

# INSTILLING THE DESIRE FOR SUCCESS IN YOUR CHILD



Ways Parents Can Help Their Children  
Do Better in School



One of a Series of Booklets for Parents

THE • DISCIPLINE • SERIES

# You Can Ignite Your Child's Desire to Succeed

When it comes to success, it isn't just a matter of how smart children are or how much talent they have. If they don't have the desire to succeed, they probably won't succeed—in school or in anything else.

The desire to succeed is like the engine in a car. Without it, no one goes anywhere. The desire for success is what drives a child to become self-disciplined—to take responsibility for his\* own learning and behavior. The desire for success actually helps him to succeed.

Children with the desire for success become intensely involved in things that interest them. They're self-starters. They're eager to learn and to find new projects and challenges. And once they start something, they keep at it until they reach their goal. They're also less likely to have discipline problems at school and at home. They are more likely to stay in school, get a good education and be prepared for life.

Most parents know they can't make children want to succeed. The desire for success must come from within—but there are many things parents can do. This booklet is filled with specific examples, activities and step-by-step plans to help you ignite that internal spark and instill the desire for success in your child.



**Tip:** Don't expect to put all the ideas in this booklet into practice right away. The best way to make changes is one step at a time. Focus on one or two ideas—and don't forget to celebrate progress.



\*Every child is unique, so we often use the singular pronoun.

We'll alternate using "he/him" and "she/her" throughout this booklet.

## Here's What You Can Do

Even though a child's desire for success must come from within, you can help your child develop that desire to succeed. You'll find details and suggestions for three important ideas in the pages that follow:

Help your child overcome barriers to success.

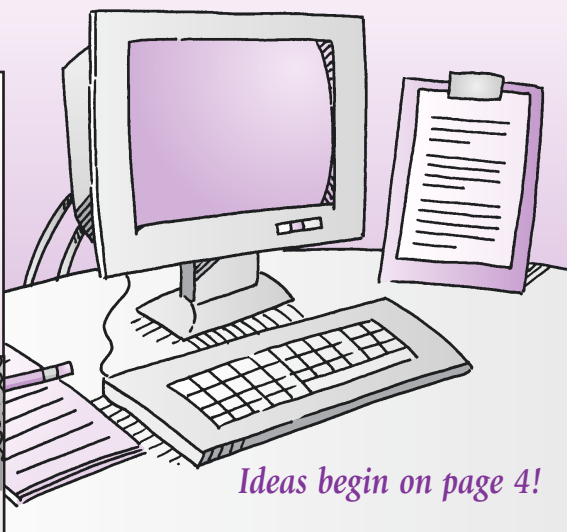
*Ideas begin on page 2!*



Set your child up for success.

Teach your child five secrets of success.

*Ideas begin on page 8!*



*Ideas begin on page 4!*

# Help Your Child Overcome These Barriers to Success

One important step in helping your child develop the desire to succeed is to identify the things standing in her way. Here are some common barriers—and ways to help your child overcome them:

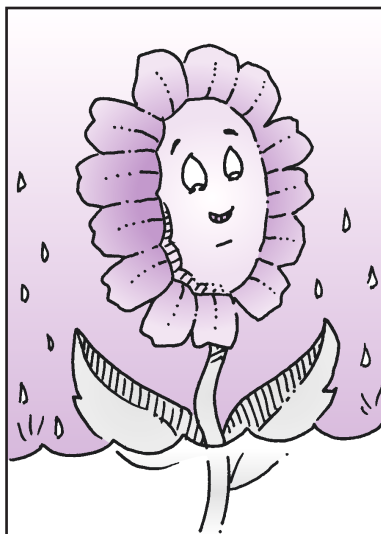
1. **Low self-esteem.** Some children have a poor self-image. This can program them for failure. Encourage your child to tell herself that she can do anything she sets her mind to.
2. **Stress.** It's hard to succeed at anything when you're upset or feeling out of control. One of the best ways of dealing with stress is to talk with someone about it. Encourage your child to come to you with concerns. Let her know you are always available to talk.
3. **Boredom.** Often children don't succeed because they are bored. If this happens, help your child talk with the teacher about possible interesting projects she might do. Ask your librarian for help finding books on topics of interest.
4. **Procrastination.** If your child puts things off, ask her to think about how she will feel *after* she's done the job. Help her create a mental picture of herself putting her homework into her notebook and feeling great about it.
5. **Peer pressure.** Some children don't do well in school because they have friends who think school "isn't cool." Help your child see that some children *are* trying to excel, and she won't be all alone if she works hard.



# Are You a Barrier to Your Child's Success?

**Y**ou may unintentionally become a barrier to your child's success. Here are some ways to avoid this:

- **Don't belittle your child's feelings.** Telling a child, "Oh, that's okay. It's not that important"—when it really is important to your child—can be a blow. When a child strives for a goal and doesn't reach it, discussing her feelings helps her feel understood.
- **Don't assume your child isn't trying.** Get out of the habit of saying, "Try harder." Even if a child *isn't* trying, experts say accusing her of it won't help. If a child isn't motivated to try, it's often because she feels she can't succeed anyway.
- **Don't have unrealistic expectations.** Children can feel like failures when they try to work at someone else's level—or at a level others think they *should*. Make sure your child's goals and schoolwork aren't beyond her capabilities.
- **Don't rescue or take over** every time your child struggles with a difficult task or problem. Doing for your child what she can do for herself tells her that she is not capable.
- **Don't allow your child to blame others.** In order to take credit for her successes, a child must learn to take responsibility for her mistakes. If a child doesn't take responsibility for her mistakes, how can she learn from them?
- **Don't make praise cheap.** Too much praise to a child is like too much water to a plant. Give praise when it is *earned*. Offer positive criticism when it is *important*. Experts say the right balance is to praise about three times as much as you criticize.

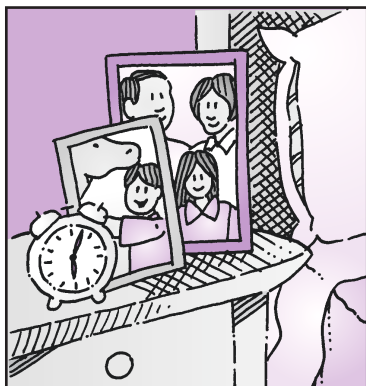


# You Can Set Your Child Up for Success

Here are five helpful things you can do to set your child up for success:

## 1. Build Your Child's Self-Confidence

Nurturing children's self-esteem is a great way to help them do better in anything they do. Children succeed when they feel good about themselves. Here are some ways to build your child's self-confidence:



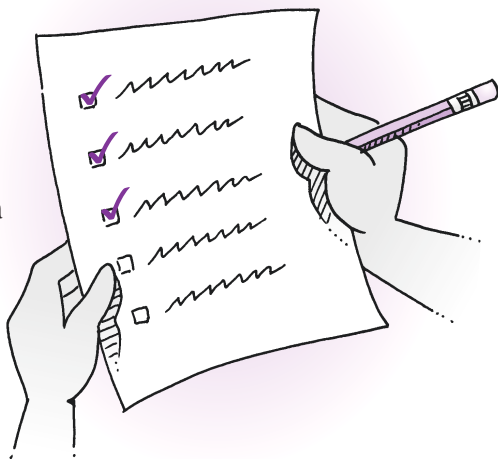
- **Believe in your child!** Let him know he is important: "You have so much to offer the world. You have special talents. I'm excited about watching how you plan to use those talents in your future."
- **Help your child feel loved and capable.** Keep two pictures at your child's bedside—a picture of your child surrounded by family and another of him doing something he loves.
- **Be specific in your praise.** The *kind* of praise you give your child can affect his motivation. The best praise is specific. Instead of saying, "You're a great kid," describe what your child did to merit your praise. "I noticed how neatly you organized the groceries in the cupboard."
- **Get your child to share what he knows.** Ask about a book he's read. If he's a collector, help him stage an exhibit of his collection. Ask your child to demonstrate something he does well.
- **Give your child a new area of responsibility**—as soon as you think he is ready for it. This shows your child you trust and respect him. In turn, your child will learn to trust his own instincts—which is the key to motivation.

## 2. Give Your Child a Taste of Success

Experts say the more you can help your child feel successful, the more willing your child will be to try to succeed—and the more he will succeed. Success will breed success!

Remember to:

- **Help him recall *something* he can be proud of** when your child feels like a loser. If his team loses a game, point out that he had a hit. If he gets a poor grade on a spelling test, compliment him on the difficult word he *did* spell correctly.
- **Focus on your child's specific accomplishments** instead of his potential. Describe an action he took: "Remember when you helped Courtney learn how to tie her shoes?" "Remember when you didn't think you could learn your times tables, but then you got 100 percent on the quiz?"
- **Point out small successes.** Don't wait until your child completes a task successfully. Comment on his effort and improvement each step of the way. A child who raises a grade from "D" to "C" deserves as much praise as a child who makes an "A."
- **Break large jobs down** into small achievable tasks. Your child may become overwhelmed when facing a big task. But once he's completed one step, he'll be motivated to do more.
- **Check it off.** Your child can feel a sense of accomplishment if he makes lists of chores he needs to do. Then have him check off each task as he completes it.
- **Encourage your child to keep a scrapbook** of accomplishments. The scrapbook becomes a "savings account" of positive feelings your child can bank on whenever he needs support and encouragement.





### 3. Help Your Child Develop Special Talents

Every child has special talents. Sometimes you have to look hard to find them, but they are there. Whatever a child's talent—singing, piano, athletics, science—experts say that the best predictor of personal and professional success is the parents' wisdom in guiding the development of those talents. You should:

- **Avoid stepping on your child's dreams.** They help keep her motivated.
- **Encourage a disciplined, organized lifestyle**—so that developing talents through practice and study is part of a regular routine.
- **Let talent come out naturally.** Encourage, but don't force.
- **Work with your child.** You may still need to remind your child to practice regularly.
- **Provide appropriate rewards,** but make sure your child doesn't think she is loved only for her talents and achievements.

### 4. Help Your Child Learn Persistence

At one time or another everyone fails at something. Help your child remember that she can try again and again until she is successful.

If your child still feels like quitting, express confidence in her and give her hope. Say encouraging things like:

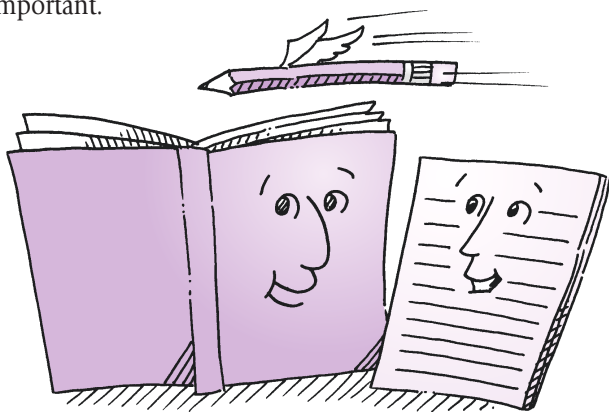
- "I know you can do that by yourself. I bet you'll figure it out."
- "That's a challenge, but I know you can do it."
- "You're doing fine. Keep at it. You'll get it."
- "It will get better. You'll get the hang of it."
- "If it doesn't work that way, try another way."



## 5. Nurture Your Child's Desire to Learn

Children are naturally curious and want to learn. But some children are more eager to assume responsibility for their learning and behavior than others. Here are some things you can do to motivate your child to want to learn:

- **Create a “curriculum of the home.”** Teach your child through household routines and regular conversations around the dinner table. Schedule regular family reading times. Hold family meetings to discuss values and solve problems. Share things you have done that have led to success.
- **Be a model learner.** Learning is a process that never ends. Your child sees you learning when you read a newspaper, watch TV and even when you chat with a friend. When you have a problem, let your child see you look for information you need to solve it.
- **Remind your child that learning can be fun.** Ask about the most fun part of your child's day. Tell your child about the fun things you remember from school.
- **Nurture your child's natural curiosity** about the world. Welcome her questions. Experiment together. Teach her to question why and how. Share your own curiosity about math facts, what makes things work and other things you don't know about.
- **Get involved with your child's school.** Actions really do speak louder than words. When your child sees you in the halls or in her classrooms, she'll get the message that school is important.





## Teach Your Child Five Secrets of Success

**L**et's face it: Everyone likes to do things they're good at. That fact gives you a powerful tool for instilling in your child the internal desire for success. If you can teach your child some proven ways to succeed—and help him get good at succeeding—he is likely to develop exactly the drive for success you want him to have.

Parents know, and children soon find out, that there is a big difference between wanting to do something and actually getting it done. Here are five steps you can teach your child to help him successfully accomplish something. Note that experts say the likelihood of success increases with each additional step:

Step	Likelihood of Success
1. Make a conscious decision to do something .....	25%
2. Decide when to do it .....	40%
3. Plan how to do it .....	50%
4. Commit to someone else that you will do it .....	65%
5. Make an appointment with the person you committed to and report whether you've done it .....	95%

For example, let's say your child's grades are not as good as they should be. Your child knows it. He wants better grades. He talks about it—but the grades haven't improved.

## To help your child, use these five steps:

### STEP 1: Decide *What* to Do

Talk with your child to help him understand that only he can improve his grades. Encourage him to make the conscious decision that he will improve his grades—and write it down. The more specific he makes his decision, the better his chances of success: "I will raise my grade in math one letter grade."

### STEP 2: Decide *When* to Do It

Once his decision to improve his grade has been made, talk about how helpful it is to set a deadline for getting it done. Help him make the deadline reasonable: "I will raise my grade in math one letter grade by the end of the next grading period."

### STEP 3: Decide *How* to Do It

Help your child decide what steps he will take to improve his grade—and write them down. "I will study or review my math every weekday evening from 8:00 to 8:30 p.m."

### STEP 4: Tell *Someone* He Will Do It

Encourage your child to make a public commitment to someone he respects, someone who cares about him—or even several people: you, his teachers, his grandmother.

### STEP 5: Set a Time to Report

#### Whether He Has Done It

For the very best chance of success, encourage him to set up a time to report his progress to those he has told about his decision. "I will improve my grade in math one letter grade by the end of the grading period—and when report cards come out, I will show you the improvement I have made!"

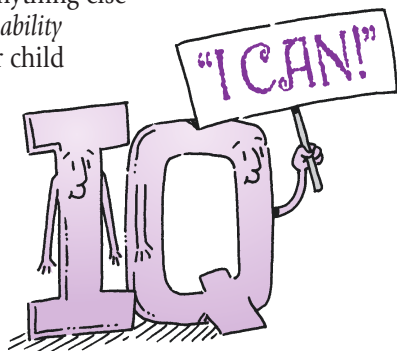


## More Great Ideas

### ‘I Can’ is More Important Than ‘IQ’

Success in school—and nearly anything else—depends more on *effort* than on *ability* or *intelligence*. You can help your child understand that.

Children who think they are failures because they are not “smart” often feel hopeless and give up. But every teacher knows that ability is just one factor leading to success—along with hard work, persistence, paying attention, getting work done on time, attending school every day, working well with others and an “I can do it” attitude.



Encourage your child by stressing that, “It’s not how smart you are, but what you do with what you have that counts.” Tell your child over and over, “If you keep at it, I’m sure you can succeed.” Then when she is successful, be sure to say, “You see? Your hard work paid off.”

### Help Your Child ‘See Herself’ Succeeding

Tightrope walkers visualize themselves walking with perfect balance on the high wire. Before they ever get up to speak, public speakers “see” the audience responding favorably to what they say.

You can use the same idea to help your child succeed in school. You might 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 spelling each correctly. Then see the ‘A’ on your paper.”

Teach your child to use “positive self-talk” to visualize success. Your child can say, “I have studied the lesson. I know all the facts. I am going to do well in class today.” The secret is helping your child see herself being successful. If she *thinks* she will succeed, she probably *will*.

## Expose Your Child to Successful People

Experts say one of the best ways to “infect” children with the “success virus” is by exposing them to others who are successful, so children can imitate them.

Encourage your child to read biographies. As she compares and contrasts traits of successful people, your child will see that most success is earned through hard work and persistence. Biographies of Abraham Lincoln, Jackie Robinson and Helen Keller are just a few your child may find interesting. Your librarian can help you find many more.

As your child sees that other people also overcame challenges, she can start to develop the “can do” attitude she’ll need for success.



## Talk About Successful People

Ask your child to tell you about a successful person or character she has met or learned about. What makes this person successful? What traits or skills of the person would your child like to have? In what ways could those skills be learned?

As you and your child talk, point out qualities, skills and attitudes that helped make the person successful. Then discuss how your child could apply the same ideas to her own success.

## Talk About What Could Happen Someday

Sometimes children get the idea that success is something that just happens to others. To change that mindset, say that good things will happen to your child, too.

Be creative. Let your child know that you see a bright future for her. By talking about the possibilities, you’ll get her to think of the possibilities, too—and that’s a step toward success.

# Put These Ideas to Work

## Turn Setbacks Into Learning Experiences

As an old saying goes: “Success comes from wisdom. Wisdom comes from experience, and experience comes from making mistakes.” And your child’s mistakes—if handled properly—can be the first steps toward future success.

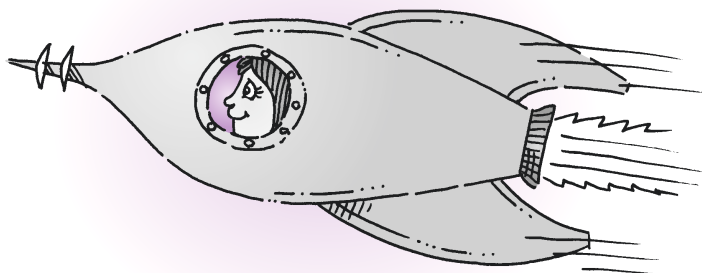
Successful people don’t see their mistakes as failures. They know there are valuable lessons to be learned when something doesn’t work out. When your child runs into a problem, don’t let him talk about being “dumb,” “stupid” or a “failure.” Instead, help him see what he can learn from the experience. Ask, “What might you do differently next time?” “What did you learn that can help you in the future?”

## Help Your Child Master The Art of Competition

Competition is a normal part of life. Children compete in grades, sports, popularity, jobs, dress, admission to college, friends and more.

But kids can get discouraged if competition gets out of hand, if winning becomes everything, or if they don’t know how to handle losing. To help your child compete more successfully, ask:

- “What are you doing?” and “Why are you doing it?” Help him be clear on what he hopes to gain from competing.
- “Will what you might gain be worth the effort?” Help him weigh the benefits against the possible pain and sacrifice.
- “Do you honestly think you can do what’s expected?” Help him be realistic about his chances for success.
- “Will you be giving it your best shot?” Remind him that, win or lose, it’s good to be able to look back and say, “I did my best.”



Parents want their children to succeed—  
but they cannot *make* them succeed.

Children must overcome their own barriers  
and make their own mistakes.

They must learn their own lessons and master  
the skills themselves.

And children must have their own internal  
desire for success.

You can ignite the desire and then nurture the flame.

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