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F A M I L Y G U I D E

THE POWER OF EXPECTATIONS

Topic: High Expectations and Pressure

The Facts

According to Elizabeth Hartley-Brewer, a writer and policy consultant on education and children's development, good parental expectations will "stress the importance of effort for improvement and achievement, rather than outcomes that involve competitive comparisons with others. We should never allow something that a child does to become linked to how good they are as a person."

Adult expectations should encourage children to reach goals of: task mastery – developing specific knowledge and skills; positive self-worth; self-determination; flexibility; and personal organization.

Start a Conversation with Your Kids

1. Do you feel like you have to ace every test or win every race? What does it mean to you when we say "do your best"?
2. What would you say your parents expect of you? Your teachers? Your friends? Do those expectations encourage you or make you stressed and nervous?
3. What do you expect from yourself? What are some of the goals you would like to achieve for your future? How do the expectations of others help you – or deter you – from achieving those goals? are different? What do we miss by only having friends who are just like us?

Advice From the Experts

The University of Michigan Health System offers these suggestions to parents regarding expectations:

- **Keep your expectations realistic.** Unreasonably high expectations send negative messages and your child's feelings of personal worth may crumble as they believe they must be perfect to be loved.
- **Respect your child's unique qualities.** Think about the expectations your parents had for you as a child. Consider whether you are placing the same expectations on your child even though your child has different needs and talents. Your child is unlike any other and should be loved unconditionally for the person he or she is. It is unhealthy to compare your child with friends, siblings or you as a child. Encourage independence and respect your child's right to fulfill personal potential.
- **Applaud effort, not just outcome.** If your child does not make the team or play the lead in the school play, explain how proud you are of him or her for trying. While victories are cause for celebration, less obvious achievements should be equally celebrated. On the other hand, do not overindulge your child with empty compliments. Your child can tell if your comments are truthful and from the heart.

