

*25 Ways Parents Can ...*

# Motivate Children



**...and Help Them Do Better in School**



## Remember the Story of *The Tortoise and the Hare?*

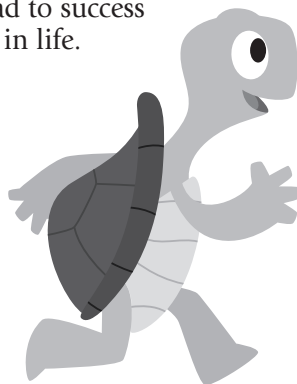
**T**he tortoise won the race because he was more motivated than the hare. He just kept plugging away until he reached his goal.

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

Not surprisingly, motivated children do better in school. They try to do their best. They enjoy the challenge of learning something new. And studies show that effort can help a child achieve more, regardless of ability.

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 to boost motivation and put your child on the road to success in school—and in life.



**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 school 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 school, your child will pay attention and be a more motivated student.

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

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

**4 Promote a “can do” attitude.** Sooner or later, nearly every child says, “I can’t.” Here’s how one clever mom attacked the problem. Every day after school, she had her child choose one finished assignment. It could be artwork, math problems or anything else that showed her child’s progress.

These papers went up on the refrigerator. They provided a visible reminder that her child’s school performance could improve.

**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*. Let your child 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 writing. Have your child use it to manage time. Suggest writing plans for the next day (and checking them off when finished). Your child 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 Notice positive behavior.** In some families, children seem to receive more attention when they misbehave than they do when they are following household rules. Because your attention is so important to your child, give more attention to positive behavior than to negative behavior.

You might say something like, "Since you and your brother have played so nicely this afternoon, let's 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 together shows you care what your child thinks—and will encourage your child's best effort.

**8 Help your child work toward 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 encourage this effort:

- **Let your child earn points** for doing extra chores. Assign numbers of points to different rewards: getting to choose the dinner menu, having a friend sleep over, etc.
- **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 get more exercise. 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 look online and in the library for the sources 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 the draft 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 each step is completed, your child will 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 families 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 Blue Engine in the book *The Little Engine That Could*, who repeated, "I think I can, I think I can." When your child has a mountain to climb, suggest saying "I know I can!"



**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 seems interesting. And don't forget to praise effort.



**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, “What did you learn today that you 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?”

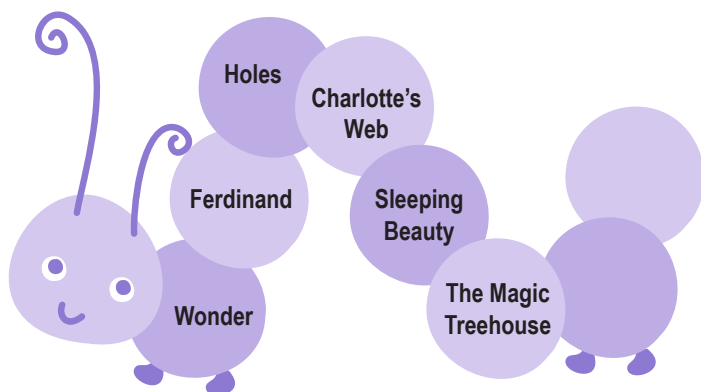


**14** **Encourage creative problem-solving.** Help your child see difficult tasks as stimulating challenges—and not as overwhelming obstacles. Here is a strategy that works. Have your child:

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 your child learn to focus on one thing at a time.
3. **Brainstorm solutions.** Think of as many ideas for solving the problem as possible. Help your child list everything—no matter how silly it may seem.
4. **Choose one solution to try.**

If your child 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.” Just a little encouragement can motivate your child to see problems as interesting challenges, and to learn to use creativity, too.

**15** **Keep track of books your child reads.** Have your child write the name of each completed book on a card and display the cards on the bedroom wall. Or cut out circles and have your child create a “reading caterpillar.” Or your child can write book titles on small strips of paper and use them to make a paper chain.



**16** **Point out role models.** Learning about the strategies that made others successful can motivate your child to adopt those same strategies. Point out successful people your child already knows, then suggest reading a few biographies of historical figures. Your local library should carry a wide variety. Biographies of Jackie Robinson, Neil Armstrong and Sonia Sotomayor will give your child a place to start.

Seeing that other people also had challenges to overcome can help your child develop the perseverance necessary for success.

**17 Motivate your child to do math.** If you say, “I’m not a math person,” your child may not think it’s important to do well in math. Instead, show that everyone can be a math person by calling attention to math you do every day. Ask your child to measure ingredients for a recipe. Point out how you double-check calculations in a spreadsheet. Have your child estimate how much time you’ll need to reach a destination.

**18 Prevent procrastination.** When your child is faced with a big school project or a messy room, suggest doing something to get started—no matter how small. Your child might set a timer and work for 15 minutes. Accomplishing a portion of the task can provide the motivation your child needs to keep going.

**19 Teach your child to visualize success.** The clearer a picture of reaching a goal is in your child’s mind, the easier the goal 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 the teacher pronouncing each word, and see yourself writing it correctly. Then see the A+ on your paper.”

**20** **Focus on success.** List five of your child's successes this week. List five 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** **Find a task order that works for your child.** Starting with a tough task when your child is freshest can make everything else seem easy. Warming up with an easy task helps some students feel successful and motivated to tackle a tougher one. See what works better for your child.

**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 interest. Parents who get excited about learning new things have children who get excited, too.

**24** **Help your child recognize success—even in defeat.** “I’m sorry that your team lost. But you can be proud that you got a hit.” “I know you’re disappointed with your math test grade. But look at all the problems you solved correctly.”

**25** **Praise your child.** But remember that the kind of praise you give can affect 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 did especially well. Here are some examples:

- “You really stuck with that math homework.”
- “You set the table 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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