



Parenting during pandemic

Day 3: Motivating children to want to learn while schools are closed

Day 3 of schools being closed and we are over half way through the 'school' week. Hopefully things are going well with setting up of new routines and reward systems. While these things in themselves can be motivating for children, there are some other things that may help. If things are going well, you may feel you don't need these tips just now but if we are to stay home for an extended period of time, we may all need a little motivation.

One of the most important things about motivation is that it is our own. Often others will tell us what we should be doing or what they think we should be motivated by but in general they are just giving us information or increasing our knowledge rather than our motivation. Knowing something is a good idea and actually doing something about that good idea are two very different things. For example, we all know we should eat a healthy diet, drink enough water, get enough exercise, limit caffeine and alcohol. But, knowing these things are a good idea and even knowing the very good reasons why, doesn't make all of us do things about it all of the time. So knowledge isn't enough. If we want our children to be motivated to do things, often we advise them and give them lots of reasons why they should do things and sometimes this works but when it doesn't, the issue may be that we are increasing their knowledge and not their motivation.

Here are a few things to try. Ask your child why they want to learn while schools are closed. Get them to write a list or draw pictures of their reasons. Remember that they have to be their own reasons and not yours; so whereas you may think about them learning to keep up, they may think about learning to fulfil their desire to be the first footballer to score a goal on the moon! This is fine. As long as it's motivating to them it's helpful.

You could also try speaking about what gets in the way of learning while schools are closed. These are the barriers. You may think you know what these are but a discussion about them can highlight some things you haven't considered that may be important to your child. The next important step is to talk about solutions to each barrier. This is not easy. We just called them barriers so they are likely to be getting in the way and difficult to move. This is where you can model for your child some problem solving skills. Talk about yourselves as a team

and explain that there is nothing you can't work out together. This approach can set things up well for later so that your child knows they can talk to you about anything and while nobody has all of the answers all of the time, things can be worked out by speaking to others and working together.

At this point, you have a list of motivation to learn while schools are closed and you have worked out what might get in the way and what you might do about it together. Next, you can ask your child what skills they think they have to help them learn while schools are off. These have to be their own skills and the things they are personally good at. We use this sometimes in building self esteem so it can be a helpful thing to do with your child anyway to build self esteem and a positive image of themselves as a learner.

Next is your champions strategy. Ask your child to write down or draw any time they remember being successful at something. This doesn't have to be academic success, just any time they have felt successful. This is what champions do. It's what sports psychologists tell elite athletes to do. Think about your skills, think about your successes, think about what it felt like to use your skills for success and then imagine yourself successful in the future. This last part may be about going back to the motivation list. If there are future aspirations on there then imagine actually doing these things. All of these things are positives; considering skills, successes, future successes; and can be helpful in building motivation.

If you are doing some learning at home, you can ask your child to do some of the things mentioned here as part of this. You can include writing, spelling, art or whatever you think may be helpful for them as part of creating their motivation lists. If you do these things early on, though, it's much easier in moments of struggling with motivation to go back to these lists you have already created to try to build up motivation again. If you try to create these things when children are not really motivated, it's more difficult as they won't be motivated to do this either.

We hope these tips are helpful. Well done on managing the third day off school and we hope you will join us again tomorrow.

Tomorrow's topic: Managing worries children may have about coronavirus and schools being closed

Please [contact us with questions, comments or topics](#) you'd like to see covered. We'd love to hear your feedback.

Wishing you a safe and healthy path through this pandemic.