

---

## A QUICK NOTE ABOUT MOTIVATION

---

There are 2 types of  
motivation

**Intrinsic:** Kids naturally **WANT to do something. CHOICE is involved.** The child makes her *own* choice and achieves satisfaction from both the act of choosing and from the opportunity to play with the toy or wear the shirt. Since the activity is generating the motivation, it is mostly self-sustaining for as long as the child wants to continue the activity.

**Extrinsic:** Kids do something to gain an external reward (pleasing another, positive reward). The reward comes from outside and has to be continually given for the child to remain motivated enough to continue the activity. It is more difficult for a child to sustain extrinsically motivated activity because of this reliance upon some outside force.

Children learn more and persist more when behavior is **INTRINSICALLY** motivating. When he believes he is pleasing himself. Parents can build on this sense of confidence by guiding their child's play and activities while still giving the child a range of options. This unstructured play is an essential element of the child's motivation, learning, and development.

---

---

## A Parent's Guideline for MOTIVATION!

Comprised by Dr. Krystal White,  
Pediatric Psychologist,  
Landstuhl Regional Medical  
Center

**Parents worry when their children avoid work.** This guideline will help parents learn how to **MOTIVATE** their kids to **WORK**.

---

*A MOTIVATED PERSON/CHILD is LIKELY to*

---

- Chooses tasks that are challenging.
  - Begins tasks without having to be prodded.
  - Show serious effort and concentration.
  - Have a positive attitude toward work, learning and schoolwork.
  - Use coping strategies to get through challenges
  - Stick with tasks until successful completion.
- 

*An UN MOTIVATED PERSON/CHILD is LIKELY to*

---

Choose work that is inappropriately easy.

- Need lots of prodding to get started.
  - Put in minimal effort.
  - Show a negative or apathetic attitude about learning and schoolwork.
  - Give up quickly or gets irritable when the going gets rough.
  - Leave many tasks unfinished.
- 

*What MOTIVATES KIDS?*

---

- Goals (both short and long term)
- Rewards
- Social Connectedness and Recognition
- Growth (personal, intellectual, physical)
- Competition
- Marketing
- Approval (peer and parental)
- Rules and Boundaries
- Play and Fun

A number of behavioral characteristics are indicators of high motivation. Here are some of the important factors and some ways to help your child develop these characteristics.

**Persistence** is the ability to stay with a task for a **AGE APPROPRIATE** amount of time. A highly motivated child will stay involved for a long period of time, whereas an unmotivated child will give up very easily when not instantly successful. Children learn persistence when they are successful at a challenging task. The art in building persistence is in **offering a task that is just challenging enough, but not**

**overwhelming.** Give support and help at first, and then REMOVE yourself. Praise EFFORT, not ACHIEVEMENT.

**Choice of challenge** is another characteristic of motivation. **Children who experience success in meeting one challenge will become motivated, welcoming another.** For example, kids that see themselves as good in one sport are likely to try another (or video game, or art project! This is how HABITs are developed). **FEELING COMPETENT (GOOD AT SOMETHING) IS INTRINSICALLY MOTIVATING.** Your job as a parent is to **GUIDE** them to choose an activity that is slightly difficult for them, but provides an appropriate challenge. When they successfully complete such a task, children gain a high level of satisfaction. Unmotivated children (those who have not experienced early success) will pick something that is very easy and has an instant success. With such easy success, children feel only a very low level of satisfaction, because they know that the task offered little challenge. The challenge for parents is helping their child find an appropriate challenge while still allowing the choice to be the child's.

How **CLINGY** a child is or how much he or she attempts to get your HELP also is another indicator of motivation. Children with strong intrinsic motivation do not need an adult constantly watching and helping with activities. Often, helicopter parents (those who seek to rescue their kids or overprotect them or solve their problems for them) have kids who lack motivation because they may feel less capable than children who do things independently. People are MORE motivated to work harder when they are the **SOLE** owners of the task at hand and the **SOLE** effort involved. Parents can **GIVE THEIR CHILD SPACE** to occupy their own free time, solve their own problems and invent their own worlds in pretend play rather than depending on an adult, or a toy/game unit, to solely entertain them.

---

### *What can PARENTS DO?*

---

Kids are born **NATURALLY** Curious! Most kids like to explore and discover, although some are **MORE PHYSICALLY** active than other. Kids learn from **everything** they do. If their explorations bring pleasure or success, they will want to learn more. During these early years, children form attitudes about learning that will last a lifetime. Children who receive the right sort of support and encouragement during these years will be creative, adventurous learners throughout their lives. Children who do not receive this sort of support and interaction are likely to have a much different attitude about learning later in life.

There are several strategies parents can use to help children remain more fully intrinsically motivated.

- Provide an environment (through age appropriate toys, activities, etc.) that allows children to freely explore and to see the effect of their actions (i.e., toys that have visible or tangible changes when moved). **THIS IS NOT TV/COMPUTER GAMES/VIDEO GAMES**
- Allow children ample time when working to allow for persistence. When children are deeply involved with an activity, make sure that they can finish without interruption. **Resist the natural urge to "help,"** and let the child know if, for example, we have to go to the grocery store in a few minutes.

*TIP!*

**EVERY TIME A CHILD IS CHALLENGED, NEW BRAIN CONNECTIONS ARE MADE. IT IS LIKE A MUSCLE THAT NEEDS EXERCISE**

- Respond to children's needs in a consistent, PRESENT, predictable manner, but allow them to be as independent as possible. This does NOT mean ceding all control to your child. All children need clearly defined limits. Playtime, however, need not be structured and organized. Let your kid be a kid!
- Provide many opportunities for **children and adults to explore together and interact directly**. It is important for both children and adults to be working together on an activity. This lets you observe, model, and encourage your child.
- Provide situations that give children an acceptable challenge. Activities that are slightly difficult for the child will be more motivating and provide for stronger feelings of success when accomplished. This may take some trial and error at first.
- Give children opportunities to evaluate their own accomplishments. Rather than stating that you think they have done a good job, ask them what they think of their work. You'll never go wrong by asking the question, "What do YOU think?"
- Do not use excessive rewards. They tend to undermine children's ability to value themselves. Praise and rewards should be based upon children's effort and persistence, rather than on the actual accomplishment.

Kids need 1) **a small amount of direction** (limits/boundaries) 2) **a large amount of freedom**. It is not necessary to praise and reward children for their own actions as they attempt to control their environment. The feelings of accomplishment they gain from results of those actions will be reward enough. Providing excessive praise and rewards is unnecessary and can actually be harmful to children's motivation and desire to learn. Remember, the habits and attitudes toward learning that are formed in these early years set the mood for all future learning.

---

*Move from PRAISE to ENCOURAGEMENT*

---

Stop PRAISING your kids so much! Only praise kids for TRYING or DOING something that is DIFFICULT. You don't have to PRAISE to tell your kid I LOVE YOU! This is the best gift of all

Praising your kids can do more harm than good. Praise or flattering words DO NOT BOOST self esteem or PERFORMANCE.

Your Goal: INCREASE your child's ability to CHALLENGE himself by PRAISING the RIGHT THING.

If you praise ACHIEVEMENT, or INTELLIGENCE "You are SO SMART!" a child learns that they only will be praised for performance. These children SHY AWAY when they face perceived challenges. Children whose parents PRAISE EFFORT, often TRY harder during challenges.

Don't IGNORE failures. Be honest. Don't say, "you'll do better next time, you are so great!" Say "What do you think went wrong?" This allows the kid to find her own problems and solutions. Parents who ignore failures often do not give kids a chance to identify areas of weaknesses, LEARN from them and practice.

HERE ARE SOME WAYS TO ENCOURAGE EFFECTIVELY

1. PRAISE CONCENTRATION
2. PRAISE EFFORT
3. PRAISE PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR (e.g. sharing)

4. **DO NOT PRAISE ACHIEVEMENT (unless you know that the test/report/essay/studying was difficult).**
5. **AVOID LABELS (“you are so smart!” “you are so pretty!” “you are so strong!”) this builds up a fear that challenge (e.g. a pimple, a bad sports game) will make them lose that label.**
6. **A lot of us praise because we feel guilty that our kids struggle or feel bad about themselves. DON’T. Negative feelings can MOTIVATE people towards growth**
7. **INSTEAD OF RESULTS, Focus on PROCESS. Say “How was the game, DID YOU HAVE FUN?” rather than “DID YOU WIN??” Wise parents know, that the road to success is learning how to manage setbacks and challenge.**

---

*A Growth Mindset (see Carol Dweck’s work) Perform Better in the long run*

---

When you  
lose, don't lose  
the lesson  
DALI LAMA

We want kids to always know that they can DEVELOP more skills and more resources. This GROWTH mindset builds CONFIDENCE, RESILIENCE, and SOCIAL CONNECTIONS.

By helping kids learn from mistakes, “hmmm....what do you think went wrong?”

You will

- Foster a love of learning
- TRY harder
- Increase CONFIDENCE
- Be Happier
- Perform Better in the long run

---

### A BANK ACCOUNT APPROACH to TEENAGERS

---

In the morning your teen is complaining about not having enough lunch money, and in the afternoon he is criticizing the type of salad dressing you just bought at the store. Nothing ever seems good enough to satisfy his shifting moods, long list of preferences, or unspoken rules (pop quiz can you name all the things that you should do or not do in front of his friends?) Many parents find themselves questioning “does my kid even like me?” or more importantly: “do I even like him or her?” These questions often lead to feelings of guilt and pessimism that persist into how you communicate with each other: everything you say to one another is either argumentative or cold.

Imagine your overall interaction relationship with your child (or spouse, or family member, or supervisor, even!) as an account. How would you describe the overall emotional capital of your relationship with your teen? Positive? Negative? Neutral? A social capital theory of relationships asserts that if you perceive your relationship as positive, of having more deposits than withdrawals, you’ll be more capable of handling the negative aspects that all relationships have. As a bonus, you’ll find yourself much happier as well. The key to positive parenting is putting more deposits into your teens account than withdrawals.

One way to “deposit” into your teen’s relationship bank is by encouraging him or her. This suggestion may seem counterintuitive at first. Given all the negative things you are observing in your child, you may be thinking that you don’t want to reward his bad behavior. But remember the

social capital idea: more deposits equal more Positivity, which will also mean *less* negativity. This is not rewarding bad behavior, but *preventing* it from occurring in the first place.

Most people will do or say something each day that is worthy of praise. All too often parents can get stuck into a communication pattern with their teen that includes only commands or highlights of what the child has done inadequately. Praise turns this rut around. How?

Think about a crummy day you've experienced lately. You probably felt a bit hopeless, frustrated, lonely, or as if nothing you do is capable of improving the day. Imagine how you would feel if in the middle of this day, a person looked you in the eye and genuinely offered you praise. Something as small as, "you are such a good baker, I would *love* this recipe" can make a huge impact.

Now, why does that feel good? As we develop, we rely more on words to shape the way we learn and make sense of the world. Affection, encouragement, and praise nurture a positive identity and a sense of security. This stability is crucial for teens in particular, who are trying to figure out who they are and want to become.

As words are a powerful shaper of our sense of self, your teen will learn from you how to interact with others. Do you want to be a parent who has a credit in bank, or a deficit? Use praise, and raise your credit score! Here's how:

### **How to Praise:**

- 1. Be SPECIFIC.** Making vague comments like, "you are a great kid," doesn't make such a big impact. A praise like this may go in one ear and out the other. Pointing out something unique, however, is much more likely to touch your teen's sense of identity. Some examples include pointing out a keen interest in fashion or music, being diligent with homework or a hobby, or for following through with household chores. An example would be, "It says a lot about someone who studies math as hard as you do. I am proud that you are so hardworking."
  - 2. Be Selective.** Pick one specific praise to give each day, and vary the manner in which you say or communicate it to him. You have to be selective in order for your praise to feel genuine to others. Praising a child all the time can lead him to feel *insecure*, the opposite of what you are aiming for! Children who are praised too often with out selectivity attribute the praise to a lack of ability rather than the other way around. Used with variation, however, praise is much more likely to touch your teen's sense of identity.
  - 3. Be Supportive: point out the good** Research has shown that children respond more favorably to positive feedback than a consequence that is negative. For instance, if a parent praises a desired behavior (like putting away laundry) a child will be more likely to do that behavior again compared to a parent who scolds a child for not doing a chore.
- PARENTAL MODELING OF EMPATHETIC, CARING BEHAVIOR toward children--and toward others in the children's presence--is strongly related to children's development of prosocial attitudes and behavior. This means....the MORE POSITIVE AND FUN YOU ARE, in the context of consistent expectations, THE MORE POSITIVE BEHAVIORS YOU'LL GET (Eisenberg-Berg and Mussen 1978; Kohn 1991; McDevitt, Lennon, and Kopriva 1991; and Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, and King 1979).

## *Five Steps to Help Your Child Accomplish Nearly Anything*

*There is a big difference\ between wanting to do something and actually getting it done.*

*Here are five steps parents can use to help children do something they want to accomplish.*

*Experts say the likelihood of success increases with each additional step they take.*

*Steps and the Likelihood of Success for Each:*

<i>Make a conscious decision to do something .....</i>	<i>25%</i>
<i>Decide when they will do it .....</i>	<i>40%</i>
<i>Plan how they will do it.....</i>	<i>50%</i>
<i>Commit to someone else that they will do it .....</i>	<i>65%</i>
<i>Make a specific future appointment with the person they committed to, at which time they report whether they've done it .....</i>	<i>95%</i>

---

### *MOTIVATE GOALS!*

---

Goals turn expectations from ideas into reality. Knowing what he is expected to do will help your child accomplish little unless he has a plan for how to do it. Here are some ways to help your child set meaningful goals:

- 1) Write the goals down. Research shows that we are more likely to accomplish written goals than those we merely talk about, perhaps because written goals provide a visual reminder of what we need to do. So don't let your child hide his list of goals in his desk drawer. Post them in a prominent spot—such as a kitchen wall—where he can refer to them often.
- 2) Make the goals specific. “[name] will do better in math next quarter,” is a difficult goal to achieve. What does doing “better” mean? What steps will he need to take to achieve this “better” performance? But change the goal to “[name] will raise his math grade from a C to a B,” and then the child knows exactly what is expected of him.
- 3) The goal doesn't stand on its own, however. Your child still needs a map to get there. “To accomplish his goal, [name] will do the following: 1) review math problems 20 minutes each night, whether or not he has an upcoming quiz; 2) stay after school once a week for the math enrichment class; 3) ask Mom to give him a practice math test every Thursday.”
- 4) Make the goals measurable. A measurable goal allows you and your child to chart his progress. For example, you can tell whether your son is on his way to raising his grade by whether he is finishing homework with less difficulty and whether his marks on math quizzes are steadily improving. If there's no way to check progress, the goal is not measurable. Change it.