

IS IT A LEARNING PROBLEM, OR A ROUTINE PROBLEM?

A 10-question self-assessment for parents of kids birth through 3rd grade

Every educational outcome runs through the adult in the room, and what that adult decides to build. When a young child is struggling with reading or math, the instinct is to ask what's wrong with the child. Usually, the more useful question is what the daily routine around them was designed to produce.

This isn't a test of your child, or of you. It's a set of honest questions to sit with. If several of these feel true, that's not a sign you're failing. It's a sign there's a specific, fixable redesign waiting to happen.

The Ten Questions

On Reading

☐ When you read to your child, is it mostly books they could technically read themselves, rather than richer stories read aloud?

☐ After a story, do you talk about it together, or does the book get closed and the day moves on?

On Math

☐ Does math only happen during a specific worksheet or app, rather than showing up naturally in everyday moments like cooking or shopping?

☐ When your child gets a math answer wrong, is the response mostly correcting the answer, rather than asking how they got there?

On Daily Routine

☐ Is there a consistent time each day set aside for reading or talking together, or does it happen only when there's time left over?

☐ Do transitions in your day (car rides, meals, chores) mostly pass in silence or screens, rather than as a chance to talk and reason together?

On Confidence

☐ Does your child describe themselves as “not a reader” or “bad at math,” even at a young age?

☐ When your child struggles with something, is the first response frustration, more than curiosity about what's actually getting in the way?

On Working With Their Teacher

☐ Do you find out your child is behind mostly from a report card, rather than from an ongoing sense of how they're doing?

☐ Would you be able to describe, in one sentence, what your child is currently working on in reading or math?

What This Means

There's no score here, and that's intentional. But a rough guide:

A few honest yeses: completely normal. Every family's routine has real gaps. Worth naming them plainly, without guilt.

Several yeses, especially across different sections: the pattern usually isn't about your child's ability, or your effort as a parent. It's a sign the routines around learning were built without anyone deciding to build them that way.

If that's where you landed, the next step isn't trying harder at what you're already doing. It's redesigning one or two small routines on purpose, the same way you'd redesign anything else that wasn't working.

If this resonated, *Raising Thinkers: Foundations First* goes much deeper on how to redesign the birth-to-third-grade version of this, one small routine at a time.