

The Apathetic Child

Parents often report that their apathetic child “just doesn’t care”. In fact, apathetic children may care too much. Ironically, one of the causes of apathy is that children are not willing to be average. They’d rather say they didn’t try than say they tried their hardest and came up short.

So, children who feel that the emphasis is on grades rather than learning, on being the best rather than doing one’s best, tend to lose interest in learning for its own sake.

What Can Parents Do?

1. Listen to the messages you give your child. Do you spend most of your time being critical? Children need to hear—often—that they are loved unconditionally. Tell your child stories about people who succeeded as a result of their effort.
2. Talk about doing your best, not being the best. Emphasize effort with your child. Recognize your child’s strengths and weaknesses. For a child who is a poor speller, setting a goal of a perfect score on every spelling test is probably not realistic. But every child can try to improve his/her own score.
3. Let your child take responsibility...and accept consequences. Every time you do something for your child that he/she could be doing for herself/himself, you’re sending the powerful message: “I don’t really think you can do this.” Pretty soon, your child comes to believe it, too. Make a conscious effort to give your child more responsibility.
4. Give your child a chance to shine. Sometimes when children say, “I can’t,” they’re really saying, “I don’t know how”. Real accomplishments are the best way to convince children that they really can achieve their goals. Success in one area often leads to confidence in others.
5. Teach goal setting. One of the best ways to help children overcome apathy is by encouraging them to set—and achieve—goals. With your child, write down a specific goal. Now make a plan for achieving it. You’ll need to show your child how to break down a big task into several smaller ones. Make sure your child checks these steps off as he/she achieves them—it’s a great way to stay motivated!