

5 Sneaky Ways to Raise Smart Kids

There's only so much a child can learn in the classroom. Success starts at home, with you and a few simple strategies.



NO, EMPLOYERS DON'T CHECK YOUR OLD REPORT CARDS. BUT GRADES DO MATTER. ACCORDING TO the authors of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation book *Crossing the Finish Line*, academic success is largely a reflection of character strength. "Traits like grit and curiosity translate to better grades," says coauthor Matthew M. Chingos, Ph.D. To wit: When the school district of Downey, California, put character development on its curriculum, scores on standardized tests rose more than 5 percent. "We've come to understand that character is a central ingredient for success in school," says James J. Heckman, Ph.D., an economics of human development researcher at the University of Chicago. So the more you challenge kids at home, the better they can do on test day. Are you ready to give your child an edge?

Offer Them \$20 to Learn to Juggle

KEY TRAIT
Commitment

The payoff takes some time. "Kids can't master juggling right away, but it's not so difficult that they can't stick with it," says Anthony T. DeBenedet, M.D., coauthor of *The Art of Roughhousing*.

ACADEMIC EDGE
Scientists at the University of Oxford noted a 5 percent boost in white matter—brain tissue involved in learning—in novice jugglers who had been practicing for six weeks.

Praise the Work, Not the Winning

KEY TRAIT
Self-Confidence

Acknowledging the struggle gives it value, says Tough. This can nurture a work ethic.

ACADEMIC EDGE
Say something when you see your child studying, says Carol Dweck, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at Stanford University. Later, when the kid brings home a stellar report card, make sure he or she notices the connection: "I guess all that studying paid off, huh?"

Tell Them to Go Climb a Tree

KEY TRAIT
Emotional Control

This kind of challenge calls for steady nerves. "Kids can't climb if their emotions are all over the place," says Dr. DeBenedet.

ACADEMIC EDGE
Climbing trees encourages children to confront their fears. Plus, playing outdoors helps foster creative thinking and problem-solving skills, say researchers at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

"CHARACTER IS A CENTRAL INGREDIENT FOR SUCCESS IN SCHOOL."

Teach Them to Play Chess

KEY TRAIT
Perseverance

You lose a lot of times before taking your first king. "Chess teaches kids that a loss is something to learn from," says Paul Tough, author of *How Children Succeed*.

ACADEMIC EDGE
Playing chess may increase a child's attention span even more than physical activity does, a recent Spanish study found. The chess-playing students also reported better attitudes toward learning.

Make Them Earn an Honest Paycheck

KEY TRAIT
Patience

Your child must learn that toys and treats don't come free, says Tough. So your boy is asking for an iPad? Have him rake leaves or stain the deck to save half the money.

ACADEMIC EDGE
A series of landmark studies that began at Stanford found that kids who could delay gratification scored higher on SATs years later. Those kids also showed higher measures of willpower as adults.

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