



# Tips for Parents: Motivation and Learning

## **Why aren't my children motivated?**

**The problem might not be motivation.** Low motivation is often a disguise for another type of problem, for example, a learning difficulty, problems with friends, a personal conflict with a teacher, or something as simple as needing a new pair of glasses. Resolving these types of problems can often do wonders for motivation.

**Some children fear failure.** Too often, parents and children themselves set their expectations too high. This can backfire. Faced with the risk of trying and failing, many kids don't try. Help your children set realistic goals and let them know that it's all right to have a setback every once in a while. Always encourage their interests but make sure they know it's okay to progress at their own speed.

**Social situations can also affect your child's motivation.** Friends are very important during childhood, and if your children feel they are not fitting in or making enough friends, they may lose interest in school. Encourage your children to invite friends to the house and see that they participate in activities outside school that will introduce more children into their circle of friends.

**Low motivation can be caused by boredom.** Some children lose interest in school because it's too easy. If you suspect that this might be the reason for your child's lack of motivation, talk to your child's teacher about ways you can work together to make school more challenging.

## **What can I do to motivate my children?**

**Motivation comes from within.** Parents can have a strong influence on their children's motivation, but they can't force their children to be motivated. Children need to feel they're learning for themselves, not for their parents. You can set an example by showing your child how exciting it is to learn something new and by being enthusiastic and motivated yourself.

**Teach your children to set short-term and long-term goals.** Goals are great motivators, especially when those goals are achieved. Younger children need short-term goals they can accomplish in a short period of time. Suggest tasks such as cleaning up their toys or taking out the trash. For older children, encourage long-term goals, such as working at a summer job in order to buy a bicycle.

**The best goals are specific.** Rather than letting your child tell you “I’m going to be neater this year,” have him or her decide “I’m going to clean my room every Saturday.” This is a good lesson for the future. Concrete goals can be measured. Your child cannot succeed unless he or she knows how to recognize success. Concrete successes will give your child more powerful reasons to feel motivated.

**Goals don’t have to be earthshaking.** The important reason for meeting a goal is not to accomplish something overwhelming, but so that your children learn that they can do what they set out to do. This is probably the most powerful motivator your children can have—a sense of competence.

### **How can I help my children be motivated in school?**

- **Talk about school regularly.** It’s impossible to overemphasize how important it is to discuss your child’s school experiences.
- **Display your children’s achievements.** Ask your children to pick two or three of their best school papers each week—such as drawings, math homework, or writing assignment—and post them on the refrigerator, in the bedroom, or in the bathroom.
- **Point out your children’s progress.** As your child learns and improves in school, compare recent papers to papers from the past. Show your child that he or she is making progress and has reasons to feel proud about these accomplishments

For more information:

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory  
<http://www.nwrel.org/request/oct00/index.html>

Video: “Motivating Kids: What Works”  
IOX Assessment Associates  
28170 SW Boberg Rd. Suite 1  
Wilsonville, OR 97070-9205  
(800) 330-3382 <http://www.ioxassessment.com>

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