

How do you fix bad parenting?

There is little doubt that the education system in the U.S. has problems. According to the [National Assessment for Educational Progress](#), less than 40% of 12th grade students are considered proficient in reading.



NAEP is a national assessment that's considered the gold standard in the country. Similar data can be seen in the states based on their own means of assessment. Now, you can certainly find pockets of success, but the overall numbers are indicative of systemic problems.

Few will dispute the fact that many American students aren't doing well in school. The challenge, though, is coming to agreement about the root causes. Some will blame the system itself and the education philosophy it rests upon. Others think we need better teachers. Still more believe we don't spend enough on the system or the teachers. Despite the differing opinions, there is one cause that seems to be quite popular in the mind of the public: bad parenting.

Plenty of data supports the idea that parenting plays a tremendous role in influencing how well a child will do in school. Everything matters when it comes to parenting, from how often the child is read to and the number of books in the house to whether or not the child comes from a stable, two-parent household.

If the atrocious numbers we're seeing in education assessments are the fault of bad parenting, we seem to have a nationwide, parenting crisis. So how do we overcome it to get kids on the right track? The poet T.S. Eliot had the following to say on the topic:

“Instead of congratulating ourselves on our progress,

whenever the school assumes another responsibility hitherto left to parents, we might do better to admit that we have arrived at a stage of civilization at which the family is irresponsible, or incompetent, or helpless; at which parents cannot be expected to train their children properly; at which many parents cannot afford to feed them properly, and would not know how, even if they had the means; and that Education must step in and make the best of a bad job."

And so here we see the great irony of our time. One of the justifications used to create the government-run education system we have today was that it would pick up where parents failed. As T.S. Eliot points out, if the family has completely broken down, then what do we have left to fix the problem other than education of some sort? That's quite a conundrum if the current education system is essentially arguing that it can't educate kids who are poorly parented.

Maybe today's educators are right; they can't overcome bad parenting and family breakdown within the current education system's structure. If that's the case, then it would indicate that we need a very different kind of education system.

Of course, there's only one major question that is left out of arguments about parents: What is bad parenting? For instance, we know that the more a child is read to by a parent the stronger the chances are that the child will do well in school. Are you a bad parent if you don't read enough to your child? We also know that kids who come from two-parent homes do better. Are you a bad parent if you get divorced or have a child as a single-mom? Furthermore, are we comfortable with government, through taxpayer-funded schools, dictating to children what is and isn't good parenting so as to help them have something to aim for?

In the current culture, probably not.

And so the question remains, if parents are primarily to blame for the overall poor performance of American students, what needs to change?