



To retain or not to retain

What if the teacher tells you that she wants to discuss with you the pros and cons of retaining your child in first grade? Your immediate reaction may be confusion.

Even educational experts are not always in agreement on this complex issue. They sometimes share your confusion.

How then can you decide what will best meet the needs of your particular child? Obtaining answers for the following questions will help you in making your decision:

(1) What is the nature of the problems that your child appears to be having? His teacher should be able to help you.

(2) What specific help will your child receive at school in the coming year, whether retained or not retained?

(3) Does the school have a formal policy and procedure regarding retention to ensure that decisions are made in a consistent manner?

A decision to retain or promote a child should be based on each individual child's specific needs. In arriving at that decision, consider some of the arguments in favor of retention, reasons against retention, and some of the alternatives.

Those who advocate retention argue that it will most likely be successful for the child who is generally immature for his age rather than the one who is weak in one or two academic areas. Retention may also be appropriate for the child who is having general difficulty in school because of excessive absence due to serious illness, for example, or due to frequent family moves. Retention is more likely to be successful if it is initiated in an early grade.

Those who argue against retention claim that no reliable body of research evidence exists to indicate that grade retention is beneficial. Instead, they point out that retention can negatively affect a child's school achievement and social-emotional adjustment. It can also affect a child's attitudes toward school which may later result in drop out.

Lastly, consider some of the alternatives to grade retention. Do not assume that merely repeating the same instruction—that failed to help a child the first time—will somehow help the child the second time. A child's specific learning problems can best be remediated through individualized instructional strategies.

These alternative strategies might include individualized instruction provided, for example, by a specialist such as a reading teacher, a teacher's aide or peer tutoring.

Classroom demands and expectations may need to be modified for your child by assigning less homework, for example. Parents may also want to consider other remedial help such as after-school and summer tutorial programs.

The most important consideration is for the child to get the specific help that is needed. As parents become more aware of the nature of their child's problems and the types of school services available, they can better help in planning and developing an appropriate individualized instructional program whether or not it is decided to retain the child.

*"America's future will be determined by the home and the school.
The child becomes largely what it is taught, hence watch what we teach it,
and how we live before it."*

—Jane Addams—