



FAMILY *Matters*

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How to handle kids who show little effort and lack of motivation

In recent years, I've seen an increase in parental concerns about low or little effort and lack of motivation in their children. Parents often are puzzled by the lack of effort put forth by their children with schoolwork even when the child knows their effort could negatively affect the grade or result in a consequence at home. There are many factors that can contribute to this.

There are many more stimulating distractions, such as electronic devices, that children may find hard to put down and would prefer the more fun activity rather than the harder schoolwork. One way to understand this is to Google search a video called "the marshmallow test", which is a well-known experiment with young children that tests their self-discipline. A child is placed in a room with the marshmallow before them and is told that if they wait, in essence, defer gratification, they can get a larger reward, which is a second marshmallow. This self-discipline demonstrated by deferring gratification is strongly correlated with the ability to sustain effort. Therefore, it is important to teach our children to delay gratification

until they put forth effort to do homework, practice musical instruments and/or an athletic activity.

Another area to consider is parenting. The most ideal parenting strategy to promote effort is one that holds children accountable and the parent(s) don't do for a child, what a child can do for oneself. Said another way, don't overparent your children. It is important not to protect your children from natural consequences of low effort by doing things for them. This simply reinforces low effort and gives a mixed message about the importance of effort.

Children can also be very frustrated by school, especially if they predict they will not be successful with an activity. They then avoid the effort necessary to achieve what is needed. Some children also believe, incorrectly, that putting forth high effort is a sign of weakness and a lack of ability. It is important that parents help the child understand that effort is the key to success and should point out areas in their own lives when they have been successful putting forth effort along with any relatable public figures that have done the same.

So, what should parents do to increase effort in their children?

- Allow the child to fail, as a result of their little effort, which becomes a learning experience.
 - Don't overparent your children and do for them what they can already do for themselves.
 - Hold your children to high, but reasonable expectations.
 - Hold children accountable for doing chores.
 - Use access to electronics as a reward for putting in effort.
 - Talk about and demonstrate self-discipline.
 - Connect your child's effort (i.e., studying well for a test) with outcome.
 - View and discuss the marshmallow test video.
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