



Rifka Schonfeld
STRATEGIES

THE NEWSLETTER FOR OPTIMUM SUCCESS

TIPS ON SOCIAL SKILLS FOR ADULTS & CHILDREN

Is There a Connection Between At Risk Behavior and Failing in School?

Dear Readers,

This week's newsletter discusses the connection between at-risk behaviors and failing in school. It includes 3 strategies to help your child academically in order to avoid these behaviors.

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QUESTION:

There's been so much discussion lately about kids at risk within our community these days. Recently, I read that there might be a connection between academics and at risk behavior? I always assumed that academics and social behavior were separate. Is there really a correlation?



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ANSWER:

It's true that there has been a lot of discussion about at risk children whose behavior is dangerous and often detrimental to themselves and their families. Rabbi Daniel Schonbuch, the author of the book *At Risk: Never Beyond Reach* discusses the epidemic of children at risk today:

These are the kids you see hanging around street corners, getting into trouble and dropping out of our yeshivah system. Unfortunately what may have been a unique occurrence just twenty years ago is becoming a common scenario whether you are yeshivish or chassidish. Today, there isn't a person who doesn't know someone who is at risk, be it their own child, a cousin, or a kid that lives on their block.

It's hard to believe that academics can have a role in helping or hurting at-risk children, but in reality, the answer is – yes – academics can play a significant part in changing a teen's behavior.

It's impossible to blame our *yeshivos* for our teenagers' problems. *Yeshivos* suffer from a lack of funds and this often leads to classrooms overstaffed with students. Because of the limited amount of attention that individual students get in the classroom, kids who are not naturally strong students get lost in the shuffle.

The truth is that a large percentage of our children are not "natural" students who sit still and take notes whenever the rebbe speaks. Many children require personal attention, smaller classrooms, and homework sheets suited to their learning styles. Today, many students learn best through visual aids, such as slides and charts. My motto is "If he cannot learn the way we teach, we had better teach the way he can learn." Unfortunately, our *yeshivos* don't always have the resources to create situations in which everyone can learn best. Because of these issues, many students feel rejected by the yeshiva system and eventually leave school or are kicked out.

So, what can you do to help your child academically in order to avoid at risk behavior?

- **Instill confidence.** Children who feel competent socially and academically are more likely to achieve. Help your child gain confidence in his studies by ensuring that he is up to grade level before he learns a new skill. For instance, if your son is struggling with basic algebra, when his class moves on to more complex equations, he is going to feel left out and hopeless. Therefore, assisting him in believing in his skills before he learns more difficult subjects will give him the confidence he needs to succeed.
- **Talk to teachers.** It is essential to be abreast of the issues in your child's classroom. Attending parent-teacher conferences is a must. However, if you see that your child is struggling in his classes, don't wait for scheduled meetings, rather, arrange your own. This will allow you the opportunity to express yourself to your child's teachers and will also indicate to the teachers that your son or daughter could use a bit of extra monitoring.
- **Be aware of friends.** Your child's friends are great signs of the road he is traveling. If you notice that many of his friends are failing out of school or are uninterested in attending *yeshiva*, consider discussing your son's choice of friends with him. Remember, being judgmental will simply make your son turn away from you – engage him in an honest and respectful conversation.

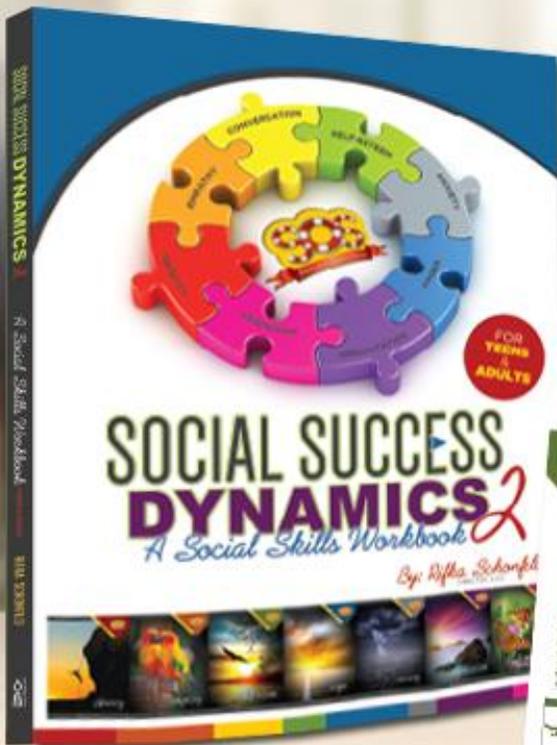
Can you rescue all at risk kids through an increased emphasis on personal attention in academics? Of course not, but for some teenagers' confidence and competence in academics can lead in the right direction.

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