

Motivating Your Kids to Do Their Best

“Success is not final. Failure is not fatal. It is the courage to continue that counts.”—Winston Churchill, former British prime minister

You want your kids to do their best. But what is their best? How do you know if your kids are living up to their full potential? Consider these ideas.

Try it...

For all parents

- Notice how much your child is self-motivated. Some kids seem to know what they want and go after it. Others seem to dillydally a lot. Every child has a different amount of self-motivation.
- Kids are motivated to do their best when they enjoy what they're doing—and whom they're with. That's why one child can have a great year in math one year and a not-so-great year the next. Teachers change. Circumstances change. A lot affects a child's motivation. Pay attention to what increases your child's motivation—and what squelches it.
- Find out what your kids love to do. They're more likely to be motivated to do things they truly enjoy. Keep introducing them to new activities so that they can discover new things that excite them.
- True motivation comes from finding the ideal point of being challenged. When kids are overly challenged, they may give up because the expectations are too high. If they're not challenged enough, they may become bored. Try to find the right balance for your child.
- Be aware of the difference between extrinsic motivation (being motivated by others with rewards and bribes) and intrinsic motivation (being motivated internally to do something). Although it's okay to try to motivate kids from time to time with rewards, try to get in touch with what makes your child motivated from the inside and focus on that motivation.
- Look for fun ways to spice up activities that your child doesn't enjoy, such as certain chores or doing homework for least-favorite subjects. For example, play music and dance while you dust. Or let your child sit with a favorite stuffed animal while doing homework.

For parents with children ages birth to 5

- Create a structured day that includes reading aloud picture books, playing outside, doing art, nap time, snack time, making music, and playing with stimulating, age-

appropriate toys. Notice which activities excite your young child and build on those.

- A key point for this age group is to give kids stimulating activities that encourage their curiosity—rather than kills it. Kindergarten teachers say they can always tell which kids have had their curiosity nurtured when they arrive at school the first day. These are the kids who have had parents who take them to interesting places (zoos, children’s museums, the library, the playground, the grocery store) and also have provided interesting, stimulating activities, such as reading aloud, going for walks and identifying colors, and building towers out of blocks.
- Motivate your child’s curiosity by not pushing or forcing your child to learn. Eliminate the flash cards and memorization activities. Instead, focus on the things that fascinate your child, such as befriending ants outside or having tea parties for stuffed animals.

For parents with children ages 6 - 9

- Closely monitor your child’s activity and motivation levels at the start of school years. Starting school can be physically exhausting for young children. Make sure they get the rest they need in order to do well at school. Visit Education World.com for [tips for healthful sleep](#).
- Young children are still highly relational. They tend to be motivated to do well when they adore the adults they’re with. Connect them with trusted, competent adults who care about them.
- Kids notice what motivates you. Talk about and include your kids in your passions, such as gardening, woodworking, scrapbooking, or hiking.

For parents with children ages 10 - 15

- Monitor your child’s motivation. Many kids go through phases when they don’t want to do the things they used to love to do. Some can become disinterested in school (or certain subjects). Talk about how important it is to keep going. For more ideas, see [Parenting Preteens with a Purpose](#) by Kate Thomsen.
- Notice the new interests that get your kids excited. Sometimes it’s giggling about the opposite sex, reading comic books, or fashion. Kids at this age are highly aware of which social groups they fit into and don’t fit into, and so many are motivated to look—and act—a certain way.
- Many kids become motivated by how they feel during this age. Model and talk about how important it is to do certain activities (such as completing homework and helping out with chores) no matter how you feel.

For parents with children ages 16 - 18

- Keep tabs on how competition is affecting your teenager’s motivation. For some teenagers, competition motivates them more. For others, competition paralyzes them. Give suggestions on how to handle competition well.
- Talk with your teenager about how to balance highly motivational activities with ones that are important but less interesting to do. Explain how adults constantly find ways to take responsibility yet also follow their interests and passions.
- Most teenagers (and adults) want to change something (such as losing weight, exercising more, or improving their performance at work or school). But change is hard. Point out how small steps matter. A helpful resource is [One Small Step Can](#)

[Change Your Life](#) by Robert Maurer.