



Prevent Child Abuse
Minnesota

Winning Ways with Children in School

You can send a child to school, but you can't make him learn. As parents and teachers, we all want to motivate and encourage our children. Our intentions are good, yet the end result can be quite the opposite. Often complex reasons may cause a child to be an underachiever, unmotivated, or discouraged. Two primary reasons are:

Fear of failure

Feelings of inadequacy

Some children believe they cannot meet high standards or expectations of parents or teachers. They do not challenge or question these expectations. Such children are intimidated by competition. They question their own adequacy, thus undermining their sense of self-worth. Their self-talk says "I can't" rather than, "I can".

Parents and teachers have many daily opportunities to encourage children. What we say in our responses and how we say it have a profound effect on how children see themselves – as capable or incapable. Demonstrate caring. Acknowledge, recognize, and describe the effort your child puts into his work. Focus on the behavior that you appreciate, rather than imply that a child is more valuable or good when they shine or perform for us.

What to do:

- Accept and respect your children's uniqueness.
- Seek out and encourage your children's strengths – those areas they enjoy and do well in even if they are not related to school work. A child's weaknesses often overshadow strengths and abilities. By minimizing weaknesses and reflecting back strengths, a parent can help their children see themselves as a capable people. Like plants, our children need to be strong and well rooted in love before we do any weeding.
- Keep expectations realistic and age-appropriate. Brains and bodies develop over time, each reaching a stage of development at its own pace. The order is more important than the speed. We cannot hurry development, only nurture it. Be aware of your child's physical and mental readiness to move on.
- Help children identify their own goals, not yours.
- Allow your children to try to do things on their own. Provide opportunities for children to overcome their struggles. This attitude communicates "You are capable, go ahead and try!"
- Help your children evaluate their own behavior. Help them make the connection between what they want and what they are doing.
- Accept mistakes. Let your child know it's okay to make mistakes, that everyone makes lots of mistakes as they learn. Once in awhile you may want to share your mistakes, thereby letting him know you are not perfect.
- Spend fun time with your child. Research shows that spending enjoyable time together with your child may be the single most important thing a parent can do. Parent-child togetherness helps a child feel significant, valued, and secure.

What to avoid:

- Comparing children
- Unrealistic expectations
- Negative feedback: sarcasm, criticism, nitpicking
- Forcing children to perform
- Jumping in to rescue your child
- Praise that compares the child's worth to the performance