

Tips to help parents motivate their child

Regularly show interest

Show interest in your child's everyday school life, in their difficulties and successes.

You can do this, for example, by asking them to show and explain their homework, asking them to tell you about their day at school, by listening to them attentively, expressing understanding for their situation and reacting if there is a problem.

Let your child explain to you why he or she is reluctant to do certain homework, is "afraid" of a subject, or is (currently) unable to get along with a classmate or the teacher.

Have the courage to discuss things

Let your child feel that you, as a parent, will still support them, even if they do something not so well or have received a bad mark in a test. Encourage your child to talk about difficult situations at school in order to find solutions together.

Praise the child

Praise your child first for the effort they have put in for a school subject, and only then for the result, for example, the mark (without overdoing it!).

One way to praise your child is: "It's nice that you've already done your homework, although maths is not much fun for you at the moment." or "Your writing shows how much effort you have put into writing."

Praise can be expressed in words, but also in a smile, an approving nod, a hug.

Please do not first praise your child and then follow it with a reservation such as: "The 3 in the dictation is a significant improvement, but with more effort, you could have got a 2."

Think carefully about when and how you use rewards as recognition for an achievement. The following rule generally applies: Doing something together is more valuable than sweets or cash gifts.

It is easier to reach your child through praise than by shouting at them or punishing them. Praise encourages and strengthens your child.

Accept strengths and weaknesses

Every child has their own learning pace. If your expectations of your child are too high, you will overburden them, for example, with a question such as, "Have you still not learned your poem?". Don't expect more from your child than they can manage.

Be careful with sentences such as, "Pull yourself together" or "You need to study more – other pupils can also do it!". You will put your child under pressure this way. Give your child the motivation to continue to make an effort: "I'm sure you can do it."

Try to also show your child the small successes that they have already had through putting in some effort: "Just look how far you've come already."

Encourage your child to do suitable leisure activities for their age

These include exercising indoors and outdoors (e.g. playing and exercising with friends, dancing), individual or team sports (e.g. in a spontaneous group on the “meadow” or in a sports club), activities at home (e.g. doing crafts or reading), singing, making music...

Encourage your child not to give up immediately if their interest subsides or difficulties come up; but also do not force them to do something they do not want in the long term.

Your child should enjoy the activity and be confident in their own abilities; only then can they experience success.

Train your child to be gradually more self-reliant

The more self-reliance children have during everyday life, the easier it is for them to work independently at school.

If you give children small tasks to do at an early age, for example, in the household or when shopping, they learn to take responsibility and become self-reliant. Praise your child for doing things independently.

Being able to learn independently is an essential goal of school education today. Schools use teaching methods that gradually introduce your child to an independent learning attitude appropriate to their age. Ask your child’s teachers how this is being developed in your child’s class and how you can support these efforts at home.

Tip: This is also a very suitable topic for the parents’ evening, as it affects all parents of a class.

Observe whether your child notices mistakes in their homework by themselves. If your child is capable of this, praise them for noticing it independently. If your child does not see a mistake, encourage them to take a closer look again.

Beware of “acquired helplessness”! In order to get more attention from parents, children tend to try to get this attention through help with homework. It has been observed that children’s learning success gets worse, the more the parents help with the homework. So encourage your child to try to do their homework independently. As a reward and as an expression of affection, you can offer your child, for example, a game or a small activity together.

If you are unsure how to help your child with their homework, especially if you do not speak German well yourself, ask your child’s teacher. Ask the teacher for suggestions about the respective homework, and try to find concrete, feasible options for you, together with the teacher.

Bring up your child to organise their time and duties

It’s important to have reliable recurring activities and rituals in everyday life because they provide structure and, therefore, a sense of security.

Children like rituals, because they are good for them. This can be: the same routine in the morning before school, meals together, homework, fixed reading (aloud) and playing times, sports or music lessons, prayer and reflection times, family discussions, trips and visits, cooking, shopping or housework times together, going to bed at fixed times...

Support your child in how to structure the day.

Create a “weekly timetable” together with your child. It shows the lesson schedule at school and arrangements for the afternoons, compulsory and leisure periods. It gives you and your child an overview of every day, including the time margins required.

Together with your child, consider whether it is necessary to make changes for the coming week (the next 2 or 4 weeks), for example, because a school subject requires more preparation time or a regular leisure activity is added.

Observe the changed daily routines for their suitability and discuss them with the family.

Encourage your child to do homework at the most regular times possible. At the end of each day, have your child make sure that all the homework required for the following school day has been completed and all school supplies have been packed. Established structures and taking responsibility for homework and school materials give the child a sense of security and strengthen their self-confidence.

Agree rules and consequences with your child

Your child should be clear about the tasks required of him/her, both as a school pupil and in the family. What does your child expect to happen, if he/she does not follow the rules?

It can be helpful to follow the methods used by the teacher to encourage children to keep to the rules and for reward or punishment.

The experiences of one mother:

For homework that has not been completed, the child first receives a green reminder from the teacher, then a yellow warning, and the third time a red entry in the class book (with information from the parents plus the offer of a parent-teacher meeting). As the 3-step consistent approach proved to be very successful with their child, these parents incorporated the clear procedure of the “traffic light method” into their child-rearing methods at home. The parents thought of an appropriate way to use the approach, that they explained to the child:

- *a green card for examples of unacceptable behaviour of the child (with oral justification),*
- *in the first case of repetition, a yellow card and the announcement of the “child-rearing measure” the child can expect (appropriate to the situation: drying the dishes in what would otherwise be free time, or similar) and*
- *in the event of the second repetition, a red card with the consistent enforcement of the “child-rearing measure” announced with the yellow card.*

Please note: Schools in Germany do not regard their central task to be “bringing up” children. They take the following perspective: Parents bring up their children so that they accept the rules that need to be kept in order to learn and in order for everyone to live together as a society.

Don't forget: You can use the parents' evening, parents' open day, teacher's consultation hours and individually arranged parent-teacher meetings to communicate regularly with your teacher about the required rules. You can find sample forms to request a meeting at www.wegweiser-bw.de.

Communicating with your child's teachers

Talk with your child's teacher about ideas and approaches to implement the “tips”. Ask for support in your efforts.