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# I N S I G H T S

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## FOR FAMILIES



### Tips to motivate a “lazy” child



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INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES is provided by your child’s school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Insights is produced by Marcia Latta, communications consultant.

Some children are naturally motivated to do their chores, achieve in school and participate in physical activities. Children who lack this motivation may seem lazy, but this behavioral issue is more complex than it seems.

People who get things done have individual motivations for taking action. Some people are naturally driven to comply, help or achieve. Others must learn good habits for action and follow through and, often, they need to know the reason for taking action.

#### **Intrinsic vs extrinsic motivation**

Two types of motivation influence human action.

**Intrinsic motivation** involves engaging in a behavior because it is personally rewarding — performing an activity for its own sake rather than the desire for some external reward. Essentially, the behavior itself is its own reward.

**Extrinsic motivation** occurs when we are motivated to perform a behavior or engage in an activity to earn a reward or avoid punishment. In this case, you engage in a behavior not because you enjoy it or because you find it satisfying, but in order to get something in return or avoid something unpleasant.

Intrinsic motivation is desirable but not always possible, and excessive external rewards can backfire and reduce motivation for an activity. External rewards are most effective if your child had no prior interest in the activity or as reinforcement or a source of feedback for meeting a goal.

Behavioral experts advise avoiding extrinsic motivators if your child already finds the activity rewarding or if the external reward makes a play activity seem like work.

#### **Praise as an external reward**

It is important to note that rewards do not have to be physical or costly. Praise and recognition of effort is often a sufficient external reward. “Researchers have found that offering positive praise and feedback when people do something better in comparison to others can improve intrinsic motivation.”

*<http://bit.ly/2FFBqzw>*

#### **Tips to boost motivation**

Most parents try to motivate their children, or at least try to get them to comply. Accountability and follow through are important life skills..

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The following tips for parents are from parenting expert and psychotherapist Debbie Pincus. Her first recommendation is to hold them accountable. “If you’ve ruled out learning disabilities and behavioral disorders and your child still isn’t participating in family life, and isn’t doing chores or homework, somehow you probably aren’t holding him to the line. In that case, you need to hold him accountable and provide the consequences that will guide him to the right place. You’ll get the video game once you get your homework and chores done.

Tips to inspire your kids to motivate themselves:

**Don’t let your anxiety push them to get motivated.** You will only motivate them to resist you or to comply to calm you down because they want you to leave them alone. It then becomes about reacting to you instead of finding some internal motivation.

**Be inspiring.** Understand that your kids will want to run the other way if you’re too controlling. Remember, the only thing you’ll motivate if you’re pushing your child is the motivation to resist you.

**Let your child make his own choices — and face the consequences.** Let your child make his own choices. When it’s a poor choice, hold him accountable by letting him face the natural consequences that come with it. If the consequence of not doing homework is that the computer is taken away, put the need to get that computer time back in his hands. If he finishes his work, he gets the time on the computer you’ve agreed upon. That will be a motivation for him in the right direction without you telling him what to do, how to do it, and lecturing him on why he should care.

**What is your parenting style?** Door number one is for the parent who wants to get their kids motivated and do the right thing in life: Door number two is for parents who want their kids to be self-motivated to do those things. To not only do the right thing but to want to do the right things.

In the first example, the parent achieves that goal by pushing, punishing, begging, nagging, bribing, rewarding, and cajoling. The second option is to reach the goal by asking different kinds of questions. Rather than, “Did you get your homework done?” you might say, “Why did you decide to do your homework today and not yesterday? I noticed you chose not to do geometry yesterday, but you’re doing your history homework today. What’s the difference?” Be an investigator, exploring and uncovering, helping your child discover his own motivations and sticking points.

**It’s not your fault.** Remember, your child’s lack of motivation is not your fault, so don’t personalize it. When you do this, you may actually contribute to underachieving by creating more resistance. Children need to learn that we don’t always need to be motivated to do the things we have to do. That’s an important lesson. Your child may hate doing his chores and try to get out of it, and that’s when you give him consequences.

You want to help your child define for himself who he is, what’s important to him and what he’s going to do to make those things happen. Our responsibility is to help our kids do that, not to do it for them.

[www.empoweringparents.com/article/unmotivated-child-6-ways-get-child-going](http://www.empoweringparents.com/article/unmotivated-child-6-ways-get-child-going)