**Talking to your Middle-Schooler – 10 Ways to Motivate your Child to do Better in School**

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Do these sound familiar?

*“My daughter does just enough to get by, instead of trying her best”*

*“My son is a smart kid, but he doesn’t work hard in school”*

As a parent, we are invested in our child’s academic life because we know how important it is for their future. From our perspective, it makes no sense that our kids would put things like friends or electronics before their work. The truth is, most kids *are* motivated, but not by what we think should motivate them. One thing for certain is that if you pressure your child in order to motivate him, it almost always makes things worse. Think about it in terms of your own life-even as an adult, you may know it’s best to eat right, but actually following through is another story!

For some people, all the stars are aligned at the right time- motivation, skill and attitude combine to create a successful outcome. But for most of us, it’s way trickier and a much more uneven path to motivation and success. When you think about it, not every kid asks teachers for help, does all their homework on time all the time, reviews the material they learned each night and puts aside all other distractions to get down to their studies. The ones who do are typically the kids who have what is called “good executive functioning,” because the front part of their brain is more developed. This plays a significant role in school achievement. It helps the regulation of emotions, attention span, perseverance, and flexibility. For many, many kids their functioning often does not develop until much later in the adolescent years. This is particularly tough if you are a parent who was responsible at an early age but you now have child lagging behind. It’s hard to imagine that they are not just lazy, irresponsible and unmotivated. Of course, if you start believing these things about your child, you will simply get annoyed, frustrated, angry, and reactive to their laziness-which will contribute to the power struggle and to their defiance. Here are ten ways to support them:

1. **Keep a relationship with your kids that is open, respectful and positive.** Stay on your kids’ team don’t play against them.
2. **Incorporate the “when you” rule.** One of life’s lessons is that we get the goodies after we do the work. When you practice shooting hoops every day, you start making more baskets. Enforce this rule and stick to it. If your child does not yet have the ability to plan, initiate, and persevere, by sticking to this rule, you are helping them learn how to do what their own brain is not yet equipped to do, which is to create the structure for him.
3. **When you are invited in.** If you child is not studying and his grades are dropping, you are invited in whether he wants you there or not! You need to be there to help set up a structure that he is not able to create for himself.
4. **Ask the teacher.** Set up a plan with his teacher.
5. **Identify a study spot.**
6. **Break it down.** Decide together whether or not it will be helpful to your child for you to help him break down his assignments into small pieces and organize on a calendar what he should get done each day.
7. **Be kind but firm.** For every negative interaction with your child, try to create ten positive ones. Try to put the focus on supporting and encouraging him instead of worrying and nagging. When you start to believe his grades are a reflection of you or your parenting and that you are responsible for his outcome, you will be on his case-and it will be harmful and ineffective.
8. **Lack of motivation or anxiety?** Recognize that so much of your child l**ack of motive (or what looks like irresponsibility) might be his own anxiety or shame about academics and schoolwork. While a little anxiety can motivate, too much blocks your child’s ability to think and to have access to the part of the brain that helps him with motivation. Keep your emotions in check by recognizing that it’s your child's anxiety at play rather than his laziness. Your job (and how you will be most helpful to him) is to not react to his anxiety or your own.**
9. **Teach life balance.** Remember to always keep the big picture in mind. Rather than go crazy over your child’s grades, help her to balance her life with friendships, other activities volunteer work and family activities.
10. **Don’t futurize. When we see our child seeming to have no interest in his academic life, it’s easy to start fast-forwarding into the future. This ramps-up our anxiety and our fear. But here’s the truth: none of us have a crystal ball or can really see into the future. Focusing on the negative things your child is doing will only bring the spotlight on them, and may set you both up for power struggle. Instead, focus on your child’s positive traits and help him work on those in the present.**

**Parents are often so worried about their child falling behind that they end up in a power struggle with their kids over it, but nothing gets better. They go round and round, just fighting about the grades and the work. But if you as the parent can calm down and understand that this is not just a bad attitude and an unmotivated kid-and that you can’t force them to be motivated-then you can actually start meeting your child where his is and helping where he needs help. Remember, your goal is stop the reactivity and solve the problem.**