

22 Ways to Make Sure Your Kid Loves School



School is a daily struggle for our children, and their classrooms are maelstroms of failure, frustration, and confusion. It is critically important that you play your role of parent and advocate, to be your child's source of strength and support.

By Richard Lavoie

1 Success is the greatest motivator. Recognize, reinforce, and celebrate your child's successes and progress—especially small victories.

2 When reviewing a test or report card with your child, always comment first on the positive aspects and achievements.

3 Compliment your children for good decisions.

4 Reinforce your child for small gains in a difficult subject area. Reward direction, not perfection.

5 Speak positively and be supportive of your child's school and teachers. If a child senses his parent's hostility toward his school, it is unlikely that he will be motivated to succeed there.

6 Be aware of your child's symptoms of anxiety (changes in eating habits, sleeplessness, nightmares, compulsive behaviors, shyness, defiance, physical symptoms, cruelty toward pets or younger siblings). Anxiety can compromise a child's ability to make decisions, use sound judgment, memorize, and learn in school.

7 Monitor your child's health for any physical problem that interferes with her ability to attend and fully participate in school.

8 Provide regular, nutritious, well-balanced meals. A child who is hungry or not receiving the right vitamins and minerals is unlikely to be motivated in school.

9 Be certain that your child gets enough rest and sleep. Tired children cannot learn. Even a one-hour deficiency in the amount of sleep a child gets will affect his performance the next day. Sleep allows children to process the previous day's events, and to consolidate learned and memorized information. In order for a child to have deep, restful sleep, he must go to bed feeling safe, secure, and loved. Avoid conflicts at bedtime.

10 Let your child know that his family holds education in high esteem. Celebrate and reinforce learning. Remind him that education is a family priority.

11 Do not tell your child that a task will be easy to increase his motivation. "Come on, Tom, let's get started on that map work. It should be a cinch." This well-intentioned strategy often backfires. If he does well

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on the task, he is not delighted, because the assignment was labeled “easy.” Conversely, if he has difficulty with the assignment, he has failed at a simple task. Either way, his pride and self-esteem are not enhanced. It is better to say, “This task is a challenge, but I know that you can do it.”

12 Work with your child in an effort to improve his organizational, time management, and scheduling skills.

13 Celebrate risk-taking behavior. The willingness to take risks is fundamental to school success and motivation.

14 Be willing and able to explain to your child’s teachers and coaches that his lack of motivation may be the effect of his school failure, not the cause.

15 Don’t compare your child unfavorably to his siblings. This builds resentment and anger, not motivation.

16 Remember the importance of family traditions and rituals. Children feel comfortable and accepted in a home environment with predictable and ritualistic events to look forward to.

17 Take care of yourself. Maintain *your* health by eating right and exercising. Have a support system and allow yourself the “luxury” of activities that replenish your energy and boost your spirits. Recognize your own response to anxiety and give yourself permission to take

a break occasionally. You can’t coach and advocate for your child if you are exhausted and drained. There is a reason why airlines advise you to don the oxygen mask first, then offer assistance to others.

18 Consistently demonstrate how much you value learning by supporting the policies and practices of your child’ school. Avoid criticizing your child’s teachers. Speak positively about your own school experiences, and promote the idea that learning is a lifelong process.

19 Show faith in your child and her ability to learn. Although her academic performance may cause you concern, disappointment, and distress, don’t harp on it.

20 Take an active (but not intrusive) interest in your child’s hobbies and activities.

21 Enjoy family activities in which all family members work cooperatively toward a common goal (e.g., gardening, family game nights, community service).

22 Help children set realistic goals for their academic, social, and athletic performances. Use these goals to monitor and assess their progress.

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Actions Matter

Families that foster student motivation are:

- > Warm
- > Loving
- > Consistent
- > Supportive
- > Accepting
- > Cooperative
- > Concerned
- > Respectful

Families that discourage motivation are:

- > Tense
- > Chaotic
- > Critical
- > Controlling
- > Rejecting
- > Aloof
- > Fearful
- > Unpredictable