

COGNITIVE RAMPS™

A Parent's Guide

Helping the child you love learn — fifteen minutes at a time

A free guide for any parent, grandparent, or guardian

Center for AI Equity and Access

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You Already Know This Child

You know a child who is struggling with something at school — and you've felt, maybe for a long time, that you don't have a way to help that actually works. Maybe their grades don't match what you know they can do. Maybe they've started saying "I'm just bad at this." Maybe they're the quiet one who never complains and never asks, so everyone says they're "fine" — while you sense they're quietly falling behind.

It was never that you didn't care enough. No one ever handed you the right tool.

This short guide introduces one — a way to help a child learn that works with how their mind actually works, that you can use at home, and that costs far less than tutoring. You don't need to be good at your child's schoolwork to use it. You just need to love a child, which you already do.

What a Cognitive Ramp Is

Think of a wheelchair ramp. It doesn't change the person — it changes the path, so the person can get where they were always able to go. A **cognitive ramp** does the same thing for learning. It's a patient learning tool that builds a path to an idea, one small step at a time, starting from what your child already knows.

The child does the thinking. The ramp only builds the road.

Here is the most important thing to understand about it, and what makes it different from a person helping: it does not give answers. Instead, it **asks** — gentle questions that lead your child to figure the idea out themselves. Because your child does the actual thinking, the understanding is truly theirs. It builds their ability, and then it gets out of the way. That is the whole design: a ramp is something you use to get somewhere on your own, not something you lean on forever.

What it is — and is not: A cognitive ramp is a learning tool, like a calculator or a good workbook — not a friend, a companion, or a substitute for people. Your child's real relationships are with you, their family, and their teachers. The ramp's only job is to help them learn and then step back. Keep it that way: a tool your child uses, not a presence in their life.

Three Ways It Helps Your Child

1. It gets them ready for tomorrow — so they walk in ahead, not behind

A struggling child spends the whole school day a step behind: the lesson is new, everyone else seems to get it, and they fall further back. You can flip that. Spend about fifteen minutes in the evening letting your child meet **tomorrow's** lesson gently, before class gets to it. They walk in already knowing the landscape. Teachers call this pre-teaching. Your child will just call it "I already know this one."

2. It is patient in a way no tired evening can be

The tool never sighs, never runs out of patience, and will explain something a different way as many times as your child asks — without judgment. That means homework time doesn't have to end in tears or frustration, and you don't have to be the enforcer. "Explain it to me like I'm five" is always welcome, as many times as it takes.

3. It helps a child who has given up on themselves

When a child says "I'm just bad at this," that isn't the truth — it's a wall. The ramp gently replaces the feeling with a fact: not "I'm bad at math," but "I got stuck at this one step, and that step can be learned." Small, real wins rebuild a child's belief that they can do hard things.

Facts replace feelings. "I'm bad at this" becomes "it broke at step three — and step three is learnable."

Sending Your Child to School Ready

As your child works, they can save questions of their own — things they wonder about — to take to school the next day. This small feature does something powerful.

A struggling child slowly stops asking questions. Every unasked question makes the next one harder, and the silence starts to look like not caring — when really it's a child who gave up on being understood. Getting ready the night before reverses it. Your child arrives with good questions, ready. **And tomorrow, when the teacher asks “any questions?” — your child's hand goes up.**

The quiet child in the back becomes one who helps move the class forward.

This makes the teacher your ally: A teacher sees a child arriving prepared, curious, and engaged — and that changes how they see your child. You're not going around the school; you're sending your child in stronger, and giving the teacher a student who's easier to reach.

Every Child in the House

Here is something families discover. When you bring a learning ramp home for the child whose struggle everyone sees, it's in the house for *all* your children. And often the one who benefits most is the quiet one — the one who “gets by,” who never asks for help, who no one worried about. The child struggling in silence finally gets the same patient help as the child struggling out loud.

Help built for the child who struggles out loud reaches the one who struggles in silence.

So don't ration it to one child. Let every child in your home use it — especially the one who never asks. They may be the one quietly waiting to be seen.

If You've Ever Felt Unheard at School

If your child has an IEP or a 504 plan, or you've sat across from the school and felt talked-over, you know the feeling: you say "I just feel like she's struggling," everyone nods kindly, and nothing changes. The problem isn't that you're wrong. It's that a feeling is easy to set aside.

As your child uses the ramp, it keeps a simple record for you — how much they practiced, what got easier, the questions they started asking. You can print it and bring it. Now you're not bringing a worry; you're bringing a dated, specific record.

Facts replace feelings — and facts are much harder to politely set aside.

An honest and important word: This tool helps your child learn and helps you notice patterns. It does not diagnose your child with anything — no tool can, and it won't pretend to. If a pattern keeps showing up, the right next step is your child's school team or doctor, the people who can properly evaluate. What this record gives you is the ability to walk in with something real, so you're never dismissed for having "just a feeling" again.

How to Start

1. **Pick one child and one thing.** Start with whatever is coming up next in school, or whatever is causing the most struggle right now.
2. **Try fifteen minutes in the evening.** Getting ready for tomorrow's lesson is the easiest place to begin and the fastest to show a difference.
3. **Let your child do the thinking.** Resist the urge to give answers. The ramp won't — and that's the point. Your job is encouragement, not answers.
4. **Include the quiet ones.** Every child in the house, not just the one who worries you most.
5. **Keep the record for meetings.** If your child has a school plan, save what the ramp shows you and bring it to the table.

You don't have to fix everything tonight. You just have to start with one child, one lesson, fifteen minutes.

A Last Word

You came to this guide worried about a child you love. The most important thing is already true: you see that child clearly, and you showed up for them. A cognitive ramp is simply a tool to help you do what you already want to do — help them learn, send them to school ready, and speak up for them with facts instead of only worry.

Do not let anyone's view of your child's struggle define who your child is. You see them clearly. This is a way to help them be seen.

Learn more

To learn more about Cognitive Ramps and the tools built on them, visit the Center for AI Equity and Access at centerforaiequity.org.

A Parent's Guide to Cognitive Ramps. A free resource of the Center for AI Equity and Access. You are welcome to copy and share this guide freely. It supports learning at home and helps you notice patterns to bring to your child's school; it is not a substitute for professional evaluation or diagnosis.