

# 4 Ways to Measure Kids' Success That Have Nothing to Do With Grades

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Like most parents, you probably dream of academic and financial success for your children. You also want your kids to become noble, honorable citizens who make substantial contributions to the world. So, how do you know that you're on the right path guiding your children to success?

**Put another way — what is the best way to measure your success as a parent?**

If you're like most parents, you probably use the same metric to measure your success (and your child's) as the rest of society ... your child's grades!

And the pressure on you to make sure your kids "measures up" is intense. Which, of course, results in you often placing a great deal of pressure on them. Report card time is fraught with tension, often ending in the usual "numbers fight," even when their grades are pretty good:

- "Oh no! Your GPA is down to 3.2! You're not applying yourself enough."

- “Wow, 3 As and 2 Bs. Great job. (pause) So ... how do we get those Bs up?”
- “You have so many Cs. You’ll never get into a good college now!”

That pressure intensifies each time family, friends, co-workers, etc. ask you “How’s the family? How are the kids doing in school?” *Translation:* “Do your kids measure up? How are *you* doing as a parent?”

Believe me, I understand how this feels. This subtle language of numbers and calculations to measure our children’s success hit me hard last spring, as my oldest daughter wound down her junior year of high school. Suddenly, people from all walks of life felt compelled (and entitled) to casually ask my child, “So, what’s your GPA?” Or, “What were your SAT scores?”

I wondered what would happen if I’d turned to all of those well-meaning adults and responded, “Well, I’ll tell you her scores as soon as you tell me your salary ... Oh, and how much you weigh ... How much is in your 401K ... and what about your FICO score?”

**If it’s rude to ask an adult about the metrics that allow us to judge them (salary, weight, age, credit score, etc.) ... why is it not rude to do the same to our children?**

Questions about other people’s salaries and evaluations are taboo enough in the adult world that asking can result in termination in the workplace. I think such questions about our kids’ grades and test scores should be terminated at soccer games, music recitals, and Thanksgiving dinner as well.

As an integrative psychotherapist, each day I witness the impact of people feeling that they do not “measure up.” I know how the underlying social messages of judgment, shame, and resentment directly contribute to anxiety, depression, and stress-related chronic illness in the individuals being assessed. People, including children, suffer a great deal from physical, emotional, and spiritual illness when others impose on them an external, arbitrary measure of their value.

**So what can modern, well-meaning parent do to help our kids be successful without measuring that success with false benchmarks (like grades)?**

### **1. Encourage effort**

Educator and blogger [Chris Crouch](#) describes grades as, “inflated, poor communicators of success,” that directly contribute to the loss of intrinsic motivation that we’re currently witnessing in our school systems. Success researcher [Carol Dweck](#) encourages parents to praise their children for effort, rather than high grades.

When your child receives a grade that is lower than their expectation, explore their learning process. Ask questions about how they learned. Applaud their desire to keep trying.

Remember to keep your eyes on the aspects of our children’s success that cannot be quantified, such as: work ethic, perseverance, creative vision, connection, and personal insight.

## 2. Replace grief with gratitude

Rather than lamenting over your 75 percent student with a 1190 SAT score, focus on the unique qualities that make your child special.

Is she a gifted artist? Does he have a knack for a particular sport? Is he a natural mediator? Does she impart wisdom to her peers? Guide them to pursue goals that reflect their dreams and innate skills, rather than their grades.

## 3. Remove the limits on your love

I have several clients who boast of withholding affection from their children as a result of their low grades. This form of punishment simply does not provide children with the intrinsic motivation that they need to do their best. *I only love you when you measure up* is a toxic message to send a child.

While the rest of the world is caught up in the numbers game, you can change the rules by freely giving 100 percent of your love.

## 4. Forgive yourself

Numerous studies indicate a correlation between shame and immune functioning. Don't make yourself sick over the fact that you did not give birth to the class valedictorian.

If you find that you cannot move past the sense of shame and guilt that you feel over these success measures, then seek help. To your surprise, you'll discover that the shame over your child's "failure" is actually rooted in a deeper wound that *you* experienced long before you became a parent.

One of the most challenging lessons I teach my clients is that imperfect parents are the reality (and so are imperfect kids).

None of us were perfectly parented, and none of us are perfect parents. Yet, we can still find success in life when we release ourselves from the burden of measuring up to "numbers" and allow our children to "score" our attention and support. —*Dr. Sabrina N'Diaye*

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