

PARENTING ARTICLE

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MOTIVATING OUR CHILDREN TO STUDY IN UNPRECEDENTED TIMES

The shift to Home-Based Learning (HBL) has posed a variety of challenges for schools and parents. Likewise, many children struggle with self-motivation. Some may find it difficult to maintain focus and interest in completing their assignments and preparing for their exams. Sometimes, their apparent lack of interest and motivation in their studies may lead us parents to perceive them as lazy. Yet, even as we strive to help our children remain engaged in their HBL, their time also has to be balanced carefully with activities that promote their mental well-being.

As we delve deeper into the uncertainties that the future holds, may we continue to stay positive and hopeful. In this issue of the Parenting Article – “Motivating Our Children to Study in Unprecedented Times”, we would like to share some practical tips that we hope will offer some support to all parents.

To help our children remain engaged in their HBL, the focus for parents is to: **(1) Build a safe environment for our children to feel valued and accepted; and (2) Coach our children in selecting goals, as well as the ways to reach them effectively.**

In fostering a safe environment, building a positive relationship with our children goes a long way. For example, giving our children the space to express their feelings freely, both positively and negatively. This safe environment helps children feel valued and accepted by their parents, which can be a big motivator for them to study hard.

In terms of coaching our children to select and achieve goals, children need assurance from their parents to know that their failures are not reflective of their abilities, and that their current level of performance is not fixed or set in stone. If they put in the effort and adopt the right strategies, they will be able to improve and succeed. Likewise, this will further motivate children to be more engaged in their studies.

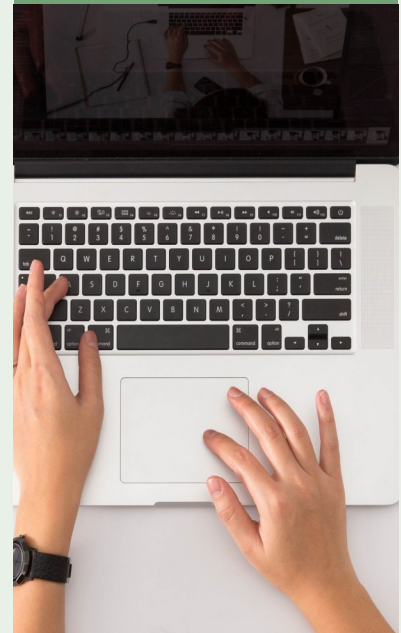


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14 TIPS TO MOTIVATE OUR CHILDREN



Photo credit: Unsplash.com



25 MINUTES
WORKING
5 MINUTES
RESTING



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(1) Give your child a sense of control - This can mean encouraging your child to work out a time-table for themselves. For example, allowing them to decide on their own – which subjects they wish to cover first. Allowing them to do so develops skills such as being able to plan their time, monitoring their progress and developing the resilience to stay on task.

Example: *Which piece of homework is most urgent? What non-school activities do I have? How much time should I set aside to complete my homework? By when should I complete this piece of homework?* At the end of each day, revisit the plan to discuss with your child on what went well and what did not go so well, and guide your child in adjusting the plan if necessary.

(2) Encourage your child to “eat the ugly frog first.” This means intentionally choosing to deal with the most challenging subject/homework first. Once your child finishes the most difficult task, they will be more motivated to continue working on other tasks as they will feel more confident and competent, knowing that the other pieces of work are easier or more enjoyable in comparison.

(3) Using the pomodoro technique. The pomodoro technique is a time management system in which a work day is broken up into 25-minute chunks separated by 5-minute breaks. This helps us to stay focused and complete our tasks. Personally, I have tried it and found that it works! To make it more interesting for your child, you may wish to get a copy of the physical pomodoro online, or simply download the app on your phone.

(4) Set up a productive study space for your child with the following considerations in mind: (1) Free from distractions; (2) Easy access to learning materials; (3) Good lighting; (4) Good ventilation and comfortable temperature; (5) Comfortable space for learning (not resting!). Having a conducive learning environment is important, as it helps us stay focused and productive while studying or doing work.

(5) Encourage your child to be involved in a study buddy group. This could take place online over messaging apps such as Zoom or Skype, or face-to-face meet ups if safe-distancing measures permit. This provides children with a sense of connectedness with their friends, and can be a good source of motivation for them to study as they are not doing it alone.

(6) Encourage self-reflection. Most children have the desire to succeed, and they just require the guidance of their parents to help them figure out what needs to be done in order to reach their goals. One way to motivate your child through encouraging self-reflection is to get them to take a hard, honest look at themselves and list out their strengths and weaknesses. Oftentimes, children are more motivated when they get to be more involved in setting their own goals, as opposed to having their parents do it for them. See [Metacognitive Prompts For Students To Reflect On Their Learning](#).

(7) Give them a taste of success. When a child experiences tiny wins, they gradually develop the confidence to go for bigger wins. The more your child sees that they have many competencies, the more motivated they become, and the more they believe they can achieve bigger things. An example could be to involve your child in the steps of cooking that are safer and simpler. Upon successful completion, that activity would be associated with positive emotions and a sense of satisfaction, which then builds motivation. This can be done on a daily basis.

(8) Bring out the best in your child. Every child has their strengths and weaknesses. Instead of continuously pointing out their shortcomings, what we can do as parents is to focus on their strengths. Look out for the good in your child and highlight it in a positive manner as much as possible. Help grow your child's strengths by giving them more opportunities to develop their strengths. This encourages your child and brings out the best in them.

Example: “Wow Son, you’re so thoughtful for wanting to help me with the dishes! I’m so thankful to have such a thoughtful son like you. I’m wondering, how else would you like to help Mummy around the house?”

(9) Use results/grades to connect with your child. Results or grades are good benchmarks that parents can use to get a sense of how their children are doing in school. While it may be easy to judge our child's ability based on their results if they are not up to our standards, we should not make statements such as "You are not smart" or "You are not good at Mathematics". Instead, we need to help our children identify areas for improvement and encourage them towards trying other study strategies. Remind your children that they are worthy of your love despite whatever grade they get.

(10) Help students develop intrinsic motivation. We can help our children develop motivation. However, at the end of the day, for it to be sustainable, they need to be able to generate their own motivation. One of the most powerful gifts we can give as parents to our children is to help them find their personal reasons for wanting to do their homework and work hard. For instance, it can be because they find the learning material interesting, or that they wish to go to a particular school or college. Perhaps it can simply be their love for learning.

(11) Manage children's anxiety. Children experience anxiety, just like adults do. Sometimes, the fear that children experience from the possibility of not doing well, can itself be anxiety-inducing. This then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy because being in a state of anxiety can make it extremely difficult for someone to perform as well as they are typically able to. To help children cope with this, parents could consider allowing them to have a power nap of 10-30 minutes a day. This allows them to feel refreshed and rejuvenated. Additionally, parents may want to listen to their child's struggles, reminding them that performing poorly in school is not the end of the world. Furthermore, they can ask the child if he or she requires extra support such as tuition classes.

(12) Helping your child set realistic goals. It is important to help children learn to set realistic goals and manage their expectations. This helps to reduce the chances of them feeling overwhelmed and giving up if they fail to achieve their goals. A useful model to follow for goal-setting is S.M.A.R.T – (1) Specific; (2) Measurable; (3) Achievable; (4) Realistic; (5) Timely. See [SMART Goals - Time Management Training From MindTools.com](#)

(13) Focus on the process instead of the outcome. Sometimes, we say certain things to our children that make them learn to focus on the outcome instead of the process. For example, if we were to say "Good job Son, you scored 90/100 for your Science paper." Instead of "Good job Son, you worked hard for your Science paper." The message we unintentionally send to our children is that their effort does not matter, if in the end, the desired results are not achieved. When we teach our children to focus on the outcome, they begin to define their worth by their performance. They may become resistant to trying new things and hesitant to give their best effort for the fear of failure. But when we teach our children to focus on the effort they put in, the process becomes exciting and rewarding, regardless of the outcome.

(14) Develop healthy coping strategies. Life gets stressful at times, and it is important for children to develop healthy coping strategies that they can take with them into adulthood. Take time to explore with your child what kind of activities help them destress. For example, it can be to go for a walk in the park, or to cycle, or listen to some music.

As we continue our journey in unprecedented times, let us continue to stay connected with our families and friends through phone or video calls. Do as much as we can to take care of our mental well-being. Remember to take time to motivate and encourage our loved ones, even those who may appear to be doing all right on the outside.

We hope you have found this parenting article useful. Should you need further assistance, please do not hesitate to email us at mwsfspeast@mws.sg or through [FormSq](#). To echo what [Dr Huang Wei-Jen](#) has said, "**Listening is Loving; Empathy is Healing.**" May we learn to pause and listen more to our children.

We sincerely hope that you will be able to build a better relationship with your children!

From the MWS FSP Team



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Should you wish to explore alternative help, you may consider calling the various helplines ([Helplines](#)). If you know someone who may benefit from this resource, please share this with them as well.

Thank you!