on the matter in hand and stick to facts rather than feelings.

If you've already spoken to their teacher, then you can discuss any decisions that were made and what action is to be taken. If not, then you'll need to broach the subject of their poor performance. Try saying something like 'I've noticed that you aren't doing well at school and I wonder if you can explain what is going on.' If there is an underlying cause then hopefully your child will open up to you.

To solve the issue, ask for your child's input. Ask them what they can do to improve matters. You might be surprised by their response. Listen to any ideas they have but be prepared by having a plan of your own, such as fewer late nights, or no TV until their homework has been done.

How Can I Help My Child At Home?

The best way to help your child at home is to start early, before they start to fall behind. A study by the charity Save the Children found that 84% of children who were not at the expected standard by the age of 7 would be behind for the rest of their academic careers.

Literacy is the most important skill for children to master. Without it they'll struggle in every school subject. Encourage your child to read every day, even if it's only for 10 minutes – every little helps! Reading to them from an early age improves their vocabulary and may well inspire a love of literature. You can carry on reading to them even after they can read for themselves. Books written for adults might be hard for children to read and so put them of reading altogether. If you read to your child, even up to the age of 10, you can do wonders for their vocabulary and their education.

Of course, once you've noticed your child has fallen behind, then you need to take action. Perhaps you've been a bit too easy-going when it comes to homework. If so, then it's time to make changes. If they've been doing their homework in their bedroom, then instead, set up a 'study area' for them where they can do their homework undisturbed and without any distractions. Set aside a part of the day in which to do homework - and stick to it!

If you can ensure that your child completes all the homework that they're set – and does it on time – then you'll probably see matters improve. Sometimes all it takes is a little more effort.

Should I Reward My Child For Their Schoolwork?

Ideally, doing well at school will be enough of a reward in itself but, for some children, a little extra motivation is needed. One option is the 'carrot and stick'. Different people have different views on this but I recommend moderation. Punishments need not be too harsh, for example you might say 'No TV until you've done your homework'. There's no need for severe punishments – like not being allowed to see their friends – save these for more serious offences. Likewise, rewards should not be excessive, but they can help to improve behaviour. If your child is getting into trouble at school then something like 'If you get no detentions this term then you can have a new game for your console' might help. Or, if they have fallen behind through lack of effort then how about 'If your grades improve by the end of the year then you can go to the pop concert'.

Be careful when rewarding or punishing your child for their schoolwork. Some children are just brighter than others. Setting an unachievable target is just setting your child up for a disappointment. It's much better to reward effort rather than achievement.

Will After-School Activities Help?

As with rewards, moderation is key with after school activities – too many and their schoolwork will suffer but one or two they enjoy can improve their behaviour and their academic results. Extra-curricular activities teach children that hard work brings results, whether it's practising football or learning ballet. There are plenty of clubs to join, from karate to scouts or guides.

Learning to play a musical instrument is particularly beneficial. Studies have shown that it can improve literacy, maths, language, memory, special awareness and even IQ. However, if your child does not enjoy it, don't force them. It's important that they continue for a short while at least – otherwise they learn that giving up at the first hurdle is acceptable. Whatever activity they try, make sure that they keep it up for a few weeks. After that, if they still don't like it, try something different.

Should I Hire A Private Tutor?

One option if your child is falling behind at school is extra tuition. Private tutors offer one-to-one teaching which is often just what is needed – school teachers have 30 or so children to attend to so individuals can miss out. However, private tutors are not cheap. Their prices average at about £20 - £30 per hour.

A cheaper alternative is an online education site. They cost around £10 per month and can help a lot.