

Solihull Children's Occupational Therapy Service

Motivation

Motivation is the drive inside us that helps us to want to learn and do our daily occupations. Motivation keeps us going and stops us from giving up even when those activities might be hard and frustrating, like learning how to tie shoelaces or cut our food independently.

Motivation is a key component when considering goals. If a child doesn't have the motivation to do a task, it is unlikely that they will want to get better at it, and therefore, will be less likely to work on a goal. When a child finds an activity particularly difficult, it can also be difficult to maintain their motivation when experiencing difficulties.

Encouraging motivation: using the ABC's of self-motivation

A is for Autonomy	+ B is for Belonging	+ C is for Competence	= Motivation
People need to feel in control of their own lives, behaviours, and goals. This means that a child needs to feel like they have a say in their goals and the freedom to make their own choices based on their interests and personal values.	A sense of belonging refers to the emotional and personal bonds that exist between people. It is important that children feel that they are cared for, respected and connected to the people in their life (family, peers or school staff).	Feeling competent happens when a person experiences pride in seeing their achievements and notices their own improvement. When a child feels confident and capable, their mind becomes open to new information.	Research has shown that each component of the ABC's has their own individual positive influence on motivation. When each component is addressed together, the ABCs can maximize motivation, performance and development.

Applying the ABC's to occupations:

A: Autonomy

Whilst your child may have to do an occupation, such as washing or dressing, you can give them a sense of autonomy by giving them a choice on how they do the task. Allowing the freedom of choice, will make them more likely to do an occupation.

- ✔ **Environment:** give your child a choice of where they do the task. For example, they may wish to clean their teeth standing at the sink, or whilst they're in the bath, or sitting on their bed. If they're engaging in the task, it doesn't matter where they choose to do it!
- ✔ **Time:** give your child a choice of when they do the task. For example, they may choose to have a wash as soon as they wake up, after breakfast or just leave it until the evening. If they're engaging in the task, it doesn't matter when they choose to do it!
- ✔ **Tools:** your child can have a choice in what tools or utensils they use for the task. For example, you could take them to the supermarket to choose a new shampoo that they like, or they could choose a toothbrush with their favourite character on. If they're engaging in the task, it doesn't matter how they choose to do it!

B: Belonging

- ✔ Instead of telling your child how to do the task, sit down with them and support them in "working out" how to do a task. This will give you the opportunity to ask questions like "How did that go?" or

“What could make that better?” which encourages your child to monitor their own progress. This will tell your child that you are working on this goal together, rather than feeling like they have to work alone, which gives them a sense of belonging.

- ✓ Where possible, try to get siblings or other family members involved in the task. For example, if practicing shoe laces, ask other family members to join the activity to make it more relaxed and fun. How does each person tie their laces? How quickly can they do it? How did they learn to do it in the first place?
- ✓ Give lots of praise to reward effort, identifying clearly what action they have done which you are proud of.

C: Competence

It is important to enable your child to gain a sense of achievement when learning a new skill. The “just right” challenge ensures that you are encouraging your child to develop their skills and independence, whilst ensuring that the goal they are working towards is realistic. The sense of achievement which they experience acts as a great motivator to encourage your child to keep working towards mastering these skills.



Types of motivation

Intrinsic motivation

Intrinsic motivation means you do something because you want to do it, without expecting external rewards. A child may have intrinsic motivation to do a task because it is enjoyable and interesting, not because of parent/carer pressure or rewards for doing it.

Extrinsic motivation

Extrinsic motivation means you do something because of external factors. An external factor may be achieving a reward, pressure from a caregiver or a looming deadline. A child may have extrinsic motivation because something in their environment makes them want to achieve their goal.

Which one?

Using extrinsic motivation can be helpful in producing immediate improvements, i.e. your child cleaning their teeth in return for a trip to the park, however, if a child is intrinsically motivated to work on a goal, they will be more engaged to work on their goal, will commit more time and effort, and is more likely to continue to use strategies in the future. Introducing extrinsic motivation too early can lead to a reliance on external factors (rewards, punishment etc) to do daily tasks.



We suggest that intrinsic motivation is always prioritised, and strategies (see next page) should be trialled to increase this in the first instance. However, if after trying these, the child or young person is still not motivated to work on a goal, extrinsic motivation can be helpful. Incentives or rewards can spark interest in learning to do an occupation and promote self-motivation. An incentive or a reward is essentially a reason to do something, so this could be promised TV time after finishing homework, a sweet treat after Saturday morning sport or simply words of encouragement after taking out the bins.

It's important to remember that although children should learn to motivate themselves, they are still developing and learning from their experiences. Your child's motivation may vary day to day, depending on their mood and energy levels. Take this into consideration when trying to work on a goal.

Top tips for increasing your child's motivation:

- 1. Establish highly motivating goals:** It's important to consider not only a child's ability to perform certain tasks, but also what is important to them and what they would like to work on. A child will almost certainly be more motivated to engage in a goal that they chose. Remember, ask, don't tell!
- 2. Understand why the answer is no:** Is your child refusing because they are...afraid of failing? Tired? Hungry? Confused about what you want them to do? Getting answers to these questions can give you a good idea of why your child doesn't want to practise tasks, and what you can do to encourage participation (i.e. provide reassurance, clarification, etc.)
- 3. Check the clock:** Consider the time of day you are trying to work on your child's goal. For example, if you try to work on a goal after a long day at school, your child may be too tired and refuse to engage. When considering practise, think about your child's hunger levels, tiredness, general concentration and how much time you have (i.e. avoid when the household is busy getting ready for school, as this adds extra pressure).
- 4. Praise:** Instead of identifying difficulties that need to be fixed or goals that remain unmet, celebrate your child's progress with every step. A study by the Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation Journal found that "a lack of positive feedback" was an important factor related to non-compliance, so it is important to provide positive feedback about your child's performance to encourage participation.
- 5. Setting the "Just Right Challenge":** By "starting small" or agreeing to limit what you do during a session, you can make a task appear more manageable and your child may be more likely to participate. Your child may not be motivated to write a full two page story, but they may be willing to write one page, and tell the story through pictures instead.
- 6. Involving family and friends:** Getting friends, family, or caregivers involved can be a great way to motivate children. An example such as asking your child to write a letter or a birthday card for a friend or loved one, when you would like them to work on handwriting or saying "Let's show Nanny what we've been working on". You can put a little positive pressure on your child to participate and get the added benefit of sharing their hard work with the world!
- 7. Reward:** Some children may be motivated by rewards or sticker charts. When using reward charts, the rewards do not need to be big or expensive, instead, rewards should be something that the child works towards, and has a sense of achievement when they reach it. For example, if a child cleans their teeth independently every morning and night for a week, you can host a family movie night where the child gets to choose the film and the sweets for everyone. Some children may struggle to understand the concept of a reward chart, and instead, immediate rewards may work better. For example, if your child independently cleans their teeth, they can have 15 minutes iPad time afterwards. It's always important to make sure that the child understands what the reward is for.
- 8. It is important to recognize when no means no:** Ultimately it is your child's choice whether or not they want to practise or work on a goal. If after your best efforts, your child continues to refuse, respect their wishes and try to set aside time on another day.



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