

# The Disengaged Student



**"School is so bo-o-o-ring."**

Sound familiar? Every child seems to lose interest in school once in a while. But some children *never* show an interest in schoolwork (or anything else). They rush through their assignments—when they remember to bring their books home. They turn work in late or not at all. In class, they keep quiet unless the teacher calls on them. Even then, they're likely to shrug their shoulders and go back to daydreaming or staring out the window.

What causes this apathetic behavior in children? What can families and schools do to give these children the skills they need to motivate themselves?

Inside are some basic facts families need to know about dealing with a disengaged student.

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## What causes disengagement?

Parents often report that their child "just doesn't care." In fact, disengaged children may care *too much*. Ironically, one of the causes of apathy is that children don't want to do poorly. They'd rather say they didn't try than say they tried their hardest and came up short.

So children who feel that the emphasis is on grades rather than learning, on *being* the best rather than on *doing* one's best, tend to lose interest in learning for its own sake. Then, when learning gets challenging, they disengage.

Other children have never had to develop a sense of responsibility for themselves. They've had everything done for them (including schoolwork). When the time comes for these children to stand on their own two feet, they won't have developed the mental "muscles" they need to be independent.



## Teach goal-setting.

One of the best ways to help children become more engaged is by encouraging them to set—and achieve—goals. Help your child write down a specific goal, and together make a plan for achieving it.

You'll need to show your child how to break down a big task into several smaller steps. Next, your child should cross off each step after achieving it. Tracking progress is a great motivator.

What should your child's reward be after achieving a goal? Brainstorm together and develop a list of non-material rewards, such as setting aside special time to work on a hobby, create artwork, shoot hoops outside, etc.

### My Goals:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



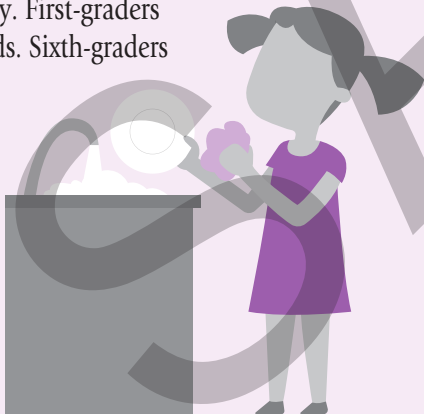
# What can parents do?

## Listen to the messages you give your child.

Do you spend most of your time being critical? Instead, remind your child that your love is unconditional. Also, share stories about people who succeeded as a result of their efforts.

## Let your child take responsibility ... and accept consequences.

Every time you do something for your child that your child could be doing independently, you're sending the powerful message: "I don't really think you can do this." Pretty soon, your child will believe it, too. Make a conscious effort to give your child more responsibility. First-graders can make their beds. Sixth-graders can do the dishes. And children of *any* age should be responsible for completing their own school assignments.



## Talk about *doing your best*, not *being the best*.

Emphasize the importance of *effort*, and keep in mind your child's strengths and weaknesses. For a child who is a poor speller, setting a goal of a perfect score on every spelling test is probably not realistic. But every child can try to achieve a personal best.



## Remind your child of past successes.

Sometimes, when children say, "I can't," they're really saying, "I don't know how." Talking about past accomplishments is the best way to demonstrate that your child really *can* achieve goals. Success in one area often leads to confidence in others.



## Show your support.

Remember to show you are proud of your child's efforts. A smile, a hug, or a "good job!" can go a long way toward keeping your child motivated.

There's nothing wrong with an occasional material reward to recognize a job well done. But when rewards, not achievement, become the goal, it's time to change focus.



These tips won't turn a disengaged student into a highly motivated learner overnight. But they can start a child down the path that will lead to motivation ... and success.

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