



## LEARNING AT HOME DURING COVID-19

# 9 Tips for Motivating Children to Learn at Home

As families and teachers are struggling to help children learn at home, many children are grappling with motivation, finding it difficult to stay interested in schoolwork without the structure of the classroom. These tips can help parents and caregivers foster their children's motivation to stay engaged in schoolwork.

Motivation includes students' intrinsic interest in tasks that they find enjoyable and personally relevant. It also takes into account their goals for learning, their capacity to track progress towards these goals, their commitment to learning tedious but necessary skills, and their expectations for success. By providing choices, coaching in selecting and reaching effective goals, and feedback, parents and caregivers can help expand children's interest in and management of their own learning.

- 1. Allow children to choose from an array of learning tasks and provide input into how they will complete their work.**

**EXAMPLE:** "It looks like you have assignments to complete in science, social studies, reading, and math. Which would you rather work on first?" "How much time do you think you should spend on that?" "I see that you have a choice of reading passages; which looks most interesting?" "What do you plan to write your social studies essay about?" "What's most interesting, do you think?" Allowing for choices will let your child plan for learning in ways that are most motivating.

- 2. Involve children in planning timelines for completing learning tasks and allow them to monitor their own progress in meeting their timelines.**

**EXAMPLE:** "Let's think about how you'd like to work on this science project. What are the steps you'll need to complete to get that done? Now, let's think about how those will fit into your schedule this week." Then, let your student sketch out a simple plan for the work. At the end of each day, revisit the plan to see what went well and what was unexpected, and help your student adjust the plan as needed.

- 3. Encourage children to trust themselves to succeed by describing the progress they have already made and the successes they have already had.**

**EXAMPLE:** “You’re right, these equations do look pretty confusing. But I notice that you’ve already learned how to solve the first part. That only took a few hours, and then you aced the practice test.”

- 4. Involve children in giving themselves small rewards for working on tasks that are important but inherently uninteresting.**

**EXAMPLE:** “You’re going to have to memorize these terms, and I can tell that it’s your least favorite thing to do. So, what could you give yourself as a small prize when you put in your practice time today?” Rewards might be reading a chapter in a favorite book, phoning a friend for a study break, a small snack, or a few minutes of video game practice.

- 5. Give children feedback that is specific, credible, and genuine.**

**EXAMPLE:** Look for opportunities to provide positive feedback to your students. Good feedback must be believable and it needs to come from the heart. Examples include: “I am impressed with how well you kept working even when those problems were hard.” “You were really concentrating on that story and you remember a lot of details about it.” “What a delightful ending! It made me laugh!”

- 6. Reframe the mistakes children make as opportunities to learn and involve them in planning ways to improve their work.**

**EXAMPLE:** Have your student look through a completed assignment, tell you where the mistakes are, and explain how to fix them. For example, “You did a nice job on these questions. Help me check them. Find the two mistakes that I see... Great, now can you tell me how to fix them?” Finding and fixing their own mistakes gives children more control over their own learning.

- 7. When a task is too hard, help children break it into smaller steps and tackle the problem one step at a time.**

**EXAMPLE:** “What’s the first thing that you’ll need to do? Put that on the bottom step of an imaginary staircase with the task on top. Great, and what comes after that? Put that on the next step.” Once the task is broken into steps, challenge your student to complete one step at a time.

- 8. Help students set goals for their work that are short-term, specific, and moderately difficult.**

**EXAMPLE:** Student-set goals help students blend their interests with their required work, but most students are not accomplished goal-setters. Guide them to set challenging but doable goals for the short term: 1-2 days for elementary students and 1-2 weeks for secondary students. Then, help them edit their goals to be specific so that both you and your student can tell when the goal has been met. For example, “You’ve been reading four pages a day in your textbook. How many pages do you think you could read and still understand the passage?” Have your student write the goal down, check back to mark whether it was completed, and then set the next goal.

- 9. When a task is hard, help the student think carefully through alternative ways to solve the problem.**

**EXAMPLE:** “OK, let’s make sure I understand. The problem is that there are too many variables in this equation and you aren’t sure how to begin. What are some things you can do to try to figure this out? Let me write those options down.” “Which option will be easiest for you to try?” “Which option do you think is most likely to work?” “Which option would your teacher tell you to try?” “OK, now pick one, and go ahead and try it.”

#### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

5 ways parents can motivate children at home during the pandemic - without nagging or tantrums  
[bit.ly/motivate-children-at-home](https://bit.ly/motivate-children-at-home)

Helping Kids Stay Motivated for Learning During Social Distancing  
[bit.ly/helping-kids-stay-motivated](https://bit.ly/helping-kids-stay-motivated)