

Motivation

Parents regularly wish that their children would demonstrate more “motivation” – especially in the area of academics. **After years of counseling students, we can attest that there are no magic answers as to how to instill academic motivation in one’s child.** Although most parents know from their own experience that repeatedly nagging their child--or comparing him/her to peers--does not work, frustrated parents still find themselves engaging in these behaviors at times. **One of the biggest challenges of parenting is accepting on a deep (and daily) level your child’s temperament, interests and pace of growth.** Parents often feel judged on their child’s behavior grades and achievements (or perceived lack thereof). The reality, though, is that children are not blank slates: they are born with certain personality traits that remain remarkably consistent from early childhood.

Given this reality, how can the issue of motivation best be addressed? **Rather than focusing on grades as the final products, a more subtle and valued based approach is needed.** An excellent blog by Dr. Tim Elmore (www.growingleaders.com) addresses the issue within the context of current American culture. Our children are growing up in a world where:

- Gratification is frequently instant, especially with the constant availability of technology
- Celebrities from reality TV dominate the headlines and garner admiration despite their often bizarre antics
- The “self-esteem” movement has boosted confidence and narcissism among students to unprecedented (and often unwarranted) levels

How do parents foster the values that are critical for the development of motivation and persistence?

Building on Mr. Elmore’s suggestions, the Staples Resilience Project offers parents these suggestions:

- 1) **Slow down the pace at home;** make sure there are established family gatherings, even if it’s a just a weekly Sunday dinner. Be creative with reluctant teens and negotiate a time and day that works for everyone then communicate your expectation that they will make plans accordingly. Family traditions build relationship and communication skills.
- 2) **Celebrate stories of people (whether they are well-known, neighbors, friends, or family) who demonstrate discipline and persistence.**
- 3) **Help your child establish clear short-term goals** (NOT connected to grades or winning). For example: exercising once a week, handing in all homework for one week or learning to cook a healthy meal. Offer to support your child in achieving the goal...but only if s/he wants you to!
- 4) **Match your praise with the actual achievement.** Students are keenly aware of the effort required to achieve certain goals –too much praise rings false. At the same time ensure that you validate the work put in even if the result is not what they hoped.
- 5) Although teens may protest, **establish a technology free time each day...**followed by **all** family members. While few teens will demonstrate a ready desire to use the time to meditate, begin encouraging mindfulness by giving them permission to disconnect for half an hour to read or just to daydream.

The Staples Resilience Project is an ongoing endeavor by the Staples High School Guidance Department. We welcome your feedback.

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