

Top 10 Ways to Motivate Gifted Children

by [Carol Bainbridge](#), About.com Guide

Parents of gifted children are often surprised and dismayed when their children underachieve in school. [Learning disabilities in gifted children](#)¹ can sometimes lead to underachievement, but it is often simply a lack of motivation. Motivating some gifted children can be difficult; neither rewards nor punishments seem to work, especially for [intrinsically motivated children](#)². What can parents do to motivate their gifted children? Here are eight ideas to try.

1. Nurture Your Child's Interests

To nurture your child's interests, provide opportunities for him or her to learn and explore that interest. For example, if your youngster loves dinosaurs, get fact and fiction books about dinosaurs and visit natural history museums. If your child loves music, get [toy \(or real\) instruments](#)³ and consider music lessons. If your child loves science, get science books and science kits and visit science museums. Kids who can explore their interests are more likely to keep their love of learning alive.

2. Expose Your Child to New Ideas and Areas

Sometimes a child lacks motivation because he or she hasn't yet been exposed to what might be a life passion. A child whose true passion is music but who has never had a chance to explore it will not be able to unlock that passion. Look for community programs, not just school programs. Don't overlook traditionally female activities, like dance and gymnastics, for boys. Keep an open mind; it's your child's interests that are important.

3. Use Short-Term Goals and Rewards

Sometimes a child gets overwhelmed by a large task. It's not that the task is difficult, but the child may not be able to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Rather than begin the task, a child will give up before he or she even begins. Help your child see the task as a series of smaller tasks. Make each small task a goal and try setting a reward for that goal. Sometimes rewards won't be necessary once a child is able to see the task as a manageable one.

4. Help Your Child Learn to Manage Time

When they start school, gifted children usually have few problems keeping up with work. They learn quickly and easily. While that may sound like a real advantage, it can lead to problems. These children may never learn to manage their time in order to get work done. At some point, whether in high school or college, they may feel overwhelmed by the work they need to complete and don't know how to set time aside to complete tasks. Teach your child how to create and use a time-management schedule.

5. Praise Your Child's Efforts

Gifted kids sometimes have trouble connecting personal effort to achievement. Much of what they do and learn comes easily to them, so they can achieve with little effort. To help a child succeed, praise efforts at success and make that praise specific. For example, instead of saying "Nice work," it's better to say something like, "You worked hard on your science project; you really earned that A." However, avoid the reverse: don't say things like, "If you worked harder, you would do better."

6. Help Your Child Take Control

Gifted underachievers sometimes see achievement as something beyond their control. If they succeed, it is due to luck or some other external factor. This attitude makes them feel like effort is pointless. Praising their efforts can help, but these children also need to understand the role personal responsibility plays in success.

The way you talk about your own life sends a message. Complaining about your boss or blaming your boss for your lack of success at work sends the wrong message.

7. Keep a Positive Attitude About School

Children need to see that their parents value education. Even if a child's problems in school are the school's or teacher's fault, you need to be careful of what you say. Negative attitudes toward school in general will transfer to your child. If school is a problem, you can point out that even though problems can occur, education is still valuable and effort will eventually lead to success. Blaming the school will allow the child to avoid personal responsibility.

8. Help Your Child Make Connections Between Schoolwork and Their Interests

Sometimes children lack motivation because they don't see a connection between the work they are being asked to do and their goals and interests. A child who wants to be an astronaut should know that math and science is important in those jobs. A little research may be necessary to find requirements of various jobs. However, unmotivated gifted children generally don't focus on anything but the present. Two weeks in the future is even hard for some of them to imagine.

9. Turn Homework Into Creative Games

Gifted children love a challenge, so by turning otherwise dull homework into a challenging game, you can get your child to do it. Some children like to race, so you can ask them to see how quickly they can get it done -- without mistakes. Checking their work lets them see you care about it. Another creative approach to homework is to link it to an interest. For example, a dull math worksheet can be the decoding assignment of an astronaut's space mission to Mars. Unless the work is done correctly, the mission will fail. Even the smallest mistake can create a problem that can cause the mission to fail.

10. Keep In Mind that Motivation Is Not Always About School Achievement

We often equate motivation with school achievement. However, it's important to note that some children are highly motivated to achieve goals, but those goals are unrelated to school. A gifted teen, for example, may be more interested in creating a volunteer community program for the elderly or for the underprivileged.

Achievement Is Not Motivation

It's important to remember that while you may get your child to get homework done, he or she may never be truly motivated to do it.