

THE POWER OF EXPECTATIONS



As exam season draws closer, how much impact will teacher or parent expectations have on a student's performance?

In the 1960's, a pair of researchers ran a curious experiment that forever changed what we know about the power of expectations. They told a group of teachers that some of their students had been identified as having the potential to become very high achievers and that these students would bloom over the course of the year. These students, were in fact, chosen completely at random. When the researchers returned at the end of the year, they found that these random students had, on average, made significantly more progress than their peers.

The impact of having high expectations came to be known as [The Pygmalion Effect](#). In Greek mythology, Pygmalion was a renowned sculptor. One day, Pygmalion carved a beautiful statue out of ivory. Upon seeing his work, he fell completely in love with it. He loved his statue so much that it turned into a real life being. The Pygmalion Effect, therefore, is the phenomenon of people raising their achievement and living up to someone else's high standards and expectations.

The opposite of The Pygmalion Effect is known as [The Golem Effect](#), named after a mythical violent monster. This effect describes how having low expectations of someone can lead to

them performing worse. [A study](#) on The Golem Effect in an education setting found that, having lower expectations had two consequences; the teachers reacted more negatively to the students and the students in turn performed worse.

We now know even more about the power of expectations since that seminal study fifty years ago. Here are five ways to maximise the power of expectations...

DISTINGUISH BETWEEN ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

There is a subtle, but important distinction between aspirations and expectations. Aspirations are about wanting to be better, whereas expectations convey the belief about the likelihood of succeeding. Raising expectations have been proven to help, the same [can't be said for aspirations](#).

The [Education Endowment Foundation review](#) on aspirations found that 'interventions which aim to raise aspirations have little to no positive impact on educational attainment'. One of the reasons for this is many students already have high aspirations. The disconnect occurs in the gap between having these ambitions and the habits required to reach these lofty goals.

[A recent study found](#) that students who have high aspirations but low expectations are twice as likely to get less than 5 GCES at A*-C than their peers who have both high aspirations and high expectations. Sam Baars, Director of Research from LKMco says that 'low expectations are far more widespread than low aspirations. Teachers should arguably focus on whether their pupils believe they will do well, rather than on whether they want to do well.'

EARLY IS BETTER THAN LATER

[Research suggests](#) that the effect of expectations is most pronounced at the start of the school year or at the beginning of new tasks/topics. This is because students start with less preconceived notions of how they will fare and look for guidance on what is realistically possible for them to achieve. If students

hear a positive external voice full of belief and conviction that they can succeed before their own self-doubt creeps in, this can be a big advantage.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BRINGING PARENTS ON BOARD

[Psychologists have calculated](#) that on their own, high teacher expectations will only help a minority of students. Parents clearly play a key role in shaping how students see themselves. [A recent review](#) on how parents can help their child succeed at school found that the biggest impact is achieved by having high expectations. By valuing education and expecting their child to succeed, conveys the message of both the importance and likelihood of success in school.

No one rises to low expectations - but don't get too ambitious either.

As well as having high expectations for their children, other parental strategies have been found to help. These include having regular communication, helping form positive reading habits and having clear rules regarding homework and social time.

MORE ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER

A word of caution is needed when it comes to expectations. More is not always better. As with most things in psychology, once you scratch below the surface you realise it is far more nuanced and messy than it first appeared.

[Evidence suggests](#) that when expectations are unrealistic, that is if they far exceed their child's ability, this can lead to a downturn in academic performance. Furthermore, these excessive expectations can be a source of stress and anxiety for students. When it comes to expectations, it seems that the goldilocks rule applies – too little or too much and it is no good. Challenging but realistic seems to be a good guiding principle here.

ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO HAVE HIGH SELF-EXPECTATIONS

Research suggests that how students think about themselves will have a big impact on how they behave. [One fascinating study](#) had some participants spend 5 minutes thinking about the attributes of a college professor, before answering questions from the game Trivial Pursuit. The results? These students answered more correct answers than those who had not been primed to think like a professor. Clearly, how you see yourself and what you expect to achieve, can have an impact on how you think and how much effort you put in.

For students who do not see themselves in a very positive light, it can be very helpful to create a [growth mindset culture](#). This is the belief that students can improve by working hard and learning from their mistakes. This can be fostered by having students reflect on their processes, focus less on their natural ability and [developing their self-talk](#).

FINAL THOUGHT

It is difficult to flourish when no-one believes in you. No-one ever rises to low expectations or fulfils demands that far outweigh their abilities. If expectations are pitched at the right level (both challenging and realistic), students can raise their performance and academic achievement. If the high expectations that staff have are aligned to those of the parents and the students themselves, are accurate and done at the beginning of a new topic, this creates a far higher chance of making a meaningful impact.

BLOG 2

HOW (NOT) TO PRAISE YOUR CHILD



Did you know that what you praise your child for and how you do it can have huge implications for how they think, feel and behave in the future?

Think of it as a double-edged sword: wielded correctly and it can boost your child's resilience, attitude and motivation to learn - used recklessly, it can lead to narcissism, anxiety and a limiting mindset. So, here is what the latest psychological research says on the do's and don'ts of praising your children:

THREE WAYS NOT TO USE PRAISE

Praise can have an unintended negative impact on children when it falls into one of three categories: if it is excessive, focuses on their natural ability or is used in comparison to others.

If Praise Is Excessive

Praise is best thought of like penicillin. It should not be administered haphazardly, and excessive doses can make children immune to it. For example, [one study found](#) that too much praise often comes across as patronising, and results in children performing only the most basic behaviours asked of them, since they think they will be rewarded for it.

If praise focuses on natural ability

When children do well in an exam or on a piece of work, [evidence suggests](#) that the most common praise they hear is that they are 'a smart boy' or 'such a clever girl'. This type of praise often leads to children [developing a fixed mindset](#), which is where they believe their gifts and talents alone are what makes them successful, not what they do with them. Evidence suggests that this can lead to excessive stress, shaky self-confidence and ultimately with them disengaging from the task at hand.

If praise is used comparatively

[Recent research](#) has shown that parents praising their child [by comparing them to others](#) (e.g. "You were so much better than X") can lead to negative outcomes. When children are constantly given lavish praise and are seen by their parents as being more entitled than others, they often come to believe that they are in fact superior. This subsequently leads to increased levels of narcissism. Constantly measuring oneself against others is a poor long strategy, as it relies on other people being present to stay motivated.

HOW TO USE PRAISE PROPERLY: THE 3 S'S OF PURPOSEFUL PRAISE

[Recent research has shown](#) that the type of praise that parents give their children at a young age can have a long-lasting effect on their mindset and motivation. The researchers found that process praise, which focuses on a child's effort (for example: "good job trying to put that back"), is a much superior form of praise compared to person praise, which highlights positive, fixed attributes (e.g. "You're such a smart girl"). This is because process praise allows a child to develop a positive, motivational framework, where they believe they can improve if they put in the necessary effort, which in turn leads to enhanced achievement over time.

The best way to think about praise is to focus on the behaviours you want to see next time in your children. We call

Praise is one of your most powerful weapons as a parent. Wield it wisely.

this 'purposeful praise'. Everything else is just hot air. To make your praise purposeful, make sure it falls into one of these 3 S's:

Selectively

What are the values and behaviours you value the most in your house? If you believe [effort, resilience and determination](#) are important, then be sure to voice this to your children through praise when they demonstrate it.

Sparingly

Too much of anything is bad for someone. Sometimes, less is more. By consciously choosing when to praise your child, it will resonate for longer.

Specifically

A scatter gun approach rarely works, so target the moments that they will remember most. [Evidence suggests](#) that this may be when they experience a setback or disappointment. Praising what they did well ensures they will maintain motivation for next time.

FINAL THOUGHT

Praise can be one of the most effective tools at a parent's disposal. Sometimes, in the rush to build up our children's self-esteem, it can end up being used clumsily, chaotically and carelessly. Praise is how we communicate to our children what we think matters and what's important.

When viewed in this light, it makes much more sense to praise the processes, behaviours and attitudes that you think lead to both better learning and development.

WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SLEEP



Students shouldn't underestimate the importance of regularly getting a good night's sleep. Decades' worth of research has associated sleep with better grades, attention, memory, mood, health and well-being. Yet despite this, many [students aren't getting enough sleep](#) and nowhere near the recommended amount of 8 to 10 hours each night. This is a common challenge for educators who see their students' daily life and achievements impacted, but who have little control over this.

We know that students often believe [certain myths about sleep](#) and have a hard time regulating themselves. Therefore, the people who are most likely to have an impact on students' sleeping habits are their parents.

But do parents have an accurate estimation of how much sleep their child is actually getting? And, most importantly, do they know what they can do to help? We have read the research and decided on the most important information we think you need to know.

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

A study of 203 teenagers at a school in Australia [found irregularities](#) between parents' estimates of their child's sleeping

patterns and the child's realistic sleeping patterns. On a school night, parents believed that their child went to bed around 15-20 minutes earlier than they really did and slept for almost 9 hours a night when, in reality, students were getting closer to 8 hours of sleep. However, parents were pretty accurate at knowing what time their child woke up in the morning.

On the weekend, parents thought their child was going to bed between 20-30 minutes earlier than they actually were and getting 10 hours of sleep a night, when they were really getting up to 90 minutes less than that. Parents also thought their child was waking up later than they actually were – with some estimates being almost an hour off.

This research study indicates that parents have an inaccurate depiction of their child's sleeping habits and often report an idealised version. Not only does this demonstrate the importance of using adolescent-derived estimates of sleep when carrying out research in this area, but it also shows a gap in sleep education in parents. To help students develop better sleeping habits, it is important for parents to be more aware of the realistic sleeping patterns in teenagers and for them to develop a more accurate picture of their child's sleep.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF SLEEP?

Numerous researchers have explored the positive power of sleep. From enhanced concentration to a better immune system, the benefits of sleep seem wide ranging. [Research shows](#) a difference of around half a grade between students who slept well and those who didn't. This is possibly because those students who get better sleep may be more attentive in class the following day, leading to more effective learning.

[Evidence also suggests](#) that new connections are formed between our brain cells when we sleep. Regularly getting a good night's sleep can aid and improve memory and recall – an undeniable reason for success in exams.

But it's more important than just good academic performance: many researchers believe that one of the main functions of sleep is

to maintain our immune system and regulate the hormones necessary to our health. Getting the recommended hours of sleep a night can help the body [defend against illness](#). Those who don't get enough sleep are more likely to get sick after being exposed to a virus and can experience a much slower recovery than those who sleep well.

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD SLEEP BETTER

If you're a parent, it is unfortunately very likely that your child is not getting enough sleep. Experts recommend 8-10 hours of sleep a night for students on average. However, [a recent survey](#) found that most are getting less than 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ hours of sleep each night. When we ask students at the schools we visit to run [our workshops](#), they often say that they are getting less than 6. Not getting enough sleep will catch up to students and lead them to [feeling grumpy](#), struggling to focus and not working to their fullest potential.

You are in the best position to help your child develop a great sleep schedule.

So, implement a structured bedtime routine into your child's daily life. This will help them get enough sleep and therefore reap all of the benefits mentioned above. A good bedtime routine should involve the following:

- ***Start the routine a few hours before bedtime*** – winding down for the evening earlier will help children relax and have a smoother transition to sleep.
- ***Encourage them to exercise during the day*** – this will tire them out as well as keeping them healthy.
- ***Ask them to turn off their phones*** – maybe have a box where you keep all the phones (including your own!) charging in a separate room overnight. This will avoid distractions and excessive amount of blue light, which will keep their sleep hormones at the right levels.
- ***Avoid any caffeinated drinks*** – these can increase alertness and throw the sleep cycle off balance.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Sleep is one of the most important parts of our day. Whilst many may see it purely as a time to recharge, its benefits for both our physical and mental health are endless. Children follow lives that are filled with distractions from the moment they wake up to the moment their head hits the pillow at night. Try some of our tips to develop a bedtime routine that will help your children to become successful sleepers.

DO PARENTS TREAT THEIR SONS AND DAUGHTERS DIFFERENTLY?



It is interesting to consider how parents treat and think about their children differently; are there subtle yet important variations in how people parent their sons compared to their daughters? Even if they are unaware that they are doing so, are there some thinking biases to how parents respond and react to their child based on their gender?

We explored the existing research to find out: do parents treat their sons and daughters differently? For more on this subject, check out our blog "[Do We Teach Boys and Girls Differently?](#)"

UNDERESTIMATING GIRLS; OVERESTIMATING BOYS

Recent research reveals that mothers of infants show a gender bias in favour of their sons. [In one particular study](#), mothers were questioned on their young babies' crawling ability before it was objectively measured. Mothers of daughters believed their baby could crawl up slopes of 14 degrees, whereas mothers of sons believed their baby could crawl up slopes of 20 degrees. It seems that from a young age, parents have lower expectations of their daughters than their sons.

TYPE OF PRAISE

[Research has shown that](#), although overall boys and girls receive the same amount of praise from their parents, the type of praise they receive differs. [Process praise](#) (defined as praise for a child's efforts and strategies) accounts for 24.4% of the praise boys receive, whereas for girls it only accounts for 10.3%. Being given more process praise from a young age (14-38 months) puts boys at an advantage, as it makes them significantly more likely to have [developed a growth mindset](#) by age 7-8.

Therefore, girls are more likely to lack [a growth mindset](#) regarding intelligence, and hence attribute their failure to inability, causing a decrease in [persistence and motivation](#), which has the potential to cause a decline in academic performance. This attribution was particularly pronounced for stereotypically male domains, such as maths and science.

EDUCATIONAL ABILITIES

[Parents have differing beliefs](#) about the maths abilities of their sons and daughters, despite actual performance being similar. Parents believe that, [to succeed in maths](#), daughters must try harder than sons and consider advanced maths to be more important for sons, to enhance their 'natural' talent.

Furthermore, the stereotypical beliefs held by parents influence their child's beliefs about their own abilities more so than their past achievements. This suggests that parental stereotypes may be limiting their daughter's scope for academic achievement, an effect that may have long-term implications in terms of [aspirations and career choices](#).

This difference in treatment isn't conscious - know how to recognise it.

INTEREST IN SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENTS

Evidence suggests that parents are [more likely to be involved](#)

[with the school](#), such as attending school meetings and contact teachers, when they have a son. The same research also more worryingly showed that parents are likely to have saved more money to further their son's education. Not having the same financial support from their parents may stop daughters from maximising their full academic potential.

TIME INVESTED

It appears that [fathers are prepared to invest more time in a son than a daughter](#), an effect which is thought to occur because fathers and sons have common ground and can share masculine activities. However, this effect is unfortunately not counterbalanced by mothers spending more time with their daughters (instead, mothers share their time more equally). Other [research has shown](#) that parents are more likely to engage with their son's play rather than their daughter's. Together, these findings suggest that parents interact more with sons than daughters, which has an impact on their social skills in later life.

FINAL THOUGHT

Whilst parents may not intend to treat sons and daughters differently, research shows that they do. Sons appear to get preferential treatment in that they receive more helpful praise, more time is invested in them, and their abilities are often thought of in higher regard. Schools can play a key role in helping to educate parents on their sub-conscious thinking biases; this would help improve parental self-awareness, reducing the negative impacts that this may have.

10 WAYS PARENTS CAN HELP THEIR CHILD REVISE



Exams can be a stressful time for both students and parents.

Emotions run high, and the uncertainty of exam performance looms large. Keen not to say the wrong thing and to offer any support they can, parents can play a huge role in their child's mental health and academic achievement ahead of exams season. Here are 10 things they can do to help:

Encourage good sleep habits

Parents should [set a regular bedtime](#) for their child to ensure that they get the recommended 8-10 hours sleep. Getting plenty of [sleep during exam season](#) is particularly important, as sleep deprivation is linked to a reduction in concentration and memory. Research has shown that sleep allows the brain to form [new connections](#) between brain cells, as well as [prioritise the information](#) we care about. This way, when it comes to the exam, the most important information can be recalled.

Ensure your child eats breakfast

We've all been told that "breakfast is the most important meal of the day". But despite everyone knowing this, research has shown that over [60% of teenage boys and 70% of teenage girls](#) regularly skip breakfast. Parents need to encourage their child to eat

breakfast, as [one particular study](#) found that children who skipped breakfast or only had an energy drink performed worse in attention and memory tasks, when compared to those who had eaten breakfast.

Minimise Distractions

When their child is revising, parents can help by minimising the number of distractions available. Many young people seem to believe that they can [efficiently multi-task](#), such that they can complete their revision, whilst also being on their mobile phone.

However, multi-tasking is actually impossible, and the mere presence of a phone is enough to cause a [20% decline in performance](#). Attempts to multi-task instead [cause errors](#) and a decrease in productivity, as time is wasted switching from one task to another.

Parents aren't powerless when it comes to revision!

Get Them to Revise Using Retrieval Practice

[Retrieval practice](#), which requires students to generate an answer to a question, is one of the most effective revision strategies. It can include answering past papers, quizzes and multiple-choice tests. Getting children to recall previously learnt knowledge creates stronger memory traces, increasing the likelihood that information is stored in their long-term memory. [Click here for tips](#) on how to use retrieval practice.

Get Them to Teach You the Material

Parents should encourage their child to teach them their revision material, as this [improves memory and recall](#). Teaching others, also known as [the Protégé Effect](#), enhances children's understanding - preparing to explain the material to others helps them organise and clarify their thoughts and understanding.

Minimise Procrastination

75% of students [consider themselves to be procrastinators](#), whilst 50% carry this out to a level that is seen as problematic. Encouraging your child to let you look after their mobile phone or getting them out of bed at a set time to revise is a good way

to reduce procrastination. Research suggests that, if children concentrate on revision for just a few minutes, the brain's desire to see tasks through to completion takes over. This is [known as the Zeirganick Effect](#).

Have High Expectations

[Recent research](#), which reviewed 37 studies, found high expectation to be one of the most important things a parent can do to help improve their child's grades. [High parental expectations](#) help children believe that they can achieve and encourages them to work harder. However, high parental expectations need to be coupled with support, which allows a child to [develop resilience](#) and better [overcome setbacks](#).

Provide Motivation

Providing motivation that encourages your child to revise can be difficult. However, [research has shown](#) that emphasising how useful the content that they are revising is increases motivation. Therefore, parents can motivate their child to revise by showing them how they've come to use the content they learnt at school later in life.

Make Sure They Get Fresh Air Every Day

Parents should ensure that their child does some [exercise outside every day](#) during revision. [Research has shown](#) that going for a short walk, for just 12 minutes, improved students' mood, even if they knew they had a daunting task to complete when they returned. Exercise has also been proven to increase concentration levels, such that they were [21% higher on days of exercise](#).

Avoid All Work and No Play

Revision can be a stressful time for students. Therefore, parents need to ensure that their child is setting aside some time to relax and unwind. Not only do high levels of stress have a negative impact on a child's well-being, but also on the quality of their revision. A bit of TV, socialising and sport are actually important ingredients towards exams success.

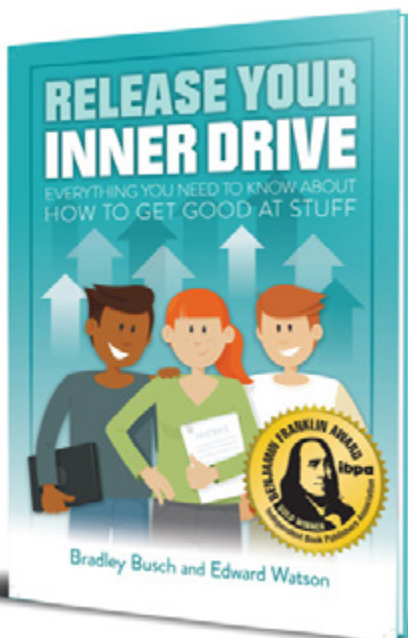
FINAL THOUGHT

Whilst exams will always be a source of stress for students and parents alike, hopefully some of it can be alleviated through the strategies above, making exam season a little more bearable for all parents and students.

Share this Back To School resource pack:



For **more tips and resources that could help your child**, why not get a copy of our award-winning book *Release Your Inner Drive*? Here's what some parents have said about it:



"Have read myself and shall be lending to my daughter and son as soon as they hit 'exam stage'. Reassuring and encouraging and most of all, inspiring."

"Fab little book I bought for my teenage son, wish I had a book like this when I was studying - he's already using the tips for last minute revision (finally...!)"

"Perfect for teenagers as has lots of tips based on research. The graphics are fab and really colourful, so grabs attention quickly. The parts on motivation and mindset really stand out. Would definitely recommend other parents get this book if their child is doing GCSEs or A-Levels."

[Get your copy](#)