

Activity 2: Who is more likely to succeed?

Sofia is 9 years old and in the fourth grade. She lives with her parents, a younger sister and her grandmother, who is in poor health. Sofia gets good grades in English, but her math grade is below average. She is very responsible. Her parents count on her to stay home with her sick grandmother on days when her parents cannot. Sofia's parents are very proud of her English skills. She sometimes misses school and accompanies them to translate in important situations.

Benjamin is Sofia's classmate. He has to work hard for his grades, but he never misses school. After school, he enjoys playing video games or playing soccer with his two older brothers. Benjamin's mother makes sure he does his homework every evening, but his last report card was not very good. His mother is happy about his English grade, but she is concerned about his math grade. She is planning to contact his teacher to ask for ways to help him improve.

Make a list of reasons each student *could* or *could not* be academically successful.

Sofia

Benjamin

Discuss your reasons with your group.

Success Factors: Communication & Discipline

2. Communication is a Two-Way Street

Effective communication requires talking and listening well. People with these abilities do better in school, in relationships and at work. So enjoy conversations with your child—and make the most of them!

Are you listening?

To be a communication role model:

- **Pay attention.** Resist distractions, such as checking email or text messages, when your child is talking. Your child should know, “My parent cares about what I’m saying.”
- **Make an appointment.** If you’re unable to listen, say so. “I’m sorry, honey. I’m so busy cooking that I can’t listen well. Let’s talk at the dinner table. I really want to hear you.” Then follow through.
- **Practice active listening.** This method checks information and shows you’re attentive. Listen carefully to what your child says, and then rephrase it to make sure you understand correctly. (Child: “I wanted Julie at my party, and she can’t come!” Parent: “You’re disappointed Julie won’t be there.”)

Show your interest

Sometimes kids say too much. Other times they don’t say enough! It helps when parents:

- **Provide words.** It’s sometimes easier for kids to say “No!” than it is to explain why they’re upset. So offer suggestions. “You’re sad about leaving Jason’s house when you’re having so much fun.”
- **Avoid lectures.** When your child mentions a problem, stay calm and let her do most of the talking. Use nonverbal communication (such as smiling and nodding) and ask questions: “Then what happened?” “How do you feel about that?”
- **Accept feelings.** Sometimes kids express difficult—even offensive—feelings. (“I hate my sister!”) Instead of denying these feelings (“No you don’t!”), talk about their cause. This keeps the lines of communication open. “She barged into your room. I see why you’re angry.”
- **Try specific questions,** such as, “What did you do in math today?”, “Who did you sit with at lunch?” or “What was the most interesting thing you did at school today?”



Keeping your plan alive



Congratulations! You've completed your Academic Success Plan. This is the most important step toward your goal of realizing the American dream for your child. But, as with any plan, it will not work unless you actively keep it alive.

Talk about your Academic Success Plan and review each step with your child regularly. Talk about how things are going. Keep the plan handy so you can monitor your child's progress at school and make changes if necessary. You should also:

Talk to the teacher.

Remember that a strong home-school partnership will help your child succeed! It's important to maintain regular communication with your child's teacher.

To find out how your child is doing at school:

- **Ask if your child is learning** as well as expected. For example, is your child reading at grade level? How are your child's math skills?
- **Find out** if there are any concerns.
- **Ask what you can do** to help at home.

Agree on needed changes.

Based on conversations with your child and your child's teacher, you may have to make some adjustments to keep your plan on track. For example:

- **Does the teacher recommend** more reading time at home?
- **Should you make changes** to your child's homework schedule?
- **Do you need to establish** "screen time" limits?

The important thing is to keep reviewing and improving your plan to make it a useful "living" plan. Update it with your child before school starts each year.