Motivation Methods *That Work*

"Have you finished your book report?" "When are you going to take out the trash?" Does it seem like you're constantly nagging at your youngster to get things done?

Instead of nagging, try the suggestions and "can-do" tips in this special report. You'll boost your child's enthusiasm for doing what he needs to do—in school and at home!

Offer praise

Never underestimate the power of a "Good job!" Children crave approval from their parents. A positive response, such as a hug or a smile, can be a great incentive. Whether it's for washing a sink full of dishes or passing a math quiz, a word of encouragement will show your youngster that you notice his hard work. His self-confidence will soar, and he will want to keep trying.

Can-do tips: Let your child overhear you bragging to a friend when he cleans his room without being asked. Hang tests on the fridge, or send copies of a good report card to relatives.

Create excitement

When your youngster needs help getting motivated for a task, find a way to make it enjoyable. For example, if you make reviewing for a test entertaining, you're not only helping her study, you're teaching her that learning doesn't have to be boring.

Can-do tip: The next time your child is preparing for a test, turn studying into a game. *Example:* Draw a baseball diamond on a piece of paper. Ask her questions related to what she's studying. Tell your youngster that she gets a base hit for every correct answer and a strikeout for every incorrect one. For every three base hits, she scores a home run.

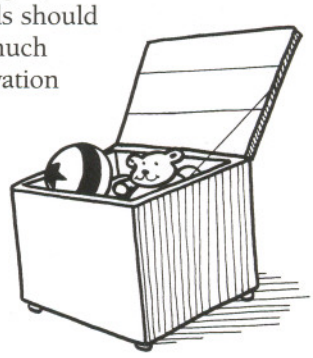
Show interest

Let your child know that what he's involved in is important to you. When you express curiosity about the new computer game he's playing with his friends or you regularly attend parent-teacher conferences, your youngster will see that you're interested.

Can-do tips: Ask your child questions about his day. *Examples:* "How was the field trip?" "What was the score of the game?" Attend extracurricular and school functions, such as music recitals and parent nights, whenever possible.

Give rewards

Simple rewards, like extra privileges, can be powerful motivators. But rewards should be used sparingly. Bargaining too much can limit your child's natural motivation by putting the focus on getting something.



Can-do tips: Offer your youngster a special snack or extra TV time when she finishes her homework quickly. Or surprise her with a thank-you card in her lunch bag for helping you clean the garage.

Use consequences

Experts agree that punishing kids for not doing what they're supposed to do doesn't always produce improved results. However, linking consequences to performance can provide a reason for your child to get the job done while giving him a greater sense of control over his life.

Can-do tip: Try to connect what your youngster needs to do with an outcome. *Example:* "After you rake the leaves in

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the yard, you can go skateboarding." This way, it will be an action on his part, rather than you, that lets him do something he wants.

Encourage problem solving

When your child runs into a problem, don't solve it for her. Instead, give her clues that will help her discover the answer. The more she does on her own, the more confident she will feel about her work, and the harder she will try. And she'll learn how to handle future problems.

Can-do tip: If your youngster comes to you for homework help, have her turn the problem into a question. *Example:* If she asks you for the name of the first president of the United States, suggest that she ask herself, "Where in my textbook did I read about the first president?"

Manage stress

You may not realize it, but stress can zap your child's energy. Feeling that he can't get everything done can keep your youngster from trying to do anything. Help him simplify his schedule so he can regain the motivation he needs to focus on what's most important: school, family and friends, exercise, and relaxation.

Can-do tip: If your child seems overwhelmed, make some schedule changes. Cut back on after-school activities like clubs and sports, and limit playdates.

Establish expectations

It's important for parents to set high standards for their children at home and in school. Students whose parents expect them to do well in school have a better chance of learning success. Encourage your youngster to give her best effort in everything she does. Let her know that some things may be harder for her than others, but there's no excuse for not trying.

Can-do tips: Teach your child to be responsible at home by assigning chores and setting clear guidelines for behavior. If she's struggling with schoolwork, offer tutoring or other help to improve her skills and boost her self-confidence.

Provide choices

Children, like adults, are motivated by their own interests. Allowing your child to make decisions will give him a sense of control and encourage him to tackle the job at hand.

Can-do tip: Give your youngster plenty of opportunities to have a say in day-to-day decisions. For example, ask him which movie you should rent for the evening or whether he'd like to visit a museum or a pet farm on a weekend trip. Let him choose whether to spend his allowance on a new video or the next book in his favorite series.

Accept mistakes

Some kids are afraid of trying new things because they think making a mistake means they failed. When your youngster messes up, tell her you believe in her, and give her a chance to try again. Treating mistakes as opportunities instead of failures shows that you value effort, not just achievement.

Can-do tip: When your child makes a mistake, help her explore what went wrong. *Examples:* If she gets a poor grade, you might ask questions like, "Did you understand the teacher's instructions?" and "Did you remember to bring your review worksheets home?" If she forgets that she has practice after school, try, "Did you write the date on your calendar?" By figuring out why mistakes happen, your youngster will improve her chances for success in the future.

Home & School CONNECTION

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