

Help Your Child Develop an 'I Can Do It' Attitude



Children who do well in school are like the engine in the story *The Little Engine That Could*. Successful students say to themselves, "I think I can. I think I can. I think I can!"

Teachers know that children who *think they can* be successful in school usually are. And those who *think they can't* usually aren't. Here's how you can help your child develop the positive attitude that can lead to achievement in school and in life.

Quick Tips

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Read About Success!

Most successful people have overcome obstacles on the way to achieving their goals. If your child is young, you might read *The Little Engine That Could* and talk about how the engine's positive attitude helped it get up the hill.

If your child is older, look for biographies of famous men and women. These two approaches work well:

1. **Talk about successful people** your child admires, then find books and articles about those people in the library and online. By reading the materials, your child can learn about the problems they overcame on the way to becoming successful.
2. **Talk about problems** your child faces. Then ask your librarian for help finding books your child might read about people who have overcome exactly those problems.

Helen Keller succeeded despite being deaf and blind. Albert Einstein struggled with math in school. Michael Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team. Thomas Edison failed many times on the way to inventing an electric light bulb. There are thousands of other examples of people who achieved success despite their challenges.



If Your Child Has a Learning Disability

Kids with learning disabilities often believe they can't do things that others can. Educators say that a student's attitude about succeeding has at least as much of an impact as the student's abilities—or disabilities.

Incentives can also motivate students. Choose a small reward your child wants—permission to have a friend spend the night, watching a favorite movie or a chance to choose the dinner menu, for example. Then give points or tokens toward the goal when your child shows a positive attitude or puts in effort.

If Your Child Is a Perfectionist

Sometimes, a desire to be "perfect" can make children doubt their abilities. Because they set such high standards for themselves, they may feel that they never quite measure up.

If your child is a perfectionist, point out the difference between doing things right—and doing the right thing. When it's time to do schoolwork, ask, "What's the most important thing you need to do tonight?" This will help your child learn to set priorities.



Use Positive 'Self-Talk'

Watch professional athletes. Many of them talk silently—or even out loud—to themselves during a game. They say things like, “I’m going to hit this one out of the park.” That same positive attitude can work for your child. Before sitting down to study, your child might say, “I’m going to do all my math problems correctly.”

You can also make sure your child hears you talking positively to yourself. Hearing and seeing you say things like, “I will get myself organized and finish all my work,” can be a powerful positive example.

Use Specific Praise

Any kind of praise from adults is likely to motivate kids. But experts have found that the most effective praise is specific.

So instead of saying, “You’re a wonderful kid,” try talking about the things your child has done quite well:

- “You really stuck with that math homework.”
- “You cleaned your room without being told.”
- “You organized your research paper very well.”
- “I love the way you described the sunset in this story.”

Display Your Child's Schoolwork

Be sure to express pride in what your child accomplishes in school. Many families use the refrigerator door to display schoolwork. Others install a bulletin board in their child’s room. One parent created a “brag line”—schoolwork hung from a long piece of yarn strung from one end of the kitchen to the other. You could also display your child’s schoolwork in an album or scrapbook or keep it in a special box.

Point out the Results of Effort

When your child has worked hard to achieve a goal, be sure to point out the link between hard work and success. You might say, “You see? Your hard work studying really paid off in this good grade.” Show that you are proud of what your child accomplishes in school.

Talk About These Famous Quotations

“Our life is what our thoughts make it.”
—*Marcus Aurelius*

“If you think you can win, you can win. Faith is necessary to victory.”
—*William Hazlitt*

“The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.”
—*Oliver Goldsmith*

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