

How to motivate and encourage your child and improve focus

We ALL struggle with motivation from time to time. Especially if the task in hand is not our favourite thing to do and children are no exception. The good news is that there are things we can do to encourage our children to stay motivated without having to nag them constantly or micromanage their schoolwork.

Plan a nice end to the day as a celebration of completing work.

You could plan this together. It could be as simple as a film in the evening or a game altogether or their favourite dinner. Involve your children in planning the end of the day or end of the week 'treat' for working hard.

Encourage them.

Through everything be positive and encourage your child. Remind them how proud you are of them and how hard they are working – even if they struggle.

Take breaks

If it is all getting too much, take a break and have some time away from the 'work' area to do something completely different and maybe separate from one another. We all need alone time.

Set timers and targets.

Show children a time on the clock, or set a timer (egg timers are good) somewhere visible to show how long they will work for before they get a break so they know a break is coming. Alternatively set a work target i.e. when your maths is finished we will play a game. Then they know fun is coming but it depends on work being completed.

Have a routine

If they know that every day they start work at a certain time, then have a break, then work, then lunch etc., they won't keep asking or wondering what will come next or when they get a break or a snack. Having a routine and sticking to it helps them structure their day and be less anxious.

Encourage connection

We all need to feel connected to other people and it can be tough being around just our family all day, every day. To help, provide opportunities to connect with others in a permitted format, whether this be on Facetime, Zoom, phone calls, sharing videos, texts or emails. Make sure your child is able to connect with people outside the home who matter to them. This might be a great way to motivate them; 'Complete your work and then we can call grandma or a friend for a chat'. They could record themselves reading and send it to a friend or family member, or share pictures of their work – this will motivate them to want to share and be proud of their work if someone they care about will see it.

Focus on effort

Remind your child how good it feels to work hard and achieve something they didn't think they could. Celebrate their success when they've put in effort. Remind them, it's about trying their best and that's all that matters not what they produce at the end.

Use their interests

If your child has a passion for something – whether that's maths, music or Star Wars – they'll naturally be motivated to do it. Be child-led and let them explore their interests, even if it seems a bit odd to you. Where possible link maths and English activities to something they enjoy.

Be curious yourself.

If we want our children to be motivated to achieve, we need to demonstrate that behaviour ourselves. If you are enthusiastic about their learning, they will be too.

Build their self-esteem.

Rather than saying, "Don't worry, I know you're not very good at spelling," which creates a lack of self-belief, build your child's self-esteem by saying, "I understand you're finding this difficult, but if we keep working at it, we'll get there," Tell them you believe in them and encourage them. Celebrate small victories, even if it's just spelling one word correctly or answering one maths problem.

Focus on the future.

For older children, you can challenge their lack of motivation by highlighting the importance of working hard. **They need reminding that the work they're doing now is preparing them for future success, and that it's worth putting in the effort now to have more choices later in life.** This may be about getting them reading for the juniors or Secondary school or a job they want to do when they are older.

Know when to step back.

It's natural to feel frustrated if your child isn't trying their hardest, but try not to slip into nagging and arguing. Sometimes children feel emotional, especially if they are finding something hard. At these times, they're not in the mood for a rational conversation, so save it until they're in a better frame of mind. Both step away and take a break and come back to something later rather than battling over it. This is a compromise not backing down. Explain you can see they aren't ready to learn that at the moment; suggest you both take a 10 minute break then try something else and come back to this later.

Celebrate effort rather than achievement.

If your child struggles to motivate themselves, it can be tempting to offer incentives: for example, giving rewards. The problem with bribery is that it creates a mentality where children are just looking for what they have to do to be rewarded. **It's better to reward effort than achievement,** whether that's with praise and kind words or something concrete. Concrete things don't have to be monetary. They can be, complete this work then we will go for a walk, or you can have half an hour of playing a board game together or listening to the next chapter of your book.

Don't let school take-over

Yes, schoolwork matters, but **it's vital to balance it with time for your child to do what they enjoy.** We have to exercise common sense: having fun doesn't mean your child won't have future success, so make sure they still get to take part in things they enjoy and have some down time every day.

Involve children in planning their day

Allow children to plan in the order of their activities and their breaks so they can choose what to do when.

Display a plan for the day visibly for children.

By showing an almost checklist of what they have to complete, children know how much they have done and how much they still need to do. This keeps expectations realistic and means they can feel happy with their progress as the day progresses.

When a task is hard, break it down.

If your child is struggling, help them break a large task into small, achievable steps so they don't feel overwhelmed and can complete one step at a time. This will reduce anxiety and build confidence.

If a child makes a mistake, don't point it out to them, encourage them to look for themselves.

Rather than saying, you've made a mistake say 'Oh I've spotted something you haven't had a chance to check and edit yet, can you spot it?' This gives them ownership and a chance to correct mistakes themselves. If they don't spot, remain positive whilst correcting them. Say something like 'I struggle to spot my own mistakes too; let me explain it to you.' Then work through it together.

If a child doesn't understand something, don't get cross.

Try to support them positively. If they still don't get it, contact the class teacher for a different way of explaining it. Often when a child doesn't understand it's because we haven't found the best way to explain it for that individual so we need to try and explain it a different way.

Take daily exercise.

We all know exercise releases happy hormones and makes us feel better (do does hugging). Some daily exercise for the whole household will reduce stress and anxiety and help with focus and concentration.

Don't let all your time together be about home-learning.

You are their parent first and foremost not their teacher. Make time for positive experiences together outside of home-schooling. This can simple be watching TV, eating together, reading a story or going for a walk but don't let all your shared time be able school.

Remind them how much their teacher is looking forward to seeing their work.

Young children want to impress their teacher. If you remind them they are seeing it and read back comments made by teachers to pupils, this will motivate them.