
Three Secrets of Scholarship-Winning Parents

What Top Parents Do Differently

Insights from parents whose children have secured competitive scholarships and selective school placements



Scholarly's Research Findings



Our Research Methodology

- Annual interviews with 100+ scholarship recipients and their parents
- In-depth analysis of parenting approaches and study strategies
- Identifying consistent patterns across successful families
- Comparison between scholarship-winning families and general populace

The Three Secrets of Scholarship-Winning Parents



1. Normalise Failure

They view setbacks as stepping stones to success rather than reflections of ability



2. Focus on Mistakes

They spend most of their time reviewing errors rather than simply completing more work



3. Reduce Pressure

They use supportive language and take more responsibility for the learning process



"Each year, we interview 20-40 students and their parents, identifying consistent patterns in how scholarship-winning families approach education differently."

Secret #1: Normalise Failure

The Reality of Difficult Exams

- Typical scores on challenging materials range from 40-60%
- School experience creates a false expectation of scoring 80-90%
- Selective and scholarship exams are designed to challenge even the brightest students
- Consistently scoring 90%+ means materials are too easy and little learning is occurring

Benefits of Embracing Failure

- Failure becomes seen as a stepping stone to success rather than a setback
- Students develop resilience and greater emotional regulation
- Less shock and demoralisation when facing actual exam conditions
- Creates realistic expectations and reduces anxiety
- Promotes a growth mindset approach to learning

Practical Applications

Start difficult conversations early

Celebrate effort over perfect scores

Adjust expectations (50-60% can be excellent)

Choose materials that challenge rather than flatter

Discuss failures openly as learning opportunities

Model healthy responses to your own setbacks

66 *"If you're the smartest person in the room, you're probably in the wrong room. Surround yourself with challenges that push your boundaries."*

Secret #2: Focus on Mistakes

The 80/20 Learning Principle

TIME ALLOCATION FOR OPTIMAL LEARNING

New Work (20%)

- Top-performing students dedicate majority of time to analysing errors
- Understanding mistakes leads to deeper conceptual mastery
- Prevents repetition of the same errors across different questions
- Creates stronger neural pathways for problem-solving strategies

Common Missteps

- Focusing on quantity over quality of practice
- Mindlessly moving through workbooks without reflection
- Avoiding difficult questions that lead to errors
- Treating mistakes as failures rather than learning tools
- Taking trial tests without proper review afterwards

Effective Correction Strategies

- ✓ Create a dedicated mistakes notebook
- ✓ Categorise errors by concept or question type
- ✓ Ask "Why did I get this wrong?"
- ✓ Rework questions without looking at solutions
- ✓ Review similar questions from different sources
- ✓ Schedule regular review of past mistakes

“There is absolutely no point doing more questions if you're not reviewing and learning from the ones you've already completed.”

Secret #3: Reduce Pressure

Supportive Language Matters

- Top parents use minimal pressure language with their children
- Avoid phrases like "How could you let this happen?" or "This is unacceptable"
- Focus on process-oriented feedback rather than outcome criticism
- Frame challenges as opportunities for growth rather than shortcomings
- Control their own emotions when faced with disappointment

Taking Responsibility

- Place more onus on themselves as parents rather than the child
- Recognise that children cannot be expected to self-learn difficult material
- Contribute up to 80% of the educational support needed
- Focus on one quality coaching centre rather than multiple programmes
- Reinforce lessons from tutoring rather than expecting tutors to do everything

Demonstration vs. Direction

Effective Approaches:

- Sitting beside the child during study sessions
- Reviewing work together collaboratively
- Actively engaging with learning materials

Ineffective Approaches:

- Simply telling children what to do
- Outsourcing all learning to multiple tutors
- Setting expectations without support

Key insight: Children learn from actions, not words. They don't listen to what parents say; they copy their behaviours and attitudes.

“If you're not that great of a parent, don't expect your child to be better than you. The learning process must be a partnership with shared responsibility.”

The School vs. Scholarship Gap

Why School Is Not Enough

- School curriculum is 2-3 years behind selective and scholarship exam content
- Being "top of the class" at school often creates a false sense of readiness
- School assessments are designed for average standards, not competitive excellence
- Scholarship exams target the top 3.5-4% of students—far above regular school expectations

When to Start Preparation

-  **For Top 5-10 Selective Schools:**
Begin by Year 3, requires significant commitment
-  **For Schools Ranked 11-20:**
Begin by Year 4, still competitive (top 8%)
-  **For Schools Ranked 30-40:**
Beginning of Year 5 can be sufficient

Reality of Competitive Selection

Scholarship Tests

200-400 applicants, only top 4% (8-16 students) receive offers

Top 10 Schools

Approximately 4,000 students competing for limited places

OC Class Link

Most students in top selective schools came through top OC classes

“ *"School is honestly a joke if you're aiming for scholarships. You can't really follow what you're doing at school because it's not representative of these competitive exams."*

The Importance of Early Development

IQ Development Window

- IQ is highly fluid in early years (ages 6-10)
- Brain development begins to crystallise around age 11-12
- Significant gains are difficult after age 12
- Early intervention produces 60% variance in expressed intelligence
- Genetics accounts for ~50% of IQ potential; environment shapes the rest

Early Enhancement Activities

- Reading: Regular reading from ages 2-3 develops verbal reasoning
- Logical games: Chess, puzzles, Sudoku build problem-solving pathways
- Music: Learning instruments enhances mathematical reasoning
- Quality conversation: Discussions build language and critical thinking
- Educational viewing: Documentaries expand knowledge and curiosity

Nutrition and Brain Development

Research shows diet has significant impact on cognitive development, particularly in early years:



Omega-3 Fatty Acids



Antioxidant-Rich Foods



Protein for Neurotransmitters

Complex Carbohydrates

“You don't need formal coaching for very young children. Reading, logical games, educational content, and quality conversation at ages 6-7 can create massive cognitive gains that formal education simply can't match later on.”

Understanding Setbacks vs. Identity

! The Dangerous Mindset Shift

- Many parents embed poor performance into identity rather than seeing it as temporary
- Statements like "My child just isn't good at maths" create fixed mindsets
- Reacting to low scores by quitting rather than persisting
- Taking academic setbacks as personal attacks on ability or worth
- Confusing temporary failure events with being a "failure" as a person

↑ The "Fail Forward" Approach

- Top parents help children become comfortable with failure as part of learning
- They frame setbacks as data points rather than judgements
- Approach challenges with a growth mindset: "I can't do this yet"
- Celebrate the process of improvement rather than just outcomes
- Create safe spaces to experiment and make mistakes without judgement

🔗 The Reframing Process

Instead of...

- "You're not good at this"
- "This is disappointing"
- "Some people just struggle with this"
- "Maybe this isn't for you"

Try saying...

- "You're still learning this"
- "What can we learn from this result?"
- "This is challenging, but you can improve"
- "Let's find a different approach"

“It's either they fail now or they fail later - they're going to fail at some point. You might as well have it happen earlier and build resilience through the process.”

Effective Coaching Selection

✓ Quality Over Quantity

- Top-performing students typically attend only 1-2 coaching centres, not 3-5
- Focus on comprehensive coaching that covers all subject areas in one place
- Avoid the "coaching centre hopping" trap that fragments learning
- The best parents understand that tutors have limitations and cannot do everything
- Look for centres that provide detailed explanations and proper feedback

🔄 Reinforcement Is Critical

- Without parental reinforcement, lessons from coaching have minimal retention
- Sit beside your child during online lessons to absorb the material yourself
- Review and discuss concepts from coaching sessions throughout the week
- Ask for recordings or summaries of lessons to reference later
- Convert coaching content into practical applications through daily discussions

⚠ Common Mistakes in Coaching Approach

The Trial Test Trap

Sending children to multiple trial tests without reviewing results or understanding errors makes these tests practically worthless learning experiences.

The Outsourcing Mindset

Believing that tutors alone can transform academic performance without significant parental involvement and reinforcement at home.

💡 **Best approach:** Find one quality coaching centre that offers comprehensive preparation, then actively reinforce those lessons at home through regular review and practice. The parent-tutor partnership is far more effective than multiple disconnected tutoring experiences.

Conclusion: Becoming a Scholarship-Winning Parent

1. Normalise Failure

- Embrace challenging materials (50-60% scores are often appropriate)
- View setbacks as learning opportunities
- Build resilience through appropriate challenges
- Prefer growth over unrealistic success

2. Focus on Mistakes


- Spend 80% of study time on corrections
- Analyse and categorise errors
- Prioritise quality of learning over quantity
- Create systems for tracking improvement

3. Reduce Pressure

- Use supportive, non-judgmental language
- Take responsibility as a learning partner
- Teach through demonstration, not just instruction
- Focus on one quality coaching centre, not many

Action Plan for Parents

- ✓ Start early—focus on ages 6-12 for maximum development
- ✓ Choose challenging materials over flattering ones
- ✓ Model the growth mindset you want to see
- ✓ Create a dedicated mistake-review system
- ✓ Actively reinforce coaching lessons at home
- ✓ Separate academic performance from identity

 Remember that scholarship success is a partnership between parent and child. Your involvement, guidance, and emotional regulation are as important as your child's abilities. The journey requires consistency, patience, and a willingness to embrace challenges together.



Success comes not from avoiding failure, but from learning through it.