

HOW TO HELP PREPARE
YOUR CHILD TO BE A
**SCHOOL
LEADER**



Written by the student leadership specialists from GRIP Leadership



GRIPLEADERSHIP

DO YOU WANT TO HELP PREPARE YOUR CHILD TO BE A **SCHOOL LEADER?**

It is natural for parents to want the best for their children because:

- **Parents know their children's strengths better than anyone else**
- **Parents know that the opportunities that children avail themselves of today will shape their future**
- **Parents often know that their children have something to offer others**
- **Parents know that if their children develop leadership skills whilst at school this will be a huge advantage in life**

It is these things that often cause a parent to think "It would be great for my child if they were to have an opportunity to be a school leader."

Unfortunately some Hollywood movies create a distorted view of student leadership. They picture popularity contests, presidential style campaigns and the glamour of achieving a position. At GRIP Leadership, we do not believe that this is what student leadership should be about. We believe that a student does not need to be chosen for any position in order to be a leader. Leadership is something that everyone can do as part of their everyday life, regardless of their age. However, we understand that in large organisations like schools it makes good sense to create structure, which then leads to formal leadership roles for students.

Over the past decade we have worked with approximately 100,000 student leaders across Australia. In our interaction with so many wonderful students we have noticed a number of important traits among many of the students that are leaders at their school. The purpose of this booklet is to pass on what we have observed and learnt to parents who have a keen interest in supporting their son or daughter in this area.



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» We are not psychologists and we are obviously not an expert on your child. However, we are parents and we have worked with students and leaders at over 2,000 schools right around Australia. This booklet contains a series of suggestions (we have called 'Tips') based on our observation of the characteristics of student leaders with whom we have had the privilege of spending time. Our suggestion is that you might consider which of these Tips will be most helpful to your children.

We are not suggesting that by following a few simple steps your child will be chosen as the school captain. We firmly believe that 'being chosen' should not be the goal of any leader, rather that, by serving and contributing in a school community your child will develop life-long leadership skills. Some students will be chosen for roles, some will not... but this should never be what matters.

We hope that the six Tips in this booklet will help you to help your child in their own leadership journey, wherever that takes them!

The GRIP Leadership Team



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1

Don't Talk to Your Child About Leadership Positions...Talk About Leadership Opportunities

It can be tempting to talk to your child about their desire to be a school captain, a house captain or another leadership position. Having a one-off casual conversation of this nature is usually harmless, but it doesn't help if this is a continual conversation. The students who are inevitably chosen for student leadership roles are those that have displayed leadership qualities in an informal setting for many years. Therefore, talking with your child about everyday leadership opportunities is what is most helpful.

You don't even need to mention the word leadership in your discussion. Questions you could ask on a regular basis could include:

- **Did you volunteer to help with anything today?**
- **Is there anyone you spent time with today that really needed it?**
- **Did you try anything new today?**
- **What good ideas did you have today?**
- **How did you help your class/school/team/group today?**
- **Did you make any kind of sacrifice today?**
- **Who did you help today?**

These questions all lead to discussion about everyday leadership opportunities.

These types of questions may feel awkward at first, but as this type of conversation becomes normal between you and your child, you will be helping to form them in the thinking of a leader. Naturally, you should ask these questions in a non-threatening way, so that it doesn't appear to be putting pressure on your child, but invites them into a conversation about leadership.

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2

Encourage Your Child to Be Involved in Everything

Schools are often very busy places, so being involved in absolutely everything may be unrealistic. However, our observation is that it is common for students who are involved in a large number of extra-curricular activities to eventually be chosen for the student leadership roles in the school.

It is important to encourage your child to be involved in things that they might not naturally step forward for. These activities could include: sport, music, drama, singing, dance, debating, fundraising, community service, committees, mentoring, or assisting in the library, canteen or junior classes.

Reasons why being involved in many things helps to prepare students to be a school leader:

- **It is an opportunity to interact with many different groups of students**
- **New skills can be learned**
- **It's an opportunity for others to see the leadership skills of a student being put into practice**
- **It provides a context to contribute to the school and/or serve others**

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3

Encourage Your Child to Solve Problems

Students selected for school leadership roles are often those that are enthusiastic about engaging issues and making changes in the school. They will typically have ideas to contribute and often naively think that anything is possible.

How does your child presently react when they face a problem? Do they enjoy the challenge or do they sit back and wait for others to solve it for them?

We are not talking about an ability to solve complex logic problems or puzzles. The suggestion is that it is helpful for a student in a leadership role to be able to think creatively and have a desire to find a solution whenever they come across a stumbling block.

An obvious way for a parent to encourage this in their child is to ensure that we do not automatically provide the answers to our child when they are confronting a problem. The problem could be anything:

- **A punctured bicycle tyre**
- **A homework question**
- **A complication with the television cables**
- **Searching for a lost item**
- **A clash of dates for two important events**

Instead of solving these everyday problems for your child, an alternative is to talk it through with them and allow them to dwell in the challenge and explore the unknown, encouraging them to collect their own information and make a list of solutions. When the problem has been solved, celebrate that a solution has been reached, as this reinforces that solving problems and finding solutions is a normal part of life and leadership.

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4

Help Your Child With Their Presentation Skills

It is a myth to suggest that people have to be excellent public speakers to be leaders. In fact, some leaders in society are often selected only for their ability to give a compelling presentation and their possible lack of leadership character means that they are largely ineffective as a leader. Whilst public speaking is not the most important ability that a school leader needs to demonstrate, for some roles a school principal or teacher will be looking for a student who is competent speaking in front of a group.

There may also be an expectation that students in some leadership roles will speak at assemblies, events, in other classes or to school visitors. It makes sense that when selecting leaders for these roles that the school would not want to put a student in this position if they would struggle with this and are instead gifted in other areas.

Helping your child with their confidence in speaking in front of a group can be done in a number of ways:

- **Listening whilst they practice a classroom presentation and giving feedback**
- **Encouraging them to make their own phone calls for various things**
- **Inviting them to say a short thank you speech at each of their birthday gatherings**
- **Watching online videos together of effective speeches**
- **Encouraging them to take any opportunity to speak in front of a group**

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5

Do Community Service With Your Child

Leadership is about serving others and contributing to the community. By doing something in your local community together, your child will see that leading is something they should do because it's a good thing; not because it will see them rewarded at school.

There are undoubtedly opportunities for you to be involved in the community together:

- **Contributing in a sporting club**
- **Gardening for an elderly neighbour**
- **Helping with a charity**
- **Involvement in scouts or similar groups**
- **Assisting with an environmental project**

Try to find something that is not a one-off project, but something that can be ongoing. This will help your child see that leadership is a commitment and should be a part of the normal pattern of life, not something that we fit in only when we have the time.

As you contribute in the community, your child will see your leadership skills surface in a setting they may not be familiar with. The key to this tip is to find something that you can do together.

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6

Encourage Your Child to 'Take Responsibility'

When we think highly of our child it can be hard to think that they would do anything wrong. Many teachers can recount stories of phone calls they receive from parents who are complaining that their son or daughter has been accused of wrong doing. The truth is, everyone makes mistakes!

A school principal or teacher will never expect that their student leaders are perfect, but they will expect that they strive to demonstrate good character. Part of this good character is accepting responsibility for mistakes.

When it becomes clear that your child needs to take responsibility for a mistake, you may find it helpful to:

- **Reassure them that everyone makes mistakes**
- **Help them to identify the mistake they have made**
- **Help them identify the ways in which their actions have affected others**
- **Encourage them to make the necessary apologies or changes**

Making a mistake, accepting responsibility, and suitably dealing with it, may indeed be a very helpful learning experience that causes your child to stand out as a potential school leader.

GOOD LUCK!

Hopefully you will see that the tips we have provided are largely based on simple common sense. The great thing about this is that they should therefore be simple enough for you to begin to implement them.

Our team presents annual leadership conferences for primary and secondary students in large cities and small towns right across Australia. Whilst some students attend in school groups, you and your child are very welcome to attend on your own or with a larger group. For full details about our conferences visit www.gripleadership.com.au.



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