



PEN Notes: Fact Sheet #18

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The Motivated Child

“Young children develop attitudes toward learning from the significant others in their lives. If parents or other adults nurture a child's self-confidence and curiosity, and provide resources that invite exploration, they instill the message that learning is useful and fun. Children who observe adults being enthusiastic toward education and coping positively with setbacks will likely follow their adult role models and pursue knowledge as well as persevere when faced with failure.” (Source: Leah Davies, M.Ed., Auburn University)

Motivation is the sense of need or desire that prompts children to do their best. There are many ways to encourage children to be self-motivated.

Seven guidelines for encouraging self-motivation:

1. Express confidence in your children's abilities.
2. Help your children see that they are capable of performing a given task. Children who trust their own abilities feel that they make a difference.
3. Involve children of all ages in family decision-making. Children gain an internal belief that their choices do make a difference.
4. Encourage your children to serve others. Kids who believe they can make a difference in the world have an enormous sense of personal power.
5. Reinforce the message of “the power of one” to make a difference, using real-life stories of people who have overcome adversity or changed the lives of others.
6. Help your children understand natural rewards such as feeling a sense of accomplishment.
7. Set a good example. If you strive to do things by being motivated and self-disciplined, children will notice. Source: Rathvon, N., The Unmotivated Child.



We can ask, beg, bribe, and demand that our children work harder, but is that going to ensure that they are motivated to do their best when they are on their own? Ultimately, motivation has to come from within the child. To be self-motivated, children must feel that they really can make a difference.

Highly motivated children have three qualities:

1. They feel that they have control over many things that happen to them.
2. They believe that their life has a purpose.
3. They are optimistic about their own future.

Types of motivation from the outside In (extrinsic).



These can actually discourage self-motivation.

- Paying your child to learn by giving money, rewards or excessive praise.
- Making a deal such as "If you will do this, I will..."
- Begging or forcing a child to work harder or to do better.
- Fixing the child's problems for him.
- Allowing the child to avoid taking responsibility for his/her actions and to blame those around him/her.

Source: Benson, P.L., What Kids Need to Succeed.

Barriers to inner-motivation:

1. Nothing I do really matters.
2. Someone else will do it for me.
3. Why try, I will just be criticized.
4. I don't know how to do it.
5. I am never going to be able to understand this.
6. No matter how hard I study, I am still going to flunk. I don't care. (This really means, "I 'm feeling so poorly about myself that it is safer not to care".)

Types of motivation from the inside out (intrinsic).

These activities will help build a sense of self-worth and a sense that "learning is fun".

- Tap into your child's interests and passions, and try to connect them to what he/she is learning at school.
- Model life-long learning. Show an on-going interest in learning new things, making new discoveries, and exploring new topics.
- Clearly communicate to your children that you value learning.
- Affirm and encourage achievement in diverse areas as students discover their own interests and capabilities.
- Make learning a family affair. Together with your children, learn more about their favorite subjects.