



## Understanding Lack of Motivation

**When a child becomes unmotivated and won't get out of bed, won't take care of their personal hygiene, won't do homework or participate in activities, what are they trying to tell us through their behavior?**

It is important for parents to understand that children are not inherently lazy. They may be frustrated and discouraged, anxious or angry; they may have become disappointed or rebellious, self-critical or negative, and they may lack confidence in their ability. But this is not laziness.

**The misconception that kids are lazy is one of the most common, and most destructive, misunderstandings of children**

Children want to feel good about themselves—and about others. They want to earn our praise and approval, and they want us to be proud of them. Children say that they don't care, but they **do** care.

## **Emotions behind Reduced Motivation**

**Why doesn't he put more effort into....? Why doesn't she care?**

- The answer to these questions is almost always, "Because he/she is discouraged." Our ability to work hard for periods of time requires a feeling of accomplishment or progress along the way, and some confidence that we will eventually succeed. Children often hide their anxiety and discouragement behind defiant and rebellious attitudes.
- The child may also be anxious or angry, and they are stuck in this negative mood. They may mask their discouragement with defiance or blame others (especially their parents and teachers) for their lack of effort. Often, they will seek relief in activities that require little sustained effort and that offer some immediate feeling of success (eg, watching TV, lying in bed, etc.).

- A discouraged child is unlikely to find importance in what we want them to do or what we want to teach them. Nothing seems important enough to put forth the effort. They will then be criticized, repeatedly, for their lack of effort, and they will become more rebellious. And eventually they will look elsewhere for a feeling of acceptance and a feeling of pride. They may become the funny child, always joking even when it's inappropriate, or the bully, who can only feel big when they make others feel small.
- Like all people, children need a sense of control over what is going on around them, and when they don't have that, they may resort to feeling powerful by resisting - doing things their way to show that they are in control.
  - When people feel powerless, they often try to feel powerful by withholding. A child who feels very powerless will stay in bed, not go to school, avoid homework, and withhold overall involvement because it gives them a sense of being in control.
- Unmotivated children lack social skills and problem solving skills – they're trying to solve their problem, but the way they're doing it is ineffective.

## What Really Motivates Children?

**Like all of us, children want to do what they are “good at.” They want to shine and feel proud. And, again, they want us to be proud of them.**

**Motivation = having a goal + feeling that we can achieve it**

We tend to respond to unmotivated behavior by coaxing, arguing and yelling at the child. Punishment doesn't work because it's not addressing the real issue.

If you're fighting day after day with a child who won't get out of bed, you're never going to solve that problem. Because even if they get out of bed, then they won't brush their teeth. And even if they brush their teeth they won't comb their hair. Or they won't wear clean clothes or they won't do their homework. If continually resisting is how a child tries to solve the problem of needing to feel in control, then parents will have a hard time until they teach the child how to solve that problem appropriately.

**Your job is to help the child to address the concerns leading to their feelings of discouragement, anger, and low self-confidence.**

## Five Important Principles

1. Promoting children's motivation begins with your enthusiastic interest in **their** interests—even if these are not the interests you would choose.
  - If you look hard enough, you will find in the child some interest—and a desire to do well. When you ask children about their interests, they are usually happy to talk about them.
  - Help them to identify what truly interests them, and you will see incredible motivation bubble up.
  - Guide them to pursue their interests, incorporating them into their daily responsibilities. For example, the child who is a big fan of cricket but struggling in math could build their math skills using cricket scores and statistics in their work.
  - As their success and confidence grows, so will their motivation, and it will extend to other areas of their life.
2. Find the source of their frustration and discouragement.
  - Talking to children about the importance of effort and hard work, or punishing them for their lack of motivation will not help. Children have heard this all before. Telling them that they have to try harder will only make them feel angry and misunderstood.
  - Acknowledge their frustration, discouragement, and disappointment. Let them know that you understand their feelings. *"I can tell that you are hurting. I know you are not a lazy person, so something really tough must be keeping you from showing who you really are. I'd like to help you figure out what that is and put it behind you."*
  - Help them identify and work through the source of their discouragement.
3. Encouragement, encouragement, encouragement.
  - Acknowledge every bit of effort and improvement, even when the child's efforts fall far short of the goal, and express confidence in their eventual success.
  - Take note of a child's improvement and their progress toward goals, not their mistakes.
  - Remind them, when they are ready to hear it, of the good things they have done and will be able to do, and that no one succeeds all the time. Help them put this failure in perspective. There will be a next time. Tell them, *"I know that you are feeling frustrated and disappointed right now, but I have confidence in you. I know that if we put our heads together, we can figure out a way to solve this problem, and you will do better next time."*

4. Focus on their strengths.

- Their strengths need to be recognized and supported. Find ways for them to excel and shine using their unique talents.
- Help them develop a different picture of themselves. Their strengths should be in the center of the picture; their difficulties and frustrations should be in the corner.

5. Give them time.

- Solving the problem of lack of motivation will take time. Demotivation has developed over time. It will take time for the child to learn to overcome their pessimism and self-doubt and to let go of cynical and defiant attitudes.

## Plan to Support the Discouraged Child

Think about your child who shows signs of discouragement and lack motivation. Use this table to create a plan to help them feel good about themselves as they regain their enthusiasm.

<b>Child's Name -</b>	
<b>Reason for Lack of Motivation</b>	
<b>Child's Interests and Ways to Incorporate into daily tasks</b>	
<b>Child's Strengths and Ways to Build on them</b>	
<b>Plans to provide encouragement, encouragement, encouragement</b>	