



February 2010

Getting Ready for the Big Test

A great deal of pressure is put on children to perform well on standardized tests, such as the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Their performance is tied to everything from passing the third grade to graduating from high school to schools' grades (and funding) from the State. With preparation — on academic material as well as test taking strategies — you can help your children reduce stress and do their best!

1. Make Sure Your Child Attends School Regularly

Tests reflect the overall achievement of your child — the more often he is in a learning situation, the more likely he will do well on tests.

2. Encourage Your Child to Use *FCAT Explorer*

FCAT Explorer (www.FCATExplorer.com) offers children the opportunity to learn about and practice the reading, mathematics, and science skills tested on the FCAT. The Web site and its activities are free of charge. Students can obtain a user name and password at school.

3. Ensure Your Child Receives Necessary Testing Accommodations (if eligible)

If your child is enrolled in Exceptional Student Education (ESE) or has a Section 504 Plan, she may be eligible for testing accommodations. Accommodations allow for changes in how the test is presented, without any changes to the content of the test. They help lessen the impact of a disability to help your child demonstrate what she knows.

4. Be Supportive and Work to Reduce Anxiety

It is very common for children to be anxious about the FCAT. Reassure your child and focus on helping him do his best. Do not emphasize test scores, as that can raise a child's anxiety level. In addition, practice positive self-talk (such as "I can do it!") and breathing exercises so that your child can help himself relax during the test.

5. Help Your Child Develop Specific Test Taking Strategies

Children should be taught specific ways to approach a variety of test questions (such as reading comprehension questions, multiple choice, essay questions, word problems, etc.). Ask your child's teacher what strategies are being taught in class, and then help your child practice them at home!

6. Ensure Your Child is Getting Enough Sleep

Be sure your child gets a full night's sleep for each of the five days prior to testing. Sleep loss is cumulative and losing even a small amount of sleep days prior to the test may reduce your child's ability to perform well on test day.

7. "Warm Up" the Week Before the Test

The week before the FCAT, have your child practice specific academic skills. For example, she should read, practice math formulas and problem solving techniques, etc. each night. Helping your child "grease the wheels" will help her retrieve stored knowledge more quickly. It will also help her to be ready to focus for lengthy periods of time.

8. Arrive on Time

Be sure your child is present and on time on test days. Rushing in at the last minute may raise your child's anxiety level and not allow him time to get settled and prepared for the test.

9. Start the Morning With a Little TLC

Be sure that your child has a healthy breakfast the morning of the test. If she wears glasses or a hearing aid, be sure she wears them. Also, make sure that your child is dressed comfortably — you want her focus on performing her best, not being cold/warm, having on pants that are too tight/loose, etc.

10. Build in Downtime During the Week

Find ways for your child to relax during the week of the test (for example, encourage physical activity, allow extra play time, etc.).