



# Why kids who learn and think differently need to stay motivated



By [Kate Kelly](#)

Imagine hearing over and over again that you aren't doing something right or that even when you try your hardest it's still not enough. What would that do to your confidence and self-esteem? And how would you find the ability to continue to push yourself to improve?

Many kids who learn and think differently have negative experiences in school – and on a daily basis. A child who has trouble focusing might forget homework and get marked down for it day after day. Or a child who struggles with math might get lots of wrong answers on a worksheet and choose not to turn it in out of fear. Bad experiences like these can be **frustrating** and make kids feel defeated or like they aren't “good enough.”

So what helps kids who learn and think differently continue to push themselves to improve? What gets them pumped up enough to try something new? They are motivated and, even when faced with a new challenge, they stay motivated.

## The importance of motivation

Motivation is a drive. It's the force that keeps kids going even when they face a difficult task. A child who trains long hours for a baseball tryout or stays up late to nail a science project has got motivation.

Usually, there's a reward involved. The reward can be simple. Making the baseball team or having teachers and peers praise the science project feels good. This feel-good boost makes the hard work your child went through seem worth it. Positive feedback or a good grade also revs motivation. A motivated child who feels rewarded by praise and a positive outcome is more likely to keep going again and again even when something feels tough.

## Motivation and kids who learn and think differently

What gives kids the drive to try new things? And what gets them to keep on trucking while working on an important project? Often, it's the simple idea of finding success or improving at something. The more kids feel good at a task, the more likely they are to enjoy it and want to do better.

But kids who learn and think differently typically face more challenges and setbacks than their peers. And improvement may come more slowly or less frequently even when they work hard. This can take a toll on motivation.

If a child studies for a test and still doesn't do well, they might be motivated to try again the next time. But, if the child *keeps on* doing poorly, again and again, they may start to think, "Why bother studying for the next test? It's not going to make any difference."

Over time, kids may expect a bad outcome with anything they try. Feeling defeated, they may want to give up or just avoid challenges altogether. Instead, if a child can find the motivation to try again, they will be more willing to stick with a difficult project or task over the long run.

## How to help your child find motivation

Kids who learn and think differently need motivation to try and try again. Without a history of perceived "wins," your child might need more of a boost from you. Here's how you can help your child stay motivated.

**Support feelings of success.** Feelings of success aren't limited to the end or completion of a project. With a little help from you at the start of a big task, your child can have positive moments and feelings of success along the way.

For example, if your child has a big paper to write, you can download a [graphic organizer](#) and help with the outline. That extra support in the beginning may help your child feel more engaged in the entire writing process.

It can also build confidence throughout the journey. So even if your child doesn't get the greatest grade, that feeling of success while researching, writing, and working on the paper may help your child approach the next assignment with extra motivation.

**Focus on effort, not outcomes.** If your child does well on a test, don't just share your excitement over the grade. There are many more helpful ways to give praise. Ask about how they prepared for the test. Did they use flashcards or get extra help from the teacher?

Perhaps more important, make sure you do the same if they don't do well on the test. Reflecting on how they prepped for the exam may uncover different ways of studying for next time. This can motivate your child to try out a new approach at the next go-round.

**Avoid a "fixed mindset."** Instead, foster a growth mindset. A "fixed mindset" is the belief that if you're not naturally great at something, you'll never be great at it. Instead, focusing on "the next time" can help your child develop what's called a "growth mindset." This is the belief that you get better with practice. That's much more motivating.

If your child tries but doesn't succeed, avoid saying what's done is done and leaving it at that. Frame the discussion around the next steps to take. You want to help your child keep moving forward instead of feeling stuck.

**Get your child out of their comfort zone.** When kids experience negative outcomes, they can lose the motivation to try new things. But taking risks and having new experiences can help kids to uncover new strengths and passions.

That's why it's important to stress the upside of beginning projects or trying hobbies that are tricky at first. For example, your child starts piano lessons, but wants to avoid practicing as a result of bad past experiences. This is normal. All kids wobble a bit when they start learning a brand-new skill. You can help your child by saying something like, "I know it's hard right now. But imagine how great it will feel when you can play that song you love so much." This reminds your child of the reward they're working toward.

**Recognize success.** No matter how your child does at something, find at least one positive thing you can say. Examples include: "You were a great team player today," or "Your scales are getting better," or "It's great that you asked the teacher for help."

It's not always easy to find motivation when things are hard to do, but the payoff can be huge. Discover ways to help your child if they sometimes feel defeated. And learn about how to give praise that can build self-esteem.

## Key takeaways

- Motivation can help kids keep trying even when they face challenges.
- It's important to find ways to help your child stay motivated.
- When you focus on building a “growth mindset,” your child tends to try and stick with new things.

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