

# PEAK Fact Sheet

## Underachievement

**Common definition of underachievement:** Underachievement occurs when a child's performance is below what is expected based on the child's ability.

**Important fact to know about gifted underachievers:** “GT underachievers are quick thinking, quick to criticize, and quick to justify their behavior (even when that behavior is inappropriate by commonly acceptable standards). Like most underachievers at all levels, they tend to have lowered self-esteem, confusion about their development and about why they are acting as they are, difficulty making appropriate choices, and a sense of being overwhelmed.” *from [www.appliedmotivation.com](http://www.appliedmotivation.com)*

### What can be done?

#### Carefully define the problem your child is having

- Not turning in assignments
- Attendance
- Disengagement from school
- Poor effort on work
- Does the minimum
- Works too slowly
- Has skills gaps
- Has a learning disability

Be specific about the progress you want to see. Provide encouragement and support to your child.

### A quick look at how to make things worse!

- Ask impossible questions
  - *Why did you put this off?*
  - *Why didn't you turn that in?*
  - *How could you forget?*
- Punish  
Punishment works for specific behaviors. This isn't specific.  
It gives parents a false feeling that something is being done.  
It breaks the dialogue.
- Threaten
  - Keep this up and you will fail 4<sup>th</sup> grade!*
  - I can't even think about what will happen when you go to middle school!*
- Lecture (even inspirational ones) or give “You-can-do-it” speeches
- Give external rewards
- Give unsolicited advice
- Referential speaking (especially bragging and negative comments)

## **Strategies that work**

### **How parents can help**

- Steady positive support and steady positive messages
- Approve and support out-of-school interests
- Allow the child to remain in extracurricular activities
- Maintain a positive attitude toward the child
- Keep a vivid positive image of your child in your mind
- Don't view underachievement as permanent
- Keep the responsibility on the student
- Remain calm, consistent, specific, and objective
- With homework, be a consultant and not a participant
- For a dependent child, affirm and then ignore tears
- Model hard work and satisfaction with your accomplishments
- Be consistent with your child's other parent
- Avoid referential speaking
- Clearly state your respect for school and teachers
- Avoid comparisons between children

### **How teachers can help:**

- Provide challenge
- Keep expectations high
- Eliminate content student has already mastered
- Include student discussion
- Choose class activities that students perceive as "real"
- Minimize traditional grading methods
- Watch for problems caused by peer pressure
- Emphasize cooperation, not competition
- Encourage independence
- Be available when help is needed

### **Want to learn more?**

The most recognized experts in this area of giftedness are Dr. Jim DeLisle and Dr. Sylvia Rimm. Both have written books on this topic. Dr. Rimm has a website where you can readily access information at [www.sylviarimm.com](http://www.sylviarimm.com).

### **Sources used in this fact sheet include:**

- Growing up gifted* by Barbara Clark
- When gifted kids don't have all the answers* by Jim DeLisle
- Underachievement syndrome: causes and cures* by Sylvia B. Rimm
- [www.appliedmotivation.com](http://www.appliedmotivation.com)