

Self-Motivation

Self Motivation is making decisions to do things that aren't *fun* now so that your future will be better. It is delaying our gratification today for something better later. For example, getting up and going to work is self-motivation, because doing so helps you pay for things you need and want in the future. Self-motivation is also making decisions NOT to do things. For example, you may choose not to smoke so that you can save up and go on vacation.

Self-motivation, or delayed gratification, is often very difficult for children. So how do we teach children to delay their gratification?

Parenting for Self-Motivation

Studies have shown that one of the most important pieces of the puzzle to help your child have self-motivation is to make sure they are emotionally healthy. They need you to be *involved* and supportive in their lives. They need to feel *safe*, cared for, and loved. They need you to protect them while still allowing *freedom* to experiment and grow.

First, **be involved in your children's lives.** Make rules surrounding your *time* to ensure you are interacting with your children.

Second, **give your child a sense of safety.** A sense of safety comes from knowing that, at home, things are going to be *okay*. How can you help them feel this? One of *the best ways is through consistency*. You can give your child consistent routines, so they know what to expect next. You can work hard to give them a consistent living environment so that they have a sense of their own space. You can choose to keep outside relationships, such as dates or new boyfriends, away from them so that the family structure isn't always changing.

Another way to help your child feel safe is to **be loving and accepting of them even if they make bad choices.** Don't withdraw love or say hateful things because of bad actions. Help your child identify the bad choice, give them consequences, and then show them love anyway. This will help them feel safe at home, even when they are getting extra chores.

Lastly, **your child needs to know you will help if needed, but they also need to have the freedom to try new things without constant interference.** In fact, it is the act of allowing your child independence that you are teaching them self-reliance. It is the act of helping them if things get really bad that you are teaching *safety*. So, work on balancing these.

Expectations and Success

If your children have this emotionally secure foundation, you can then increase a child's ability to delay their gratification by having goals and expectations for them to reach.

First, **set goals together with your child.** Give them a good likelihood of success by making sure the goal is achievable. But also allow them to earn a sense of accomplishment by making sure the goal isn't too easy. Help your child understand what it will take to reach the goal and then help them understand why it is a good thing to do so.

Second, **set and communicate your expectations.** Be very clear, such as, "I expect you to do an hour of homework between seven and eight o'clock every school night." Make sure your expectations are personalized for your children.

It is VERY important to note that goals and expectations are good, but they can be used in a way that is *harmful*. If, at any time, your child feels like they are less loved because they didn't reach your expectations, then there is something going wrong.

We will never do it perfectly, but every time we do any of these things well, we will be helping our children be more successful and happier in their future.

Resources include:

1. LStaub, Michael E. "Controlling ourselves: Emotional intelligence, the marshmallow test, and the inheritance of race." *American Studies* 55.1 (2016): 59-80.
2. Mischel, W., Ebbsen, E. B., & Zeiss, A. R. (1972). Cognitive and Attentional Mechanisms in Delay of Gratification. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 21(2), 204-218
3. Makkar, Ashi, and Bhavana Arya. "Gratification Delay and Parenting Behaviour: A Study on Pre-School Children." *Indian Journal of Psychological Science* 6.1 (2017): 60-67.