

Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP)



GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

Studies, Coaching, and Vocational Counseling



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10 FAQs on STUDIES, COACHING, AND VOCATIONAL COUNSELING

1. When should I start sending my child to school? My child is currently 2 years old.
2. My 14-year-old child watches a lot of TV and when asked to stop, responds by saying that television is their only relaxation. How should I handle this?
3. My child studies a lot but is unable to do well in school tests. Is there any way I can help?
4. My child's scholastic performance is poor and is not improving. Please tell me what are "study skills" do they really work? Does punishment have any role in improvising his studies? If yes, what type of punishment is recommended?
5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of coaching? What features should I look while selecting a coaching center for my kid?
6. My child is particularly good in singing. Should I send him for a coaching for this? Will it not affect his academics?
7. My child is 8 years old, he forgets very quickly, what memory booster or brain tonic should I give him? Are yoga, pranayama, and meditation useful?
8. Physical activities of my child are getting displaced because of heavy studies. Please guide.
9. My child is very ambitious and wants to join IIT. But, I know that his capacity is not that much. Please guide.
10. What is vocational counseling? When should I consult a vocational counselor? What are the principles and stages of vocational counseling?

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Studies, Coaching, and Vocational Counseling

Q1

When should I start sending my child to school? My child is currently 2 years old.

A. Should it be a day-care/crèche or a formal school?

- It could be any location that can provide a good balance of play and academics. Methods such as Montessori schooling have shown “active learning while playing” is an effective way of engaging infants and toddlers. Structured activities/curriculum work better for 4+ year olds.
- A lot of parents are mistaken that the school is good for 2-year-olds. Children at 2 years of age need love, a chance to socialize with other kids, and conversation. The latter is crucial.
- Sending children at 2 years of age to playschool might backfire as some playschools, for not knowing what to do with these children, tend to focus on academics. Studies in developmental psychology have shown that it is harmful to push children into academics too early.
- Nonparental daycare is an option for a 2-year-old baby, only if parental care is not possible due to various reasons.

B. At what age, should I start reading to and writing with my child?

- *Conversing* by way of talking, reading, singing to your child should be an essential activity in first year of life. Engaging infants in this manner builds listening, memory, and vocabulary skills and introduces concepts such as numbers, letters, colors, and shapes in a fun way.
- *Reading together* when babies are as young as 4 months old increases the chances that parents continue reading to babies as they get older. Beginning early is important because the roots of language are developing in a baby's brain even before he can talk! The more words your baby hears over time, the more words he learns.
- To start *writing activities*, the child is your best guide...take your cue from them. Usually around 18–24 months, most children get interested in holding pens or pencils and in scribbling. To introduce writing, start with an unstructured approach and expose your child to writing tools such as thick chinks or crayons, markers papers, slates, finger painting material, etc. By 5–7 years of age, a child is able to hold a pencil correctly and form letters.

Q2

My 14-year-old child watches a lot of TV and when asked to stop, responds by saying that television is their only relaxation. How should I handle this?

Instead of asking the child to turn the television off, try to engage the child in an activity in which you and the child can spend some time together, such as solving a puzzle, playing a board game, doing some yoga/dance moves, or coming up with a fun story and writing it down with silly illustrations.

- Spend quality time with the child.
- Set up a physical environment at home that does not center around the TV.
- Try to engage the child in activities you do at home—set an example.
- Encourage participation in alternate activities such as sports, games, hobbies, music, etc. using age appropriate behavior modification techniques, e.g., token economy.
- Set a limit of 2 hours or less per day for screen viewing.

Monitor the Duration and Content of TV Viewing

- The best way to monitor media that children use is to experience the media yourself. Test Apps and play games before the children use them. Watch what they watch. Talk about what they are seeing on their screens. You know your kids best, so you are the best judge of what they can handle.
- Set the viewing time by setting expectation regarding timeline and content. Try to gradually incorporate interactive shows (like quiz shows) or shows with some educational value (travel shows, nature or science documentaries, even cooking shows).

Q3

My child studies a lot but is unable to do well in school tests. Is there any way I can help?

Talk to and acknowledge frequently that you are happy the child is making an effort. Try to avoid adding additional pressure regarding the marks/grades and tell them that by working together you can overcome the obstacles. Use the help of practice test books and spend some time doing mock tests with your child. Observe and try to understand the problem—is the child unable to understand the study material or does the child get nervous during the test? Knowing the issue will help you solve it more effectively. The day before the test, take a couple of hours engaging in some other activity with the child to help put their mind at ease.

Approach this problem under the premise that *“no child performs poorly in studies on purpose”*. Every child wants all around her/him to think that she/he is the best child in the world. Therefore, if the child has difficulty in studies, there must be an underlying cause. The most common cause is lack of a “learning environment” at home, school or in the social setup that the child is living. Early detection of the problem, early intervention, working on the child’s strengths and imparting life-skills training are the keys to opening a stress-free path to achieving her/his full potential in life.

The “No Detention Policy” is one such hurdle which needs to be tackled. Check for sensory inputs first—“hearing and vision”. An assessment for learning disability and attention deficit is in order.

Should I encourage competitive spirit in my child to always stand first in class?

Every child has a different personality. Some children thrive on challenges while other children do much better when unburdened with huge pressure and unrealistic expectations. As a parent you must be an objective judge of the approach that works best for your child. However, it goes without saying that encouraging your child and telling them that they are capable of great accomplishments does wonders in building their confidence.

Q4

My child's scholastic performance is poor and is not improving. Please tell me, what are "study skills" do they really work? Does punishment have any role in improvising his studies? If yes, what type of punishment is recommended?

Study Skills

For students to succeed in academics, good study skills and study techniques are very important. *Study skills* are the different strategies applied while learning.

- One must be a *good listener* to learn the things properly.
- Students think they will remember everything taught in the class and often forget. Therefore, it is important to take notes and master the art of "*notes taking*".
- Students should learn good "*time management*" and plan ahead—weeks, months, and terms.
- Use *Mind-Map*, a way of organizing, visualizing, and summarizing the things.
- One can *read loudly* at home, also *record it and listen* to it while traveling in the school bus.
- *Rewrite and reread* until they understand the concepts properly.
- *Discuss the subject with friends or be a tutor*. By tutoring, one will understand the subject very well.
- Physical activity and unstructured play must be encouraged as this helps in relieving stress.
- Establish regular study hours.
- Make studying interesting and improve comprehension by introducing intelligent use of "flash cards, lists, memory strategies such as mnemonics, charts, timelines, and diagrams".
- Some children may benefit from using recorders and listening to recorded information may help them to remember better.

Punishment

- Punishment is defined as anything that attempts to decrease a behavior. Punishment makes/is aimed to learn discipline and time management.
- Punishment should always be at low level; however, high level of punishment will increase the fear.
- However, the best methods are "No punishments, but rather to teach and reward discipline". *Discipline is positive while punishment is negative.*

Rewards and praise always work far better than punishment. Another way is to have clear rules and expectations, and teach the consequences of breaking the rules.

Punishment could be counterproductive:

- Use a powerful reward. If the reward is not meaningful, behavior will not change. Rewards have been found to be much more powerful in shaping behavior than punishments.
- Sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) before starting—be very specific in setting goals by describing exactly what you want the child to achieve; finalize a reward schedule for each stage toward attaining the goal with provision for continued reinforcement for staying on course.
- Reward less frequently (but continue in smaller ways) as the goal is nearing achievement point. This helps to maintain the child’s training.

Q5

What are the advantages and disadvantages of coaching? What features should I look while selecting a coaching center for my kid?

Advantages

Coaching can make students realize the heights, they can achieve with perseverance and efforts. It may help students to reach full academic potential, to think critically, and solve problems. Coaching, especially one-on-one basis, improves individual skills and behavior. Coaching institutes may also provide career guidance. Coaching classes are useful for those students who need personal attention and a little push-up.

Disadvantages

However, there are disadvantages also.

- Child will be spoonfed, there is hardly any time for self-study and use of his own brain.
- Trial and error in finding the right coach to meet individual needs is waste of time.
- Too many tuitions leave the child with hardly any time to communicate with friends and family and this might turn him/her into an introvert.
- Heavy coaching can develop stress in students due to competition.
- Students from different schools with different type of syllabi may not adjust with one particular coaching center.
- Coaching is also an additional expenditure for parents.

One has to look for such coaching institutes who can provide individual attention, one-to-one coaching, teach same syllabus as of the school and teach different learning techniques for different type of students.

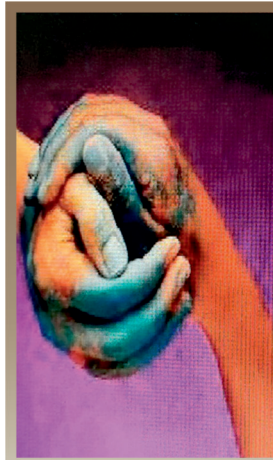
Q6

**My child is particularly good in singing.
Should I send him for a coaching for this?
Will it not affect his academics?**

Extracurricular activities help students to develop their skills and abilities. Evidence suggests that participating in extracurricular activities increases attendance rates, improves grades and facilitates higher educational attainment, positive social behavior, sense of belonging to school, and higher self-esteem.

Some good extracurricular activities are school council, academic club, debate team, arts club, internships, cultural club, volunteer work, community service, and newspaper club.

Working on strengths helps the child to excel in what she or he is good at and the resultant recognition by peers, teachers, and others improves self-esteem and overall performance of the child.



**A tool to handle
Children and
Adolescence in School
more effectively**

Q7

My child is 8 years old, he forgets very quickly, what memory booster or brain tonic should I give him? Are yoga, pranayama, and meditation useful?

- There is no scientific evidence to prove the utility of any of the so-called brain tonics. Parents' unconditioned love, support, and encouragement (PULSE) is the real brain tonic for children!
- Assess for learning problems, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), vision, hearing, and hypothyroidism.
- Assess for attention-deficit disorder (ADD)—if ADD is significantly affecting his academics—consult doctor for need for medication and study strategies.
- Lack of concentration is because of lack of interest, lack of sleep, diet high in carbohydrates especially sugars, excessive TV watching or any problem at home or school.
 - Iron deficiency needs to be corrected.
 - Diet should be rich in protein, iron, and omega-3.
 - Children should play focused games to increase concentration, e.g., jigsaw puzzles and counting backwards.

Yoga

Yoga is all about linking breath with motion and becoming fully present in mind and body. The practice itself is centered on concentration. Children can start practicing Yoga as soon as they start to understand instructions. Ideally kids of 4 years and above are capable of understanding instructions and follow the teacher. Advantages include better sleep, reduced anxiety and stress, improved self-esteem, and ability to focus and study. Omkar chanting increases concentration.

Aasanas to increase concentration include *Vrikshasana* or tree pose, *Taadasana*, *Paschimottanasana*, etc.

Ways to Increase Concentration

- Concentration games and activities such as playing chess, crossword puzzles, jigsaw puzzles, and card games such as "Memory" and "Uno" help improve attention for words, numbers, and picture.
- Picture puzzles to look for things that are "wrong" in the picture or look for hard-to-find objects—also improve attention and increase concentration.
- Drawing within narrow track lines, playing "statue", practicing tongue twisters, counting backward, tell a story in reverse; finding the missing in a sequence of numbers, alphabets or words of the child's favorite rhyme, etc. are also useful strategies.
- Prepare a distraction-free environment at home.
- A power nap for 20 minutes after school or in the afternoon.
- Set short-term goals for better concentration; start child on the tougher activities during his high energy time and as energy levels diminish, switch to a lighter activity.

- Resorting to deep breathing and imagery is useful in some children.
- Like any skill, concentration can be improved and made automatic. The trick is to be consistent.

How many hours of sleep is appropriate. Night study or early morning study, which is better?

You have not mentioned your child’s age. But, on an average, at least 9 hours of sleep is necessary for children.

No particular time is ideal for studies, it is the individual’s comfort level that matters. However, if he has early morning classes, you will have to ensure that he sleeps on time to complete his sleep requirements. Inadequate sleep will not only put him to sleep in class but will also reduce his concentration and make him irritable.



Online Learning

Online learning is a new concept, and we all are getting used to it. You can try a few things:

- Use a big screen such as a desktop computer or TV instead of a tab or mobile device.
- Make sure the screen is kept in a common area like the hall where you can keep an eye.
- Screen time use apart from schooling should be restricted.
- Ask him to write notes and encourage him to keep his video on so that the teacher can see him.
- Read the topic with him before the classes to make him familiar with the subject.

Q8

Physical activities of my child are getting displaced because of heavy studies. Please guide.

Childhood is the last chance to grow well, healthy, and strong. It is essential that they get a good supply of required nutrients. Along with that, good physical exercise is a must. Effective time management can ensure at least 45 minutes of some physical activity everyday. In fact, exercise and play will boost his concentration and ability to learn. So even though he has to spend a lot of time on studies, please make sure not to give his exercise a miss.

Q9

My child is very ambitious and wants to join IIT. But, I know that his capacity is not that much. Please guide.

You can take help from a good career counselor or a good psychologist to have an impartial and professional opinion after assessing the child's strengths and limitations. That would give you an idea whether to encourage him or dissuade him. The adolescent should finally be able to decide for himself. He could take his time and try to make the grade. Do not make the mistake of telling the child that he cannot make the grade. Be supportive and teach coping skills in the meantime.

Q10
What is vocational counseling? When should I consult a vocational counselor? What are the principles and stages of vocational counseling?


Vocational counseling is a set of services designed to develop the skills and ability to practice a vocation in a productive way. Those born with physical or cognitive impairments are taught how to perform in the workplace taking into consideration their abilities and challenges. “Vocational guidance counseling” aims to help the individual to expand his alternative professional perspectives that are necessary in making decisions relating to the future career and profession by:

- Helping pupils to know themselves.
- Helping pupils to make a right choice.
- Helping pupils to prepare themselves for entry into the careers of their choice.
- Helping pupils to get suitable jobs in their chosen field.
- Helping pupils according to their vocational assets and liabilities.
- Helping pupils to be familiar with vocational implications of different subjects to be studied in the secondary school.
- Helping pupils to be familiar with occupations and their requirements.

The principles of vocational counseling are all-round development of the individual, considering human uniqueness and it should be objective and must be based on facts.

Three stages of vocational guidance are “primary school stage”, “secondary school stage”, and “college stage”. Primary school stage is not appropriate stage for career guidance. Hence, vocational guidance program is not given for children at this level. At secondary school stage, child has already reached adolescence stage and is capable of taking decision about his future. So, it is the right and appropriate stage to guide them for their career. At the “college stage”, one should assist students to relate their studies with the vocations that would help them at the end of their college career.