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## Should My Child Repeat a Grade?

Ideally, no. Repeating a grade—also known as "grade retention" —has not been shown to help children learn.

**Children won't outgrow learning and attention issues by repeating a grade.** In fact, repeating a grade may contribute to long-term issues with low self-esteem, as well as emotional or social difficulties.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) believes children are most successful when they are supported to advance grade levels with their peers, when possible, while reasons behind their lack of academic progress are sorted out and addressed.

## How many kids repeat grades annually?

According to 2016 data from the National Center for Education Statistics, about 1.9% of U.S. elementary through high school students stayed in the same grade they were enrolled in the prior school year— *down from 3.1% in 2000.*

**Rates remain higher among younger children.** In 2016, 4.3% of first-through-third graders repeated a grade. Social and economic factors such as race, family income and parents' level of education also affect how likely a student is to have repeated a grade.

**Rates are also high among children in households with low incomes.** In 2016, 8% of children from households with incomes at or below the federal poverty level repeated a grade versus 3% of children who were from households with higher incomes.

## Can your child read at a third-grade level?

- Some states have "third-grade retention laws," meaning that third grade students who aren't reading at a certain level aren't allowed to move on to fourth grade. The school of thought behind these laws: **the transition from third to fourth grade is when classwork shifts from *learning to read* to *reading to learn*.** But exceptions may be possible, especially if your child is diagnosed with a learning disability and has an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Other "good-cause" exemptions may include students who have been learning English as a second language (ESL) for three years or less.

## Do any children benefit from repeating a grade?

Some students may benefit from repeating a grade, at least in the short term—especially those who already have strong self-esteem and are emotionally healthy but are still having difficulty



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keeping up academically with their classmates. But even if students who were held back improve on standardized test scores, this doesn't appear to help their overall learning.

**Repeating a grade can be considered an adverse childhood experience**

**(ACE).** Research suggests that repeating a grade, at any grade level, is associated with later high school dropout and other long-term effects. It also can affect a child's social and emotional development. In one study, sixth-grade students rated having to repeat a grade as "the most stressful life event."

## What can parents do if their child is in danger of repeating a grade?

- **Set attendance goals.** Don't underestimate the harm of these school absences. Children who are chronically absent in kindergarten and first grade are less likely to read on grade level by the third grade.
- **Talk with your pediatrician.** Your pediatrician may refer your child for psychological and educational evaluations. These can help identify any neurodevelopmental and language disorders, learning and intellectual disabilities, emotional health issues, and/or sources of stress that can be addressed.
- **Get supports at school.** Your pediatrician can help you request and advocate for the best Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan at the child's school, as well as help you advocate for changes to existing plans.
- **Reinforce your child's learning at home.** In addition to doing homework, your children should spend time reading not only with you, but also on their own. If a child finds pleasure in reading, it increased the chances that it will become a lifelong habit.
- **Look into alternatives to repeating the grade.** In addition to academic supports and services such as extra one-on-one time with a teacher's aide, there are other alternatives to repeating a grade. One example is multi-age grouping, or mixing children from two or more grade levels in the same classroom. This way, a child stays in the same classroom with his or her friends—continues developing socially and emotionally—but receives the appropriate academic work that he or she needs. It also allows for the completion of grade-appropriate work in areas where they are capable. Other options include allowing children to repeat a failed semester instead of a full year. Extended school year or summer learning programs may also be offered in some areas.