

10 Practical Ways to Motivate Your Child

This month's tips are for any parent who wants their child to achieve everything possible and to enjoy a rich and fulfilled life.

They are drawn from my friend and fellow coach Nigel Lane's wonderful parenting book [*A Better Way: 101 practical ways to motivate your child.*](#)

To find out more about Nigel's coaching and speaking work, visit his [website](#).

Here are ten of his wise and commonsense tips to help motivate your child:

- The main sources of motivation:** This tip identifies four possible sources of motivation that will empower you to consider your child in light of the task they seem to be struggling with. When you realise which of the following four issues is the strongest one, you will be able to use that information to encourage your child to find the success that they want.
 - 1. Interest.** Your child will work harder and apply themselves more effectively if they have an interest in the subject and if they see value in it for them.
 - 2. Capability.** Children will work hard at something they are good at; it clearly adds to the enjoyment. Therefore, take opportunities to praise them and assure them that they can do the job in front of them.
 - 3. Acknowledgement.** They will work better when they can see a direct link between their success (or failure) to the amount of effort they put in. They will see that their efforts will pay off and, if they fail, they will be able to identify it was because they didn't try hard enough.
 - 4. Goals.** If the knowledge they are acquiring, or skill they are using, has a use in achieving one of their goals, then motivation will be easier to find.
- We learn differently:** Some learning styles will be more motivating and others less motivating to your child. The three main learning styles are visual, auditory and kinesthetic - also known as seeing, hearing and doing.
 - 1. Kinesthetic/Doing.** Your child is likely to love making models and creating things. They would much rather participate than sit and watch and will be much happier doing science experiments than learning the theory. They are into using their hands and find it more difficult to sit still. They feel more motivated and engaged when they incorporate practical activities into their school work.
 - 2. Auditory/Hearing.** Do they enjoy listening to books on their iPod? In fact they listen to their iPod a lot - to music of their choice. Did they love (do they still love) listening to you read and tell stories? They can probably take verbal instructions well and enjoy talking themselves. If it comes to a spelling test, they would prefer spelling something out loud to the teacher rather than writing it down as a test. Auditory learners feel motivated and engaged when they incorporate more listening into their school work.
 - 3. Visual/Seeing.** Does your child learn best by reading a book or studying graphs? Do they appreciate art, going to the movies or attending live theatre? Do they like to have a written back-up of what teachers say in class? Do they prefer studying a chart of their multiplication tables rather than repeating them out loud? Are they good at following your journey on a map? Approximately 40% of people are visual learners and they feel more motivated and engaged when they incorporate visual activities into their school work. Teachers are fully aware of the need to provide a range of activities that cover all learning styles but you will find it very helpful to know your child's style as you help them stay motivated.

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3. **Motivating them to read:** Very few life skills are as all-encompassing as reading. Reading opens the doors to learning. The earlier a child can read, and the more often they read, the more they will speed up their learning. Here are some tips on motivating them to read for themselves: 1. Set aside time each day for reading. 2. Ensure a variety of books is available for them to choose from - buy them books (amongst other things) for their birthdays and other events. 3. Make regular trips to the library and allow them to browse the children's section. 4. Encourage them to borrow from many different genres - picture books, fiction, non-fiction, audio books. 5. You can find many games (on-line and in-store) to improve their literary skills - Scrabble to name but one. The time you invest in their early years will provide significant dividends later in life.
4. **Teach them responsibility:** If we, as parents, can instill a sense of responsibility in our children, then that will, in turn, develop an intrinsic motivation to do the right thing. This will lead them to grow and become successful. Whilst the word responsible doesn't contain the letter 'a' it could be written as respons**ABLE** or able to respond. To help them become responsible human beings we should encourage them to focus their efforts on the following: show respect for the rights of other people; at all times do the 'right thing' as determined by the norms of our society; always obey the laws of the land; don't avoid the results of their behaviour but remain accountable for what they have done; act appropriately for their age and work towards being able to rely on their own abilities and efforts.
5. **Chores:** With many jobs to be completed around the house and especially when you have more than one child doing them, a chore chart is a great motivational aid. Perfect for sticking on the refrigerator, they will enable your children to take responsibility for their own chores and chart their progress. Depending on the age of your children it will be good if they can decorate the chart either with crayons and their own designs, or by cutting out pictures from magazines. If they have a sense of ownership they will be more willing to get involved in filling it out.
6. **Sibling rivalry:** There are two main risks to parents of more than one child in addition to the rivalry between siblings - favouritism and comparison. When we compare a children to their brother/sister, it is highly damaging and potentially highly demotivating. Often too, parents put their children under pressure to produce the same results as their sibling. No doubt the intention is to spur them on to greater things, but it is more likely to turn them off. The reality is that all our children are unique and have many differences. Over time, comparing siblings can leave damaging scars on their self- esteem and cause them to not want to accomplish anything for themselves. It can also cause a breakdown in their relationship that can continue well into adulthood. This happens because they also begin to compare themselves to each other. It is also natural for us to have different feelings for different children at different times, different ways we connect, different school interests, but if this creates a comparison culture and perceived favourites, the cost will be a lowered motivation level.

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7. **Encourage resiliency:** Resilient children are able to cope with whatever life throws at them and therefore don't become demotivated when things get tough. They develop an ability to solve many of their own problems whilst recognising mistakes as being common to everyone - things to learn from, not things that get them down or cause them to lose focus. Experts talk about the language of resiliency and the fact that resilient children can say: **I have** - people I trust and love; **I am** - a lovable person and **I can** - find ways to solve problems. We can help build resiliency by ensuring our children have trusting relationships, structures and rules at home, as well as good role models.
8. **Finishing the job:** It's not uncommon for children (adults too, in fact) to start something we have asked them to do but not complete it. Either they feel the pain and effort is just too much for them to bear or that it was just taking too long and they have other things to do. Here are some practical suggestions for helping them grow and realise that a task isn't over until it's over. 1. Be realistic in your expectation and thoroughness. If you tend to be a perfectionist, you may be too demanding and, in reality, the job is finished to the best of their ability. 2. Make sure that they have fully understood what you are asking them to do and what the job will look like when it is complete. 3. Refuse to bail them out by finishing the job for them. This runs the risk of creating a habit in their mind that will actually encourage them to stop part way through and then expect you to complete it.
9. **Depression:** Lack of motivation could be a symptom of a different issue, rather than the issue itself. Could your child be suffering from depression? Depression is a pessimistic sense of inadequacy, sad feelings of gloom that have been in existence for a period of time. If you feel your child is at risk then seek professional advice. At the same time, it can be hard to know what to say or do. Here are some thoughts: talk to them about how they are feeling; listen to what they say. Sometimes they don't need advice, they just need to be able to express how they feel; use open ended questions, e.g. 'So tell me about ...'; if they get angry/emotional, then you need to stay calm; sometimes just spending time with them assures them that you do care for and love them.
10. **Goal-setting:** A great way of getting (and sustaining) motivation is to have a clear set of goals. Goals give focus to what we do as well as providing relevance to our daily tasks. Help your child set goals - short, medium and long term - and see them be motivated as they achieve them. Just make sure you avoid the temptation to make them work towards your goals and not their own. If they don't own it, then a goal won't motivate them.

If you'd like to read more of Nigel's great tips, you can [get a copy of his book here](#).

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