

1. What can I do to prep my kid for on line learning until the end of the school year?

Check in

We are in the Upside Down now, and kids—uncertain about their education, isolated, and grappling with new routines—may be motivated by different things than before. Your Type A kid may no longer work for gold stars, and your slowpoke may speed through work just to get it over with. See how they are holding up, ask how they feel, determine what they want to accomplish, and figure out what you can do to support them.

Lead by example

While we are all excited to be done with this "triage" education, keep your attitude positive and your approach consistent. If you sense your kid is flagging, find role models—from movies, books, or real life—whose grit may inspire your tween.

Build their work ethic

Yes, it is down to the last few assignments. But remember that learning is a lifelong goal. When discussing the end of the year, focus on the skills kids are building, the value of seeing things through, and the feeling of accomplishment. Most kids can push themselves when it is something they love, like creating a successful game or mastering dance choreography. Ask them to call on the same skills that drive them in other areas.

Praise effort

Maybe they got a problem wrong but asked the right questions. Maybe they breezed through the day's reading assignment when yesterday's was tough. Now, more than ever, taking notice of and commenting positively on how your kid is growing and progressing can really give them forward momentum.

2. What are some sure-fire techniques I can do immediately to motivate my kid?

The basics

- Provide structure and routine. Sticking to a schedule provides the stability kids need to keep their eyes on the prize. Plus, it minimizes their instincts to go rogue. When expectations are set, it's more likely they'll be met.
- Establish accountability. Maybe you can't motivate your kid—but their best friend can. Have them schedule daily check-ins over text or social media with a friend.
- Accountability helps kids realize they're not alone and gives them a tangible reason to work hard.
- Incentivize. Kids may be motivated by rewards, but you want to make it feel as though they've earned their treat (or you'll end up in a vicious cycle). If they finish one packet, they get a half hour on the tablet; two packets, 45 minutes; etc. (Screen-time rewards may not be your usual motivation go-to, but we are in unusual times!)

Make it special

- Mark the occasion. Give kids something to look forward to. Plan an (online) family/friend celebration, like a virtual class party or a Zoom dance. Or do a family movie night and let them choose what to watch.
- Let them see progress. Use a calendar or another visual aid to mark time so they can see how much they've accomplished and how much more there is to go.
- Do a related activity. Build upon and extend what they're learning with a natural connection. If they're learning about the solar system, let them stay up late and use an astronomy app to map the night sky.

Mix it up

- Be willing to experiment. If a kid is struggling with reading a book, turn it into a read-aloud or get an audiobook. If math is "too boring," do the problems on a whiteboard or outside using sidewalk chalk. A change of scenery can do wonders for a kid's motivation.
- Break up the day. If you have some control over when they do the work, break things up a little. Let them have a slower-paced morning and do their work after lunch. Make an agreement in advance: "If you take the morning off, you still have to get your schoolwork done before you can play online with your friends later today."

- Change the timing. There's nothing magical about the hours of 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.—that's just when we're all used to school happening. Of course, if your kids are in online classes, you have to accommodate those schedules. But for things like working through a packet of assignments from a teacher, there's no harm in experimenting with different times of day. Sometimes the change is all it takes.

3. What if I just can't motivate my kid?

Appeal to a favorite teacher

A word of encouragement, such as a recorded video message, a text, or an email, from a beloved teacher can be just the thing. Your kid wouldn't want to let the teacher down.

Rule out other issues

Sometimes what looks like a lack of motivation is actually a kid covering up for a problem. Probe for underlying issues and address them.

Adjust expectations

If we've learned anything during this crisis it's to expect the unexpected. Your kid may not end the year where they—or you—were hoping to. Insist on the bare minimum (completion of all assignments), and set up natural consequences for noncompliance (maybe they miss an end-of-year celebration). Empathize with your kid's feelings and move on. Allow yourself a moment to gather your strength and recharge. Celebrate the little victories, and remember, this too shall pass.

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