

Ask the Expert ***Educator Edition***

How to Build Self-Motivation in Teens with ADHD



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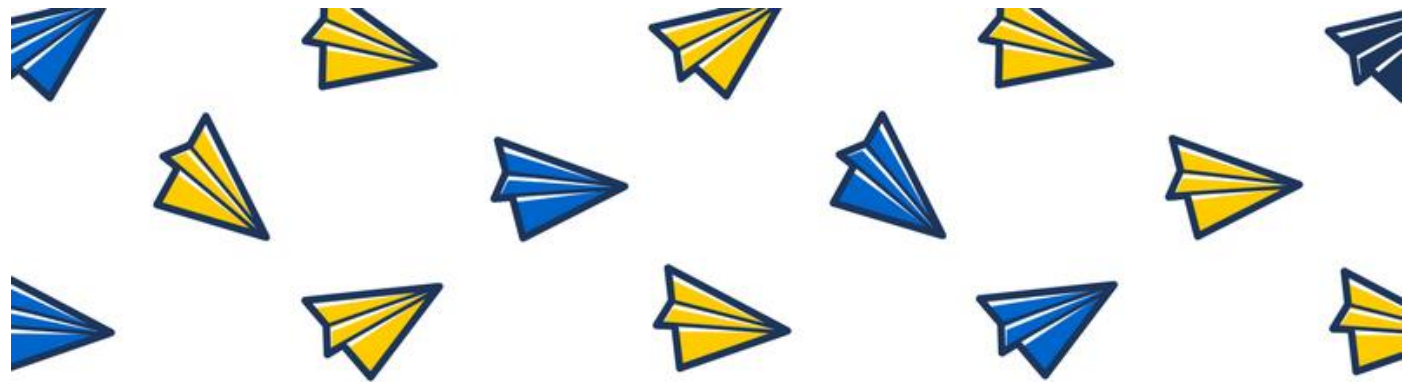
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Building Self Motivation in Students with ADHD

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What is Self Motivation?



Some of Our Goals

1. Help students find their **own** reasons for engaging in education.
2. Support students to successfully pursue educational goals.
3. Create an engaging learning environment that makes learning enjoyable

Motivation systems have multiple parts



Intrinsic Motivation



Intrinsic Motivation: Because I like doing it

- Function of learning in child development: understand environment so that you can navigate it successfully.
- Attentional processes orient to stimuli that present the greatest opportunities for learning.
- Sweet spot: not something you already know (boring) – not something that's too complex (hard)
- Activity is its own reward.

Neurobiology

- Dopamine- a chemical in your brain involved in the experience of enjoyment.



Increased Dopamine activity associated with Intrinsic Motivation

- Attention is fixed to the task because it is interesting and maximizes learning.
- Not too boring, not too hard.
- Intrinsic motivation is a natural process. Difficult to influence the topics that students naturally find interesting.
- We can influence how boring or hard the task or subject matter is, to create the sweet spot for attention and learning.

Flow State

- The pinnacle of intrinsic motivation
- Full engagement in the activity with a sense of energized focus
- “In the zone”
- Depends on the ability of the person and their personal interests



ADHD and Intrinsic Motivation

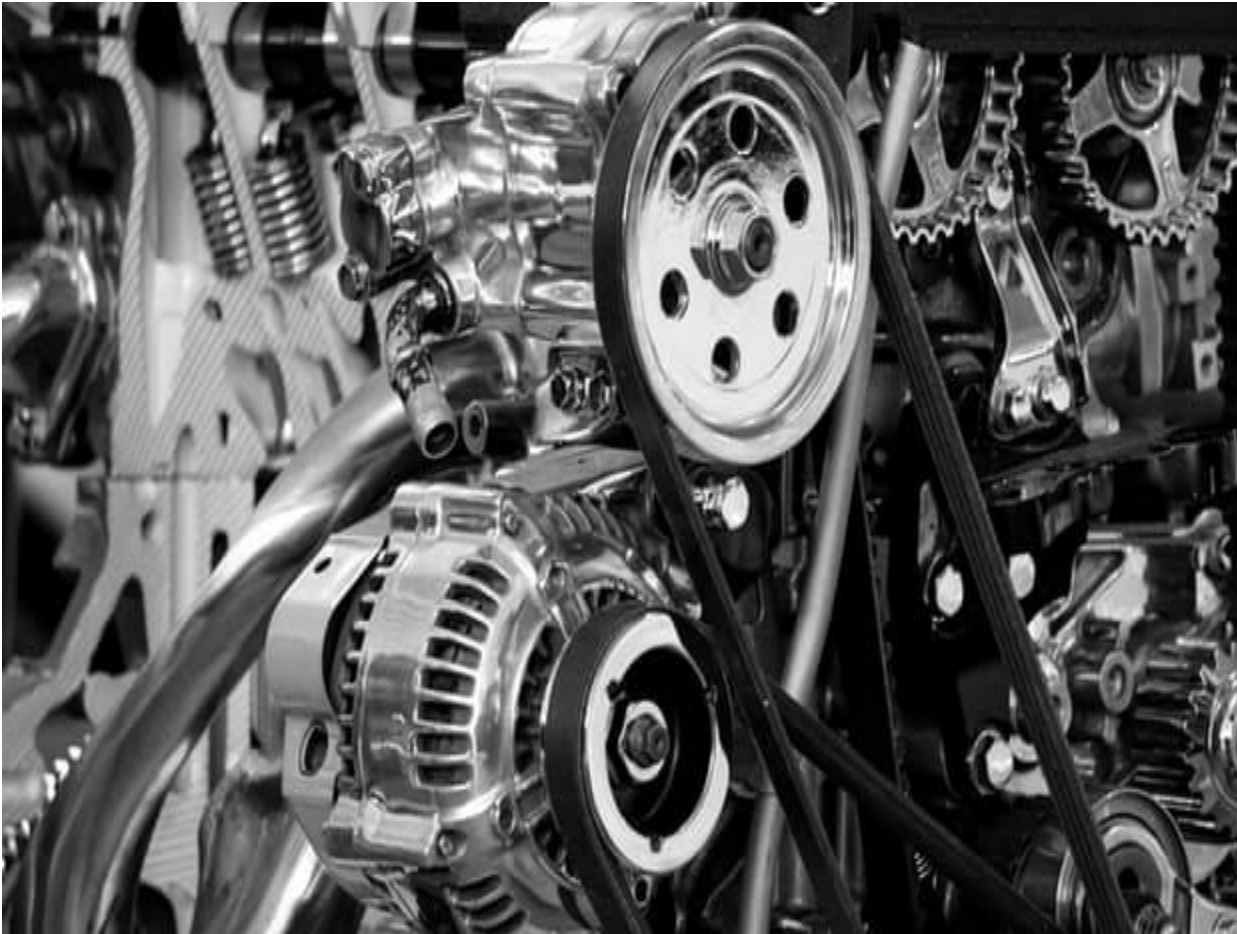
- Students with ADHD have lower levels of intrinsic motivation for schoolwork
- Students with ADHD more likely to feel that academic tasks are aversive
- Rewards processing deficits may reduce the rewarding feelings associated with learning
- Learning history (associating aversive situations with schoolwork) may also reduce intrinsic motivation in students with ADHD

Plamondon et al., 2015; Morsink et al., 2017

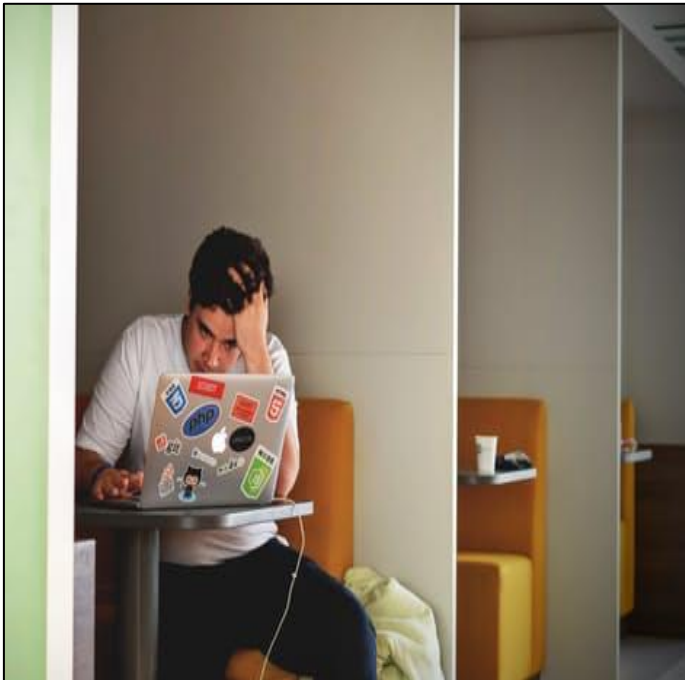
Intrinsic Motivation: What can we do?

- Make sure that student ability level is appropriately matches curriculum (sweet spot)
- Create opportunities for students to route themselves into academic tasks that they naturally enjoy.
- Allow students to decide *how* they accomplish academic and household tasks.

Motivation systems have multiple parts



Extrinsic Motivation: Because I want something to happen later.



Extrinsic Motivation:

Doing something hard or boring



Because I want something good to happen later



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Extrinsic Motivation and ADHD

- Students with ADHD may need particularly strong *extrinsic* motivation to make up for deficits in intrinsic motivation
- However, extrinsic motivation is also impaired in students with ADHD due to:
 - Rewards sensitivity deficits
 - Learning history

Extrinsic Motivation: Starts with Goals

- Helping the student discover their own priorities
- Forging interests and looking ahead at goals
- Immediate, short-term, and long-term goals can be considered

Goal Pursuit: Paint the picture of the goals



Goal Pursuit:

Use goals to self-motivate when tasks may feel hard or boring

- Decision-making: to do something hard or boring anyway because it supports your personal goals
- To develop willpower- can you summon the strength to get started on uncomfortable or difficult tasks?
 - Requires the goal to feel so important that you are willing to do the task anyway
- To practice self-control- can you resist distractions or alternatives that may be more fun or stimulating to keep self working on the undesirable task?

Goal Setting and ADHD

- Students with ADHD show deficits in their ability to set goals and stick to them (largely due to executive functioning deficits)
- Having educational goals was significant predictor adult outcome among children with ADHD in the New York Longitudinal Study of ADHD

Klein et al., 2017; Barron et al., 2006

Goal Formation: What can we do?

- Expose students to experiences that help them develop their own personal interests and priorities.
- Talk with students about the link between engaging in school and meeting those goals.
- Create opportunities for student goals to remain accessible and exciting.



Goal Formation: Remain Open



Goal Pursuit: Willpower & Self-control

- Some people are naturally better at this than others.
- Problems can lead to procrastination, distraction, and work avoidance.

Will power and self-control and ADHD

- Difficulties with cognitive control are a central feature of ADHD
- Students struggle to resist urge to engage in passive leisure activities and to sustain attention on dull or boring tasks
- Even with goals in place, students with ADHD struggle to find volition to carry out day to day activities required to achieve goals

Interventions for Resisting Distractions and Overcoming Procrastination

- Setting up a structured routine at home and school
- Breaking work into smaller tasks that feel more manageable
- Strengthening goals and developing self-statements to overcome procrastination
- Eastern practices: mindfulness, meditation, yoga, to improve self-control
- Exercise
- Affirming student efforts and successes when they occur
- Help them see themselves being successful and link that to their hard work.
- Make enjoyable activities contingent upon getting work done

Things that interfere with self-motivation



Self-Efficacy:

Believe that you can Succeed

- Students may not pursue a goal if they do not think they can reach it
- Academic self-efficacy is strongly correlated with success and persistence at goals



Self-Efficacy and ADHD

- Students with ADHD have lower self-efficacy than students without ADHD
- Self-efficacy reduces after consistent negative feedback from teachers, parents, and peers
- Self-efficacy in students with ADHD is related to homework completion

Self-Efficacy: What can we do?

- Avoid shaming or blaming students when they struggle
- Set fair expectations for students
- Send positive messages to students about effort rather than achievement
- Replace criticisms with affirmations- focus on small positive improvements
- Celebrate successes rather than moving on to the next problem
- Send message that its okay to be good at some things and struggle with others
- Help students find areas in which they can be successful

Adult Interference

Adult interference with Motivation



Student lacks accountability for

Disconnected Adults	
•	Becomes disengaged from student's academics
•	Expects student to figure out their own schoolwork
•	May believe it is pointless to work with the student
•	Sometimes is too busy or tired to pay attention to student
•	Often unaware of student's grades until report card



Student becomes dependent on adult help or reminders to

Overly Assisting Adults	
•	Can become overly involved in student's schoolwork.
•	May sit with student during homework time
•	Communicates heavily with teachers or parents
•	Frequently checks on student
•	May often punish student
•	Sometimes does work for student or passes them through
•	Worries that student will fail without high support



Disconnected Parents and Teachers

- Rarely monitor or hold student accountable for work
- Student lacks structure needed to succeed
- May be difficult to remove electronics or put limits on student once they have gotten used to doing whatever they feel like
- Student may lose motivation to succeed because it begins to feel impossible and they forget what success feels like

Personal Assistant

Parents and Teachers

- Student lacks accountability to complete work independently
- May feel easier to let student off hook or complete work for them rather than push them to do it on their own
- Problem gets worse over time if student gets used to excessive assistance from adults
- Can prevent self-motivation because students are looking for cues from parents and teachers instead of independently self starting

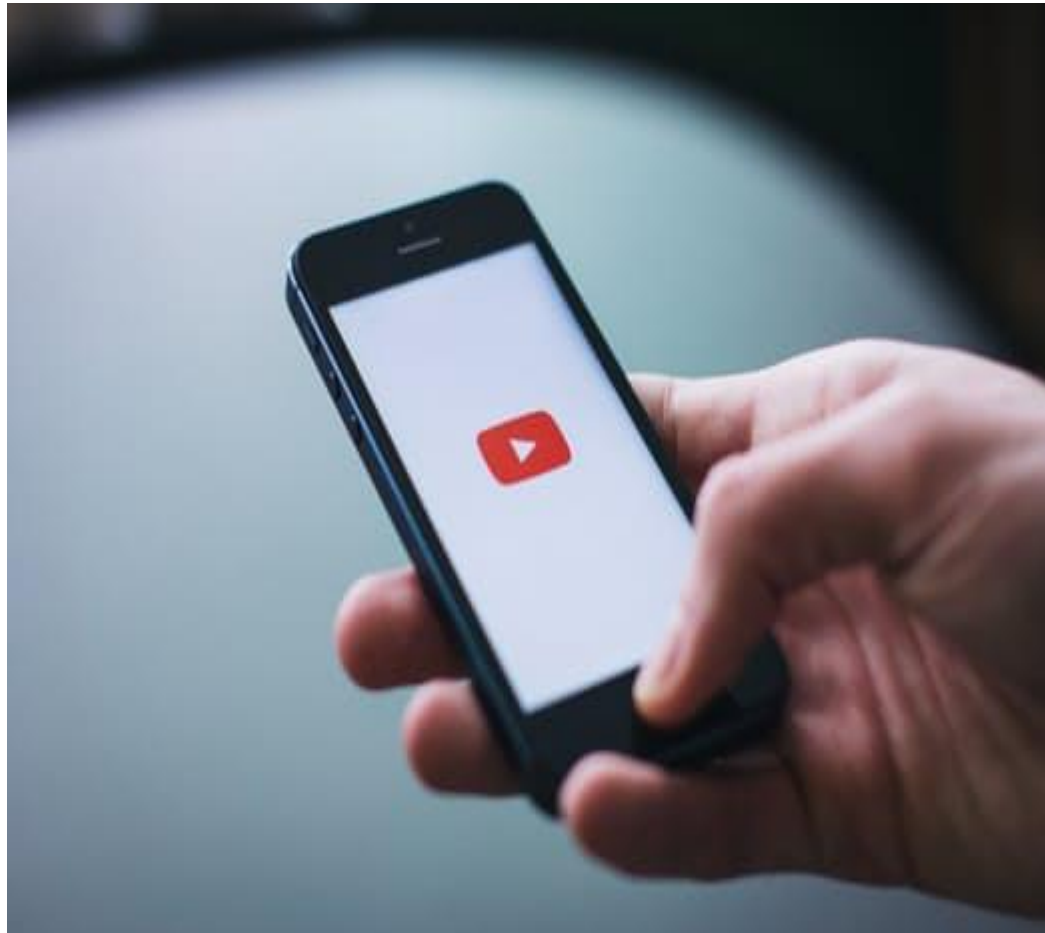
Interference from Adults :

What can we do?

- Make sure that student is in an educational setting that is appropriate for his or her current abilities
- Set clear and appropriate expectations for independence
- Remove distractions and electronics from the home environment during homework time
- Consistently monitor whether student is meeting these expectations
- Affirm the student for meeting expectations
- Return electronics to student once they show proof of completing work
- Reduce reminders and prompts to the student

Student has unrealistic
or unhealthy goals

YouTube Personality.



Unrealistic Goals: What can we do?

- We cannot control what students find inherently interesting
- Arguing, persuading, or disagreeing with student can close student off and make them less receptive to adult advice
- Look for small and gradual opportunities to increase positive interests and goals, rather than trying to diminish unrealistic ones
- Help student see the benefits of realistic and positive goals and interests
- Draw a link between positive goals (i.e., doing well in school) and unrealistic ones (i.e., being a reality TV star).

Should I use external rewards for a student who lacks self-motivation?



Self-motivation is a slow process that develops over time under the right conditions...



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External rewards- Downside

- Can undermine the development of self-motivation.
- Students will work for the reward rather than their own personal reasons
- Students can become obsessed with earning the reward and not learn the value of hard work for meeting personal goals

External Rewards- Upside

- Can be effective at enhancing student performance in the short-term
- Can jump start a student into starting work

External Rewards: The Balance

- Should be used as a last resort
- Can be put into place in times of crisis (needing to pass the year) rather than as a daily occurrence
- External rewards cannot sustain motivation long-term

External Rewards:

How to do it right

- **First** understand why the student might be unmotivated, is there something else that can be addressed?
 - Can I make the task more enjoyable or engaging?
 - Can I help the student develop personal reasons for wanting to do succeed or work hard?
 - Can I change the environment or the routine to support the student's motivation?
 - Can I strengthen the student's cognitive skills to improve motivation?
 - Have I made sure the student is living a healthy lifestyle (i.e., exercise, diet, reduction of stressors)?
 - Is the student experiencing a mental health problem that requires treatment from a professional?

External Rewards: How to do it right



- **Second** rely on external rewards that are already in the student's life (i.e., electronics access) and create a situation where these are earned. Do not introduce new rewards (i.e., buying them a video game console).
- Make sure the only way the student can access the reward is if they've completed the responsibilities.

External Rewards: How to do it right

- **Third** offer a rationale for why the task is necessary. Acknowledge that the task is boring, difficult, or not inherently interesting.



External Rewards: How to do it right

- **Fourth** allow as much freedom of choice as possible on how the task is done.



Conclusions

- Building self-motivation in students is a slow process that must be cultivated over time.
- Parents and teachers can do small things every day to contribute to this process.
- We cannot control what students find intrinsically motivating, but we can try to create academic tasks that harness their natural interests for learning
- We can help students develop goals, interests, and priorities that will support self-motivation
- We can create environments and give students experiences that support increased self-control and willpower so that they better tolerate hard and boring tasks.
- Parents and teachers can promote self-efficacy through appropriate interactions with students.
- Parents and teachers can use an autonomy support approach to hold students accountable for independently completing work
- We can slowly steer students away from unrealistic goals that interfere with education.
- We can use external rewards as a last resort when crisis emerges or nothing seems to help them self-motivate.

Remember:
Building Self Motivation is a gradual process. You may not see results for years. Keep doing this stuff anyway.



Remember:

If you've consistently been trying these strategies, and the student is not succeeding or finding motivation, he or she may not be in the optimal academic environment.



Remember:

There is no magic solution. If a student struggle in these areas, they may need help from a professional therapist. Good therapy is hard work for families but it is worth it.



Thank you.

Parent-Teen Therapy
for Executive Function
Deficits and ADHD

Building Skills and Motivation

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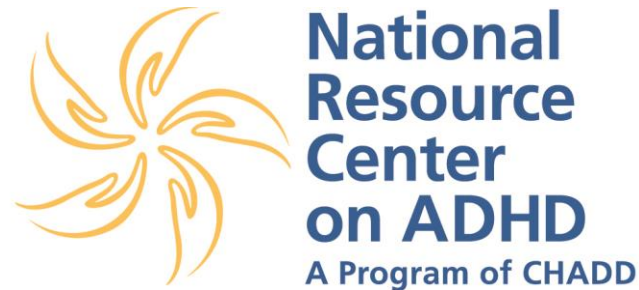


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