

Your Questions Answered

We received over 600 questions during our Managing Motivation webinar, which was fantastic. It was great to have everyone so engaged and invested in helping support their children during this uncertain time. We have taken the most common questions and put together our answers below.

My child only does the bare minimum required of them before moving on to something they enjoy. How do I encourage them to do a bit more?

There are two components to this question. The first is how do we inspire more intrinsic motivation so that students are more likely to get more done of their own volition. The best way to inspire intrinsic motivation is by helping them set a compelling mastery goal. Rather than focusing on a goal mark, focus on mastering a skill. You want to ensure they are part of the goal setting process from the beginning so they feel connected to their goal and feel it is worth working towards. The second component of this question relates to how students plan their time so that they know when they need to study and when they can spend their time doing other things. Build a planner with them so their time is mapped out with when they will study and when they will be doing other things, which helps you come to an agreement together about where time is spent.

Do study skills matter if a student is already getting high grades?

Absolutely – when students get high grades without understanding why, the risk is that they begin to attribute their success to who they are as a person. That is, they come to see their results as a reflection of their natural ability, and come to expect success now matter how much effort they put in. There almost always comes a point, whether in secondary school, sixth form or beyond, when the workload increases, the difficulty increases, and they can no longer coast along. The meta-skills and habits that underly good academic performance, such as being able to manage your time and think strategically about the best ways to learn, are critical not just because they're important beyond school, but because they re-attribute success to the process rather than the innate abilities, which is key for the development of a growth mindset. This means that when life does become challenging – and it will! – they'll look at how they're doing things and make adjustments to their process, rather than seeing the challenges as a reflection of their ability.

My child is currently missing their work deadlines school is setting

If a child is forgetting to hand in their work or is struggling to keep up with their work at the moment, it likely points to an issue with their organisation. Consider getting them a diary and helping them come up with a process for using it that works for them. Schedule a time for every task that needs to be done (including each component of larger tasks like assessments and exams) and write the due date next to each of them. As more work comes in each day, add it to the diary. When your child sits down to get their work done, the first thing they should do is open their diary and instead of focusing on how long they are going to work for, focus on crossing everything off their to-do list for that day.

My child doesn't see the value in what they are doing at school and sees it as being irrelevant to life. This means they are very unmotivated. How can I fix this?

*This is incredibly common and a tricky issue to address. Our approach is to help the student set a long-term goal and work backwards from there. For example, we encourage students to consider what they **do** enjoy doing and what possible jobs, degrees or college courses might fit with that. Once they have a vision for where they would like to be in 1,2,3,5 or even 10 years, we work backwards. We look at required grades, pre-requisite subjects, required knowledge and required skills. From there, we set a combination of mastery and performance goals that drive towards that vision. That way you're connecting school with the goal and helping them see why it's still important to engage and put in effort.*

How do you ensure your child is actually following their timetable and not playing games or on social media when they are meant to be working?

The best way to do this is to focus on the tasks that they need to get done, because they will need to then be doing the tasks during the time that they are studying. Focus with them on the tasks they need to get crossed off their list and speak to them about how they are getting on with them, rather than focusing on the time that they have spent sitting at their computer. When they are at the end of a slot in their timetable, ask what task it was they were completing in that time and whether they completed it. The difference at this stage is that you are not telling them to study just because they should be, but because they have tasks to complete in their diary or planner.

My child has an avoidance disposition. They are fairly negative about school and only ever set avoidance goals. How do I change this?

To move students away from an avoidance disposition, you need to help them increase their levels of self-efficacy. That is their belief in themselves to achieve well at school. To do this, help them set goals that are well within their reach. Set mastery goals that focus on skill improvement (e.g. write better introductions) or set goal marks for homework or assessments that focuses on incremental improvement (e.g. going from 13/20 to 14/20). When they achieve these goals, celebrate it like crazy. Make them feel good about it! As they start to feel good about their consistent improvement, it will become less and less likely that they set avoidance goals and retain that avoidance disposition.

My child spends hours on end in their room getting through their work tasks. They tell us there is too much to do. How do I encourage them to leave their room and maintain balance?

Have them schedule in break time before they start working and set alarms as reminders. When those alarms go off, feel free to check in on them. If they don't feel they have the time to take that break when it comes around, help them reprioritise if possible. Without taking active study breaks (getting away from their desk and walking around), students' attention spans will begin to drop after about 50 minutes which means the quality of their work is likely to drop and it will take them longer to complete their work – which could become a cycle! Also make sure you set a definitive end point for them so that they are not studying around the clock and have some time in the evening to do some exercise and the things they enjoy doing.