

Lesson Activity

Identify incidents or occurrences that might have caused a breakdown in your child's development of motivation:

Practical Parent Education

The future of America rests in its homes.

—Abraham Lincoln

Parenting is perhaps the most important role in society. Children are our future. And yet, rearing children is a challenging and complicated task. All parents need support, education and resources as they strive to promote the healthy development of their children in what has become a very complex world. Your community is committed to providing you with quality services through Practical Parent Education as you strive to rear responsible, self-confident, mentally healthy children.

For further information regarding services offered in your community, contact:

Practical Parent Education is a primary prevention program.



Practical Parent Education

Module 5.5

Encouraging Motivation in Children

“What we want is to see the child in pursuit of knowledge, and not knowledge in pursuit of the child.”

—George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950)
British playwright and novelist

Lesson Objectives

- Understand the concept of motivation
- Recognize the symptoms of lack of motivation in children and adults
- Develop parenting skills for encouraging motivation in children

Suggested Reading for Parents

- *Underachievement Syndrome: Causes and Cures* by Sylvia B. Rimm
- *Mega Skills* by Dorothy Rich
- *Kids Who Underachieve* by Lawrence J. Green
- *Boosting Adolescent Underachievers* by Victor Cogen
- *The Myth of Laziness* by Mel Levine

Suggested Reading for Children

- *Get Off My Brain* by Randall J. McCutcheon
- *How to Do Homework Without Throwing Up* by Trevor Romain

Lesson Concepts

Motivation is a feeling or an attitude of excitement. It is the ability to work against discouragement; to be able to face competition and challenge; to take on a task with determination and perseverance. Parents can encourage motivation by:

- ✓ Being a role model
- ✓ Establishing clear, consistent rules regarding education and responsibility
- ✓ Setting reasonable goals and expectations for the child
- ✓ Emphasizing effort and process
- ✓ Encouraging the development of intrinsic rewards
- ✓ Helping the child develop an “I can” attitude
- ✓ Keeping yourself separate from the child
- ✓ Not rescuing
- ✓ Allowing the child to take the lead in learning
- ✓ Not accepting excuses for failure to fulfill a responsibility or to do a job well
- ✓ Teaching a strong work ethic

Lesson Notes

Profile of an Unmotivated Child

Branden was a late summer baby and had just turned six when he began first grade. As a toddler and preschooler, he had always been a very bright, precocious child. Kindergarten teachers reported that Branden was an intelligent child, but seemed to prefer play activities to readiness activities. However, if Branden's parents worked with him on readiness skills during the summer, he would probably be ready for first grade in the fall.

Branden's parents did work with him extensively during the summer and when fall came, Branden approached first grade with confidence. Reading, math, and other subjects seemed to progress well. Branden's handwriting was poor, but teachers assured his parents that his fine motor skills would improve and that they would soon see a change for the better. Branden progressed through first grade without any significant problems, although he was not achieving at the level his parents had hoped he would. Four weeks in summer school seemed to help him get off to a good start in second grade.

After Christmas, however, Branden seemed to be slipping in his work and teachers frequently mentioned his inability to assume responsibility and demonstrate organizational skills. Both parents and teachers worked diligently in these areas, setting up reward systems and carefully monitoring his daily work habits. By third grade, with continued supervision, Branden seemed to be more accountable and was making average and above average grades. Throughout fourth and fifth grades, Branden was making mostly Cs and Bs.

As Branden moved into middle school, however, his grades began to deteriorate. His old patterns of irresponsibility and a lack of organizational skills reappeared. Teacher comments repeatedly noted failure to complete assignments on time and to turn in

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Encouraging Motivation in Children

homework. Branden seemed unconcerned and appeared to be making very little effort in his classwork. Disrupting the class with his clown antics was now adding a new dimension to his academic problems. Teachers, counselors, and Branden's parents all worked with him, but by eighth grade Branden was failing most of his courses. His parents closely supervised homework assignments, yet he failed to turn them in at school. He would frequently say that he had no homework when, in fact, he did. Special assignments or projects were never mentioned at home, or if they were, it was always at the last minute, causing anger to erupt in the family. Branden's parents were feeling frustrated, angry, and helpless. They weren't sure whether to be angry at Branden or to be angry with the school.

Conferences with the school didn't seem to bring about desired changes. Rewards, threats, punishments, and reasoning with Branden all seemed ineffective. Nothing seemed to motivate Branden. He seemed completely oblivious to the ramifications of his school performance. With ninth grade and a move to high school ahead, concern for Branden's education is mounting. What will the future hold for a student who is totally unmotivated and who becomes more resistant each year?

Encouragement versus Praise

Positive verbal reinforcement can be a very significant technique for nurturing and building self-esteem in children. Praise and encouragement are two commonly used tools, and yet there are major differences between the two. *Parents must understand that praise and encouragement are two difference processes, and the effects of each can be totally different. Give parents time to understand the concept of each and then allow time for practice.*

Praise

- ✓ Often used as a reward
- ✓ Not always believable
- ✓ Can be discouraging
- ✓ Creates dependency on external rewards
- ✓ Seen as difficult to measure up to
- ✓ Frequently based on competition

Examples:

"That's a fantastic drawing!"

"You're incredible!"

"Wow! You're a genius!"

Encouragement

- ✓ Focuses on effort and improvement rather than end result
- ✓ Enables child to believe in him or herself and his or her abilities
- ✓ Emphasizes child's strengths and assets
- ✓ Helps child accept his or her imperfections
- ✓ Creates internal motivation
- ✓ Helps child develop courage to face difficult tasks

Examples:

"I see you have picked up your dirty clothes and placed them in the hamper. That really helps me out."

"You're making good progress on your math. You'll sure feel good when you have that out of the way."

"Your little sister really seems to enjoy having you read to her."

Don't Give Up!

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Some of the most recent successful people in the world had "rocky" times in their lives. For some, the setbacks came early in life in the form of discouragement from "significant others." For others, the setbacks came much later in life. But the common denominator all these great people shared was an attitude of perseverance. They would not accept setbacks as permanent obstacles, but rather turned the "stumbling blocks" into "stepping stones" on their road to success.

1. Bethoven's music teacher said, "As a composer, he is hopeless."
2. Isaac Newton's work in the elementary school was rather poor.
3. Einstein couldn't speak until age 4 and couldn't read until age 7.
4. Edison's teacher told him he was unable to learn.
5. F. W. Woolworth's employers refused to allow him to wait on customers because he "didn't have enough sense."
6. Louisa May Alcott was told by an editor that her writings would never appeal to the public.
7. Caruso's music teacher told him that he had "no voice at all."
8. Leo Tolstoy flunked out of college.
9. Admiral Byrd was deemed "unfit for service" before he flew over both poles.
10. Louis Pasteur was given a rating of "mediocre" in chemistry at Royal College.
11. Winston Churchill failed 6th grade.
12. Walt Disney was fired by a newspaper editor because he had "no good ideas."
13. Henry Ford was evaluated as "showing no promise."
14. Fred Waring once failed to get into his high school chorus.