

Life... 4th grade testing

S i t u a t i o n :

My daughter is in fourth grade and our school system has instituted end-of-year testing. Basically the students are going to have to write a composition and if they don't make a passing grade, they won't be promoted to the 5th grade.

It's only January and all the hype about this new all-or-nothing exam is making Chelsea nervous already. At least once a week she talks about it and then I worry about it while I'm trying to fall asleep at night. I have visions of her failing, and how I'll feel when I comes time to tell my parents about it! I hate to see what we'll be like when the end of May rolls around and the test is the next day!

Chelsea does well enough in school, but I can't say that writing is her best subject. What can we do?

A n s w e r :

Good for you for wanting to take action early instead of trying to cope with months of built-up tension at the last minute!

The first thing to do is to calm yourself down. It's not helping Chelsea to see that you're looking at this with a gloom and doom attitude. Children do mimic their parents. If you go around talking about how unfair this new testing is, so will your daughter. And you'll both be wasting precious energy complaining instead of helping Chelsea polish her skills.

The school rules and school administration are your outer environment – as a parent you can make your voice heard if that's what you choose to do. And remember, all you can truly control is your thoughts and your behavior. Be careful not to blame the teachers. Plenty of them are opposed to this added tension too. Other school systems across the country use end-of-grade testing – that means it's average. Controversial? Undoubtedly. But nevertheless it's an average/common procedure. It's one of those issues that some people will agree with and others will not. Everyone will have an opinion and they're all entitled to their opinions. Whether you're for or against it, it is a reality you and Chelsea have to live with.

For the next few months you can do some coaching. Have Chelsea read a newspaper article and tell you about it. Start with short pieces and topics that she's interested in. Then graduate to longer magazine articles and have her give you a short synopsis of the information. Always, always remind her that it's ok to make mistakes. Children are so pressured to be perfect. As adults we often forget the fact that not everyone is going to be great at everything.

These spoken reports will provide the practice and build her confidence that she can talk about a certain subject. After four or five weeks have Chelsea write a single paragraph

on a topic that's she's talked about the week before. Again – it's a confidence building tactic. Then have her write out a single page, then two pages. Before you know it, you may have a budding writer in your household. And even if you don't, Chelsea will have some practice in what she's supposed to do during the test.

Your change in attitude and behavior may temporarily confuse Chelsea – she may think that you've switched camps –changed your loyalty from her to the school. Let her know that's not the case, that you're simply helping her be her best.

One more thing Dad... Although it's not likely at all, think about the absolute worst thing that could happen – Chelsea would have repeat the 4th grade. If she did, she wouldn't be the only one. Thousands of children in the last 50 years have repeated a grade and for some of them, it was absolutely the best thing that happened to them.

Now take a moment to “what if” the best: Chelsea earns a “C” or better and she passes the test!

Hold that thought!

