

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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MOTIVATING YOUR CHILD

Self-motivation lasts a lifetime

Some parents give kids money for every good grade on a report card. That may work, but it puts the emphasis on the reward, not the learning. That can be the problem with a lot of so-called “motivation” ideas. Students learn to depend on a “push” from parents rather than their own desire to succeed.

You won't always be there to promise a reward for getting a job done. Eventually your child will have to learn how to motivate himself. You can help.

The next time your child brings you a good school project, don't automatically offer praise. Instead, ask, “Are you proud of that?” When your child says *yes*, ask a second question: “How do you feel about being successful?”

Your child will probably say that it feels pretty good. And that's the information you can use again and again. Point out to him that he is capable of doing very good work. He can achieve. And when he does, it feels pretty good.

Use this approach when your child is struggling, too. Say, “Remember when you thought you couldn't do long division? You worked hard and you did it. You were proud of yourself. I know that if you work hard you can do this, too!”

Source: Bob Sullo, *Activating the Desire to Learn*, ISBN: 1-4166-0423-5 (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, www.ascd.org/books).



BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

Offering choices builds responsibility

How do you prepare your child to be a responsible adult? Start now by gradually allowing your child to make choices—and expecting her to live with the consequences of her choices. Begin by offering a young child simple choices such as:

- **Which shirt** to wear.
- **Which fruit** to have for a snack.
- **Which book** to read before bed.

As your child gets older, allow her to make some of the following choices:

- **Which homework** assignment to do first.
- **Which topic** to research for a project.
- **Which after-school activity** to join.

Of course, you will always set *some* limits. And remember to increase your child's freedom gradually. It's easier to relax your control than to tighten it up if you've allowed your child to do too much too soon.

Source: Foster Cline and Jim Fay, *Parenting with Love and Logic*, ISBN: 0-89109-311-7 (Piñon Press, www.navypress.com).

WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

Your involvement matters

April 18 – 24 is Public School Volunteer Week. Parent involvement helps students, teachers and staff achieve goals to promote student success. You can volunteer:

- **For just one special event.**
- **On a regular basis.**
- **At home.**
- **In the school building.**

Contact the school today to ask about volunteer opportunities. Your participation can make a difference!

Source: “The Six Slices of Parent Involvement,” Project Appleseed, www.projectappleseed.org.

TALKING AND LISTENING

Get your child to listen

You know your child can *hear*. But if she doesn't seem to *listen*, try these tips:

- **Find the right moment.** Don't try to talk when your child is rushing out the door to catch the bus.
- **Reduce distractions.** Turn off the TV.
- **Get her attention.** Gently hold her shoulders and look into her eyes while you talk.
- **Ask for a “rerun.”** When you are finished speaking, ask your child to repeat what you just said.



BUILDING WRITING SKILLS

An ‘Idea Book’ can help eliminate writers’ block

Help your child paste newspaper photos and interesting articles in an “Idea Book.” Add brochures from museum visits, postcards, great quotations and more. Having lists of story ideas will get him started on his next writing assignment.



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can parents help children cope with test anxiety?

Q: End-of-the-year tests are coming soon and I'm worried. My daughter studies hard, but when she takes a test, she freezes up. How can I help her calm down so she can show everything she has learned?



A: Anxiety can keep kids from doing well on tests, but there are ways to help your daughter. Teach her to:

- **Relax.** Have her try taking a few deep breaths. Relaxation is a skill, and it will get better with practice. When you're in a frustrating situation (like stuck in traffic), you can say, "Let's both practice our relaxation skills."
- **Prepare gradually.** Cramming the night before an exam can actually increase her anxiety. Encourage your daughter to study a little bit every night for the week leading up to the test.
- **Give herself a pep talk.** Have her say to herself, "I know this. I learned it. I can do this."
- **Keep things in perspective.** One bad test is not the end of the world. If she knows you believe in her, she can start to believe in herself. Like it or not, her life is going to be filled with "tests." Sometimes, they will be school tests, of course. But she'll also face tests on the athletic field and in a job. Learning to handle pressure is an important life skill.

PARENT QUIZ

What is homework like in your house?

When parents find ways to make homework a positive experience, children will usually do it without a battle. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see how you're doing:

- ___ **1. Do you give** your child some choices—such as which subject to study first? Or whether to study right after school or before dinner?
- ___ **2. Are you available** to offer support when your child is studying?
- ___ **3. Do you make** homework a time for the whole family? Do you turn off the TV and ask everyone to do quiet reading or studying?
- ___ **4. Do you praise** your child for working hard?
- ___ **5. Do you help** your child by asking spelling words or creating flash cards?

How did you do? Each *yes* answer means you are doing your part to make homework a positive learning experience for your child. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

"Work is either fun or drudgery. It depends on your attitude. I like fun."
—Colleen C. Barrett

IMPORTANCE OF ATTENDANCE

Follow the three P's to get an A in attendance

You started out the year great. Everyone got up and out the door on time. But lately you've started to slip. To make sure your child still gets to school on time, remember the three P's:

- 1. Plan it.** Each evening, plan for the next day. Help your child pack his lunch and put it in the refrigerator. Set his (packed) backpack by the door.
- 2. Prioritize.** Avoid taking your child out of school for medical appointments or family trips.
- 3. Practice.** Practice does make perfect. Getting into daily routines will make it easier to get your child to school on time—every day.

Source: "Increasing Student Attendance: Strategies from Research and Practice," www.nwrel.org/request/2004june/strategies.html.

ENCOURAGING READING

Enjoy read-aloud time

Read-aloud time should be fun. Laugh and enjoy the story with your child. Be sure to choose books that are at her reading level. If she struggles with each word, ask her teacher how you can help work on your child's reading skills at home.

MAKING TIME COUNT

Learn about local places

Is your street named for a famous person? How did your town get its name? The next time you're in the library or online together, do some research. If your child is especially interested, he can write the answers in the form of a story.



Source: Ruth Graves, *The RIF Guide to Encouraging Young Readers*, ISBN: 0-3852-3632-8 (Bantam Dell Publishing, www.randomhouse.com/bantamdell).

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