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New Brunswick
CANADA

One bad report card is not the end of the world

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Early last year 15-year-old Trenton O'Neal stood at a busy intersection in Chesapeake, Va., for hours on a Saturday, a huge poster board of his bad grades dangling around his neck.

 [ENLARGE PHOTO](#)



Courtesy Hampton Roads

Trenton O'Neal stands on a busy intersection in Chesapeake, Va., with a poster board of his bad grades dangling around his neck.

His parents said they wanted Trenton to realize there is no excuse for lousy grades.

"It sucks," said Trenton, who apparently got the message. "I don't want to be out here again. I know that much."

While this may be somewhat extreme - and the act of "shaming" has its own set of traumatic issues - parents across the country at this time of year wonder how to help their kids get better grades next year.

Oxford Learning offers some fail-safe tips on goal setting that the tutoring organization says will make sticking to academic resolutions foolproof. Its called RAM which stands for Realistic Achievable Measurable.

So, Oxford tutors claim, if your child's goal for this year is to get better grades in say, math, then following the RAM guideline may help.

Realistic. If your child is currently getting marks in the 60s, don't set a goal of getting 90 on the next test. A more reasonable goal is to improve by five points, and five points more on the test after that. Resolve to make incremental improvements.

Achievable. By setting a reasonable goal of improving five points per test, there is a greater likelihood of achieving the results. A reasonable goal is an achievable goal.

Measurable. By setting a goal that is incremental, such as improving five points per test, improvement and results can be measured. This way, you have a clear demarcation line of where your child was, and where he is now. For example, In January, she was getting marks in the 60s. By April she was getting 75 or better. She improved 15 points in four months.

The RAM method for setting goals makes for resolutions worth sticking to say the Oxford tutors. And kids won't get discouraged and abandon their resolutions, because they can track their progress, no matter how minor the achievement is.

It's also important to work together between report cards. We asked our daughter's school to put her on a biweekly report, which they email to us. This way we see what is due (or overdue) and how she is faring overall so we can, hopefully, help her nip any problems in the bud.

When you are looking at report cards Oxford also offers these suggestions

2. Sit down and review together. Make sure that there are no distractions so you can focus on each other and the conversation.
3. Don't get upset. If you're upset or angry about grades, hold the discussion until you can speak calmly and rationally.
4. Start with empathetic and positive comments. Highlight something positive about the report card, no matter what. For instance, "we are pleased with your community service commitment"
5. Listen to your child. Recognize your child's struggles. School can be tough. It is helpful for students to know that someone is listening to their concerns and complaints.
6. End with a plan. Be optimistic and identify any next steps before you leave the table.

The website 4TroubledTeens.com suggests talking about the most obvious changes first, and giving

your teenager plenty of time to explain his side of the story.

Remind him that he needs to take responsibility for his own actions; if he places the blame on a teacher or administrator, steer him toward responsibility by asking him what he could have done to improve the situation.

Work on developing a solution together that can make school a more positive experience. Talk about setting time aside to do homework, asking teachers about extra-credit assignments and scheduling your teen's day properly so she can fit all those extracurricular activities in while still succeeding in school.

Most importantly keep it in context.

Remember, this report card is but a single snapshot of a child's progress up to this point, not the complete picture of a child's ultimate potential by any means.

Kate Wheeler is a Toronto journalist, former CTV national anchor and mother of two teenage daughters. Her column runs every other Saturday. Teens or parents with questions can email Kate at generationnextquestions@gmail.com.

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