

BOOK REVIEW

How to motivate your child for school and beyond

Andrew Martin

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Parents in general and workers concerned with the needs of young people in care, will welcome this book as a very accessible guide for enhancing the motivation to learn in children and young people. In focusing on motivation the author is talking about the child's energy and drive to try hard, study effectively, improve and work to his or her potential.

In the first chapter, he strikes a note of optimism talking about raising the happy learner and discussing the significance of motivation on personal well-being, effects on school, parenting and home. He also introduces three student motivation categories – the 'success striver', the 'failure avoider', and the 'failure acceptor'. For those in the first of these categories, self esteem and confidence are higher and success builds on success. A degree of academic resilience helps to overcome setbacks and there is some enjoyment in challenge and hard work. The book is about promoting the conditions which foster this category and dealing with the factors leading to the two categories in which failure appears to be generated and compounded. The second chapter introduces the reader to motivation enhancers in the form of booster thoughts and booster behaviours, which are opposed to motivation mufflers (anxiety and failure avoidance) and motivation guzzlers (low control and self sabotage).

Part 2 of the book leads the reader through eight chapters, each of which discusses a strategy to boost motivation. The areas explored include self belief, building a sense of self-control, increasing belief in the value of school, increasing a learning focus, assisting school work and study, enhancing persistence, reducing test anxiety and reducing fear of failure. In these and other chapters of the book, points are often illustrated by short vignettes, case studies and practical examples. The work is laced with many practical tools including short pencil and paper tests or rating scales and check lists which will help parents, significant others or young people themselves to benchmark their position or see how they are doing with a particular course of action or challenge. Each chapter concludes with five key points the reader can take from that chapter as a guide for action.

Part 3 of the book attends to some special issues related to motivation which are likely to be of great interest to people for particular purposes. In the chapter on building a good relationship with your child, parents are encouraged to adopt or shift toward authoritative parenting styles and to recognize the research which points up the difficulties which are now

seen as more likely consequences of overly authoritarian or overly permissive parenting styles. Youth workers, teachers and parents will find many insights and practical suggestions in the chapter on re-engaging the disengaged child. The author points out the significance for the 'failure acceptor' of the loss of a sense of control and the adoption of explanatory styles concerning their situation which further inhibit finding a way forward. A solution focus is supported and there are a range of very practical suggestions, including starting small, for finding a way out of the downward spiral or hole. The top five suggestions for this chapter concern (1) enhancing control by helping students make links between actions and outcomes, and developing explanations which involve factors that are controllable, specific and changeable; (2) getting back to basics in relationships, goals and tasks, recognizing small successes and using some of the suggested means for effort, strategy and breaking tasks into bite-sized chunks to achieve and recognize success; (3) building effective links with school in a solution-focused way; (4) breaking the run of poor performances which can sometimes 'fast-track helplessness', using strategies including chunking, scaffolding and broadening your own and the child's view of success; and, (5) attending to mental health and support needs for both yourself and the child through family, friends and helpful professional support. A chapter on 'Motivating boys' and another on 'Motivating the gifted and talented' pick up areas of contemporary and at times contested interest. Again the author grounds his work in the available research while making practical, manageable and optimistic suggestions.

The concluding chapter, 'The bottom line', returns to the schema of motivation boosters, mufflers and guzzlers, presenting the author's selected top two strategies for doing something with each, as well as doing something about a parent's relationship with the child. In doing so, he acknowledges the importance of the parent's own knowledge and sense of their child and his or her situation, while affirming a research-based view which indicates that there is much that parents and their offspring or charges can do to change thinking, attitudes and behaviours to mutual advantage.

Reviewed by:

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