



25 Ways Parents Can ...

Motivate Children



... and Help Them Do Better in School

THE
PARENT
INSTITUTE®

One of a Series of Booklets for Parents

Remember the Story of The Tortoise and the Hare?

The tortoise won the race because he was more motivated than the hare. He just kept plugging away until he reached his goal.

Motivation is important for your child, too. Kids who are motivated are excited to try new things. They do their schoolwork (and their household jobs) without a lot of nagging. They say *yes* more often than they say *no*.

Not surprisingly, motivated kids do better in school. They always do their best. They enjoy the challenge of learning something new. And studies show that they often do better than bright students who just don't try.

No one has more influence over your child's motivation than you. Your actions can help your child develop a "can do" attitude.

This booklet contains 25 ways you can motivate your child. Once she's* motivated, your child will be on the road to success in school—and in life.

**Every child is unique, so we often use the singular pronoun. We'll alternate the use of "he" and "she" throughout this booklet.*



1 **Teach your child to set goals.** Start small. For young children, goals might include tying their own shoes or learning to spell their names. Older children may want to learn a list of spelling words or learn how to ride a bike. Celebrate each success. Remember: Kids who feel successful in one area are more willing to try to learn something else.



2 **Talk about schoolwork every day.** Ask your child questions about the school day. And try to be specific: “What was the funniest thing that happened in school today?” “What story did you read?”

Then really listen to the answers. When you show an interest in schoolwork, your child will pay attention and be more eager to share experiences.



3 **Recognize success.** Store your child’s awards, ribbons, honor roll certificates and photos of school events in a photo album. When you put something in the album, talk with your child about how proud you are of her accomplishment.

Occasionally, take out the album to show grandparents and other relatives. And when your child is having a bad day, encourage her to look through her album to remember past successes.

4 **Remind your child that he *can*!** Sooner or later, nearly every child says, “I can’t.” Here’s how one clever mom attacked the problem. Every day, she had her son choose three papers from the ones he’d brought home from school. They could be artwork, math homework that he’d completed or anything else that he thought was his best work.

These papers went up on the dining room wall. They provided a visible reminder for her son that he could improve his school performance. “We may not be able to see our dining room wall,” the mom said, “but we *can* see a major change in my son’s attitude toward school.

5 **Reward your child with your time.** Some parents reward their children with money or presents for special accomplishments. But this teaches kids to work only for rewards, rather than for the pride of doing a job well. Instead, reward your child with *your time*.

If your child has done something special, let her choose an activity for the whole family to enjoy—a visit to the zoo, a favorite movie or a family picnic.





6 Motivate your child to write. Use an inexpensive dry erase board or chalkboard to encourage your child to write. Have her use it to schedule her time. She can write plans for the next day (and check them off when she's finished). She can also write long-range goals where they'll be constantly in sight.

Or just enjoy some word games. Providing easy access to writing tools encourages kids to try their hand at writing.

7 Catch your child being good. In some families, children seem to receive more attention when they misbehave than they do when they are being good. Because your attention is so important to your child, try to give more attention to good behavior than to bad.

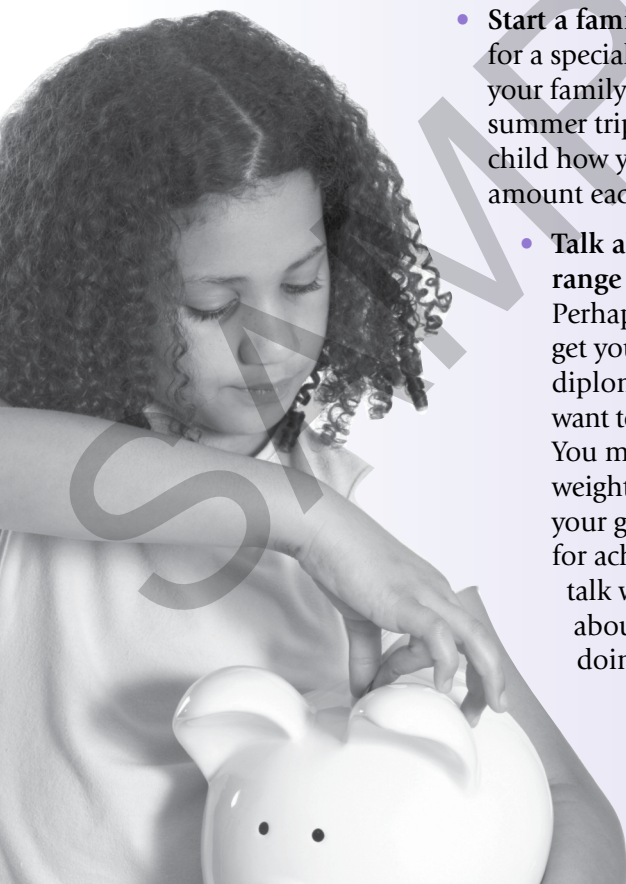
You might say something like, "Since you and your brother have played so nicely this afternoon, let's push back bedtime tonight and have an extra-long story hour."

The most powerful motivator you can give your child is your undivided attention. The time you spend listening and talking with your child will make him feel good about himself—and encourage him to do his best.

8 **Teach your child to set long-range goals.** Studies show that unmotivated children tend to live in the present. They ask, “Why are we learning this? When will we ever use it?”

Motivated students know that present actions can affect their futures. They are willing to work hard now—to enjoy success later. Here are some ways you can teach your child about goals:

- **Give your child an allowance.** It should be large enough to cover some regular treats, but small enough to encourage saving for something special.
- **Start a family savings plan** for a special goal. Does your family want to take a summer trip? Show your child how you save a small amount each week.
- **Talk about a long-range goal of yours.** Perhaps you want to get your high school diploma. Maybe you want to quit smoking. You may want to lose weight. Whatever your goal, set a plan for achieving it. Then talk with your child about how you’re doing.





9 Help your child break large jobs into smaller, more achievable tasks. Sometimes large jobs can seem overwhelming. When kids feel a task is impossible, they won't be motivated to try.

Suppose your child has a big report due next month. Say, "First, let's plan a trip to the library so you can get the materials you'll need. Then you'll need to set aside time every day to read and make

notes. After that, you can make an outline and write a draft. When you're finished, you can correct and revise it before you write your final report."

Have your child write the steps down, give each step a due date, post the list and check them off. As your child completes each step, she'll gain confidence and motivation to keep going until the job is finished.

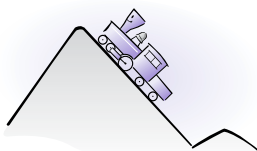
10 Show your appreciation.

Appreciation motivates children to do their best. Children try harder when they know their parents appreciate hard work. Here are some ways to express your appreciation:

- "I appreciate that you cleaned your room."
- "You stopped watching TV to help me carry in the groceries. Thanks."
- "You studied hard for your math test. I'm proud of you."

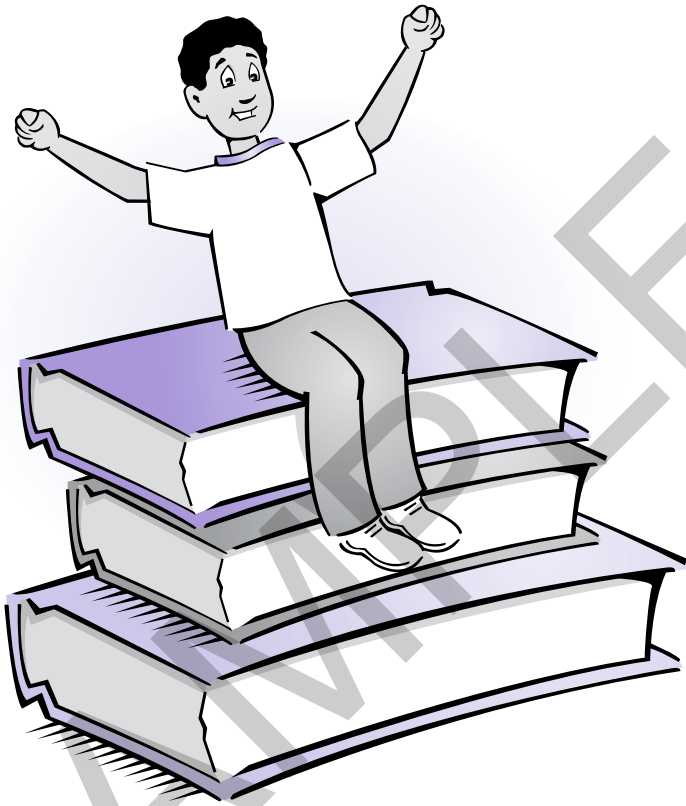


11 Teach your child “positive self-talk.” Take a tip from the Little Engine That Could, who repeated, “I think I can, I think I can.” When your child has his own mountain to climb, teach him to tell himself over and over that he can do it.



12 Encourage your child to take part in an after-school activity. Many experts believe that kids who see themselves as successful in other areas also feel motivated to be successful in the classroom. Let your child choose an activity that interests her. And don't forget to praise her efforts.





13 Help your child see progress. Get out an old favorite book and say, “Remember when you had trouble reading this book?” If your child is struggling with long division, ask, “Do you remember when you couldn’t add $6 + 9$?”

Engage your child in conversation. Ask him to tell you what he’s learned that he didn’t know yesterday—or last week—or last month. Sometimes, ask about the future, “What do you want to know by this time next year?”

14 Encourage your child's creative problem-solving. Help your child see difficult tasks as stimulating challenges—and not as overwhelming obstacles. Here is a strategy that works. Have your child:

1. **Come up with a list of problems** that need solutions.
2. **Choose one problem from the list.** You can discuss other problems later. Help her learn to focus on one thing at a time.
3. **Brainstorm solutions.** Have your child think of as many ideas for solving the problem as possible. Help her list everything—no matter how silly it may seem.
4. **Choose one solution to try.**

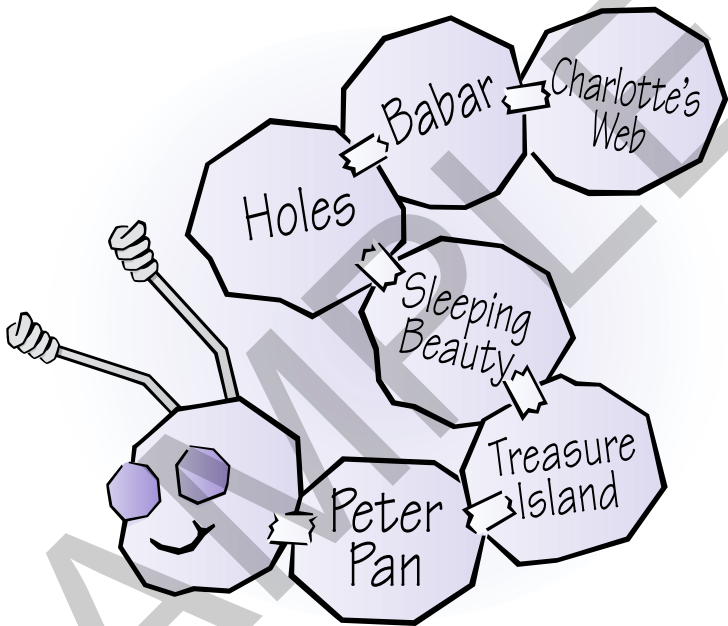


If she runs into more problems, ask questions that may help solve them. In other words, say, "How can you keep

these two parts together?" instead of, "I think you need some glue." Remember to keep the activity fun and relaxed. Just a little encouragement can motivate your child to see problems as stimulating challenges, and to learn to use creativity, too.



15 Keep track of every book your child finishes to motivate reading. Write the name of each book on a card and display the cards on your child's bedroom wall. Cut out circles and have your child create a "reading caterpillar." Or write book titles on small strips of paper that your child can use to make a paper chain.



16 Point out role models. As your child learns about the traits that made others successful, he can begin to adopt those same strategies for success in his own life. Point out successful people your child already knows, then suggest he read a few biographies of historical figures. Your local library should carry a wide variety. Biographies of Jackie Robinson, Albert Schweitzer and Helen Keller will give your child a place to start.

As your child sees that other people also had challenges to overcome, he can start to develop the "can do" attitude he'll need for success.

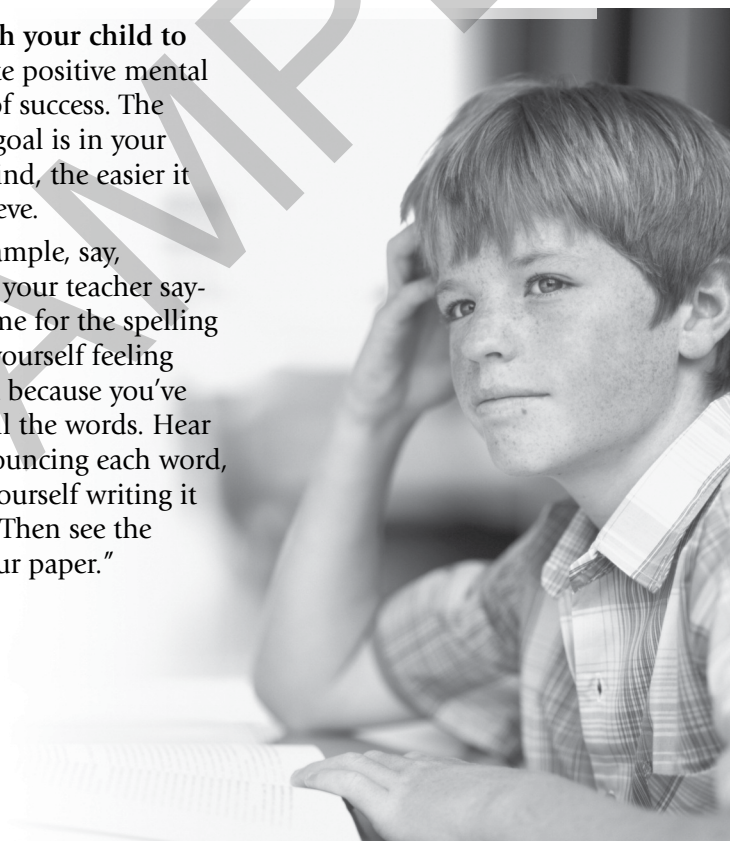
17 Play “Beat the Clock” for any task that causes your child to dawdle. Give your child a reasonable time limit to complete a job. (Ask him for his thoughts on how much time he thinks he’ll need.)

Then set a timer and encourage him to see if he can finish before it rings. Be sure to praise your child for a job well done.

18 Have your child compete against herself. Use a stopwatch to see how much time it takes for your child to perform a specific task. Post that time on the refrigerator. See if she can set a new personal record the next time.

19 Teach your child to create positive mental pictures of success. The clearer a goal is in your child’s mind, the easier it is to achieve.

For example, say, “Imagine your teacher saying it’s time for the spelling test. See yourself feeling confident because you’ve studied all the words. Hear her pronouncing each word, and see yourself writing it correctly. Then see the A+ on your paper.”



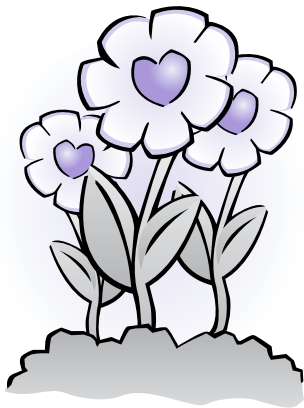
20 **Focus on success.** List 10 of your child's successes this week. List 10 of your own. Post the list where you can both see it.



21 **Listen to the messages** you pass on to your child. If your attitude about work is, "I hate Mondays," don't be surprised if your child isn't motivated to get up for school after the weekend.

If you say, "I'll do that later," your child will probably put things off until the last possible second, too.

22 **Teach your child to "save dessert for last."** If he has a school subject that's especially challenging, have him begin his homework with that subject, saving his favorite for last. Do the same thing yourself. You might say, "First I'll pay the bills and then I'll call Grandma."

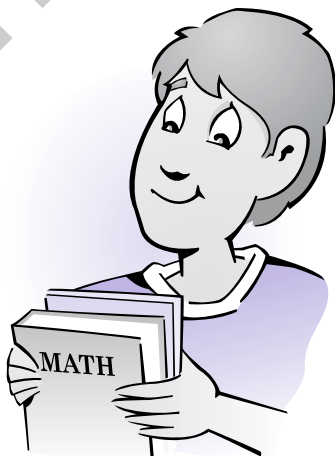


23 Share your own excitement with your child. You may be thrilled about your new job. Tell your child about what makes you happy. You may love gardening. Let your child share your love. Parents who get excited about learning new things have children who get excited, too.

24 Help your child see something he can be proud of—even in defeat. If his team lost the game, point out that he had a hit. If he got a poor grade on a spelling test, compliment him on a difficult word he *did* spell correctly.

25 Praise your child. But remember that the kind of praise you give your child can affect his motivation. The best praise is deserved, specific and sincere. Instead of just saying, "You're a wonderful kid," try commenting on specific things your child does especially well. Here are some examples:

- "You really stuck with that math homework."
- "You cleaned your room without being asked."
- "You organized your paper very well."





Nurture the love of learning that your child
already has. Start with just one idea—
it's a step in the right direction.
That's one way you can make a difference!

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