

Motivating your child

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To work hard and sustain their efforts, children need to feel confident of their success. They need to be able to manage their anxieties, frustrations and feelings of discouragement or anger. If they cannot, they will give up trying to succeed.

Children need to be encouraged and inspired. They need to see the relevance of learning. If they are criticised for lack of effort, it is likely they will become more disengaged, acting defiant and rebellious. This behaviour can also provide the perfect cover to hide feelings of anxiety or inadequacy.



Children need to feel proud and appreciated, and want to be like the people they respect and admire. We need to remember that children look up to us for their affirmation and their emotional support. Without it, they become demotivated.

Focus on your child's strengths to keep him motivated and learning. To be motivated, a child needs to be interested. Encourage your child to explore topics, subjects and activities that fascinate him. Show an interest in his interests. Praise his efforts to learn and master information and skills. For example, if animals are his focus then challenge him to identify his five favourite animals and explain why he chose each one.

Demotivated or lazy?

Children are not born lazy. They may feel discouraged, hopeless, anxious or angry to the point they have lost their confidence and drive, but the misconception that children are lazy is common – and very destructive.

Look for the real causes for a lack of motivation and effort; then you are more likely to find solutions. Undiagnosed attention and learning disorders are among the most common reasons for a perceived lack of 'motivation'. These disorders can make schoolwork or homework difficult, so children will look for ways to avoid them.



Tackling difficulties together

Rewards and punishments are irrelevant if your child simply cannot do what is asked of them. If your child has gaps in their learning and knowledge, have a meaningful conversation about it, make a plan together to address this and follow it through. Trust is everything. Be patient and consistent so your child feels supported by you whilst being in control and motivated.

Once your child knows they can trust you to provide support with their difficulties and any possible failures, they will open up and start to become more motivated. Children need to experience the process of making mistakes and failing, and then recovering from that. If you let children fail but remain emotionally present and support them, they're going to be much more resilient and retain their motivation in the future.

Helping your child to organise their papers, books, stationery and resources can really help their motivation. Overwhelmed children can become frustrated and worried.

Focusing on learning, not results

Always look at the positive achievements going on: how pleased a child is when mastering a new activity and is deeply engrossed. When your child comes home from school, rather than asking how well she did in her maths test, ask her to tell you what she learned in maths today. Focus on what she is learning rather than how she is performing, showing that you're more interested in her than her performance. Of course, by recounting the lesson she will also reinforce the maths she learned that day and this process will increase motivation as she looks forward to sharing and impressing you with her knowledge.

Sustaining motivation

Children's anticipation of success and praise makes them extremely motivated. Children need to have goals that they feel they can achieve. This starts at the Foundation Stage with stickers and goes on to achieving predicted exam grades in later years.

Encouraging your child to do what makes him feel good will sustain motivation. Having meaningful and positive conversations create the foundations for a trusting adult-child relationship, where your child feels heard and that they have some control. If your child is grumpy and refuses to do his homework, try asking why he feels that way; he may simply be hungry and want to have a snack before he begins!

Remember, your child wants to please you; this connection is powerful and a motivator, so make sure you give praise when you mean it. Children want to feel good about themselves and others, they want our praise and approval, and they want us to be proud of them.

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